

Laudato si' Reader

An Alliance of Care for
Our Common Home

With a Preface from Pope Francis



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Table of Contents

Preface	13
<i>Pope Francis</i>	
Special Message	15
<i>António Guterres – United Nations</i>	
Introduction	19
<i>Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson – Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development</i>	
Editorial	25
<i>Fr Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, Nicholas Fitzpatrick & Jordan Glassman – Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development</i>	

PART I – Communities & Social Movements

Laudato si’: Ecological Conversion and Renewal of Life	31
<i>Aloysius John – Caritas Internationalis</i>	
A Reflection on the Impact of Laudato si’ on the Struggle for Global Justice	37
<i>Chiara Martinelli – International Cooperation for Development & Solidarity (CIDSE)</i>	
How Laudato si’ Gave Birth to a Movement	41
<i>Yeb Saño & Tomás Insua – Laudato si’ Movement</i>	
Laudato si’ Reaches Aotearoa New Zealand	45
<i>Julianne Hickey – Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand</i>	

Laudato si's Eco-Spirituality.	49
<i>Christina Leaña – Laudato si' Movement</i>	
Birthday Tree Planting – A fruit of Laudato si'	55
<i>Stella Marilene Nishimwe – Focolare Movement</i>	
Laudato si' Through a Mother's Eyes	59
<i>Lorna Gold – Laudato si' Movement</i>	
Laudato si': My Newfound Love Overflowing. . . .	65
<i>Samuel Zan Akologo – Caritas Ghana</i>	
A Healthy Planet Depends on All of Us	73
<i>Lavinia Rocchi Carrera – World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO)</i>	
Reflections on Laudato si'	79
<i>Sr Catherine Mutindi – Bon Pasteur</i>	
Gospel Nonviolence and a Laudato si' Future. . . .	83
<i>Marie Dennis – Pax Christi International</i>	
Laudato si' – Hope in Dark Times!	87
<i>Moema Miranda – Churches and Mining Network</i>	
Living Laudato si' – The Adventure Continues! . . .	91
<i>Jane Mellet – Trócaire</i>	
Living Laudato si' in the Philippines	97
<i>Rodne Galicha – Living Laudato si' Philippines</i>	
Laudato si', from Casa Velha	103
<i>Margarida Alvim – Casa Velha</i>	
New Perspective, New Rhythm: Cinema, Faith and Laudato si'	111
<i>Lia Beltrami – Aurora Vision</i>	

The Journey of a Filmmaker.	115
<i>Nicolas Brown</i>	

PART II – Indigenous, Interfaith & Youth

The Vision of a Pope and a Patriarch	123
<i>Fr John Chryssavgis – Theological Advisor to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople</i>	
How Laudato si’ Has Impacted Lives Among Indigenous Peoples in the Asia Pacific	133
<i>Bros Flores – Jesuit Companions on Indigenous Ministry for Asia Pacific</i>	
Martuwarra Fitzroy River of Life Flow	137
<i>Anne Poelina – The University of Notre Dame</i>	
Laudato si’ – A View from Indigenous Peoples’	143
<i>Tania Avila Meneses – Latin America & Caribbean Confederation of Religious (CLAR)</i>	
Pastoral and Socio-Environmental Priorities in the Light of Laudato si’	147
<i>Fr Rigobert Minani – Congo Basin Ecclesial Network (REBAC)</i>	
Laudato si’ – A Global Trailblazing Call to Action that Inspired UNEP’s Faith for Earth.	153
<i>Iyad Abumoghli – United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)</i>	
“We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth” (Genesis 2:7)	157
<i>Susana Espinosa-Soto – Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador</i>	

People's Landscape of Faith, Hope and Action	163
<i>Fr Pedro Walpole – River Above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN)</i>	
Protecting Papua New Guinea's Environment Inspired by Laudato si'	167
<i>Wenceslaus Magun – Sea Turtles Restoration Project</i>	
Laudato si' – Learning from our Indigenous Communities	173
<i>Chiara Porro – Australian Ambassador to the Holy See</i>	
Laudato si' and Intergenerational Solidarity.	177
<i>Ridhima Pandey – Youth Environmental Activist</i>	
Laudato si' – A Guiding Light	179
<i>Gopal Patel – United Nations Multi-Faith Advisory Council</i>	
Supporting the Community, Young People and Living Laudato si' in Action.	181
<i>Arnel Santander – Institute of Environmental Science for Social Change (ESSC)</i>	
We Are the Laudato si' Generation!	185
<i>Allen Ottaro – Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA)</i>	
Laudato si', Mother Earth and Pakistan	189
<i>Syed Asif Ali – Express Tribune</i>	

PART III – Science & Academia

Laudato si' – A transformational climate alliance between science and religion	199
<i>Veerabhadran Ramanathan – Pontifical Academy of Sciences</i>	

Laudato si' – A Reflection from a Teacher's Angle . . . <i>Dorothy Mensah-Aggrey – University of Dayton</i>	209
Laudato si' – Six Years Later <i>Barbara Wall – Villanova University</i>	219
US Responses to Laudato si': Personal, Ecclesial, Na- tional <i>John Carr & Anna Misleh – Georgetown University</i>	229
Receiving Laudato si' in the United States: What We Have Done, What We Have Yet To Do <i>Kevin Irwin – Catholic University of America</i>	239
Laudato si' – Concern for Our Global Commons . . . <i>Ottmar Edenhofer & Christian Flachsland – Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research & Hertie School</i>	249
The Impact of Laudato si' on Public Discourse Over the Climate Crisis <i>Michael Mann – Penn State University</i>	265
Laudato si' – A Letter for Our Age <i>Celia Deane-Drummond – University of Oxford</i>	269
Ad Novum Unitatis Universities <i>Michael Schuck – Loyola University Chicago</i>	273
Unstoppable Waves <i>Oliveira Panao – University of Lisbon</i>	275
A Historian's Perspective of Laudato si' <i>Camilla Russel – Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu (IHSI) at the Jesuit Roman Archive (ARSI)</i>	279
Laudato si' – Inspired Decarbonisation Project . . . <i>Edward de Quay – University of Oxford</i>	285

The Holy Water in Jesus: A Basic Element of Earth, who Constitutes, Empowers and Challenges Us	287
<i>Elisabeth Steffens – RWTH Aachen University</i>	
Laudato si’ Comes to Canada	291
<i>Norman Lévesque – Green Churches Network</i>	
Laudato si’ has Gathered Us In	297
<i>Peter & Maria Victor – York University & University of Toronto</i>	

PART IV – Politics & Economy

Laudato si’ – Celebration and Duty.	303
<i>Patricia Espinosa – United Nations Framework Con- vention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)</i>	
The Pursuit of Authentic Human Development in the Anthropocene	307
<i>Achim Steiner – United Nations Development Pro- gramme (UNEP)</i>	
Laudato si’ and the Paris Climate Agreement	313
<i>Laurent Fabius – French Constitutional Council</i>	
Reflections on Laudato si’ and Ecological Economics .	317
<i>Herman Daly – University of Maryland</i>	
How the Encyclical has Impacted Nordic Business Leaders.	321
<i>Henrik Ehrnrooth – Climate Leadership Coalition (CLC)</i>	
The Message and the Moment: On How and Why Laudato si’ Became the Most Quoted Encyclical in History	331
<i>Johannes Van de Ven – Good Energies Foundation</i>	

Collective Reflections from the Laudato si' Challenge.	341
<i>Eric Harr – Laudato si' Challenge</i>	
Laudato si' at Six	353
<i>Nicholas Stern & Claude Henry – Grantham Research Institute & Sciences Po Paris</i>	
In Celebration of Laudato si'	359
<i>Members of the Council for Inclusive Capitalism</i>	
The Glory of the Arctic	363
<i>Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson – Arctic Circle</i>	
From Political Life to Practical Actions	373
<i>Maciej Grabowski – Institute for Responsible Finance</i>	
One World, One Environment, We Save It Together	377
<i>Sally Axworthy – British Ambassador to the Holy See</i>	
Laudato si' – Chapter 5 and the Ezcazú Agreement.	383
<i>Roque Acosta Ortiz – Paraguayan Bishops' Conference (CEP)</i>	
Harmonizing People and Nature Through Humanity	387
<i>Anni Mitin – Malaysian Agroecology Society</i>	

PART V – Pastoral Leadership & Bishops' Conferences

The Impact of Laudato si' in the Archdiocese of Bombay	395
<i>Oswald Cardinal Gracias – Archbishop of Bombay</i>	
The Renewal of the Ecological Pastoral Care in Africa	399
<i>Philippe Cardinal Ouedraogo – Metropolitan Archbishop of Ouagadougou</i>	

6 Years of Laudato si' – A Programme for COMECE's Work?	409
<i>Jean Claude Cardinal Hollerich – Archbishop of Luxembourg</i>	
Laudato si' and the New Evangelization	415
<i>Jóse H. Gomez – Archbishop of Los Angeles</i>	
Laudato si': A Roadmap for Advocates	421
<i>Ann Scholz – Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)</i>	
Personal reflection on Laudato si'	427
<i>Sr Sheila Kinsey – Justice, Peace & Integrity Creation (JPIC) Commission USG-UISG</i>	
Laudato si' – A Convergence Point for All	433
<i>Sr Lilly Driciru – Association of Religious in Uganda</i>	
Laudato si' in Ireland	439
<i>Fr Sean McDonagh – Columban Priest of Ireland</i>	
The Impact of Laudato si' on Communities, Researchers, Decision-Makers and Activists in Zambia . .	447
<i>Sr Matilda Mubanga – Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops</i>	
The Impact of Laudato si': California	451
<i>Fr Kenneth Weare – Archdiocese of San Francisco</i>	
Big Dreams and Small Beginnings – Laudato si' from the Ground and the Peripheries!	457
<i>Fr Jun Cruz – WeGen Laudato si'</i>	
Personal and Communal Engagement of Laudato si' .	465
<i>Sr Anne Falola – Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA)</i>	

Laudato si' – A Path We Are All Called to Live	471
<i>Maureen Villanueva Lecuona – Universidad de Monterrey</i>	
It Is the Poor Who Will Save the Planet	475
<i>Fr Emmanuel Kakule Vyakuno – Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development</i>	
Despite the Dark, Let's Sing as We Go: Fruits of Laudato si' in Latin America	483
<i>Fr Dario Bossi – Churches and Mining Network</i>	
How Laudato si' Shaped the Growth of a Commission on Creation Justice	487
<i>Geraldine Clare Westwood – Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia</i>	
The Inspiration of Laudato si' in an Action-Reflection Process for a Global Community	495
<i>Sr Adele Howard – Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG)</i>	
Laudato si' – A Prophetic Voice for Humanity and Creation	505
<i>Valeria Méndez de Vigo – Society of Jesus</i>	
Laudato si' – Source of Inspiration for the Path of Religious Life in Latin America and the Caribbean . .	509
<i>Sr Daniela Cannavina – Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR)</i>	
Praise Be to You, My Lord! Laudato si'!	515
<i>Sr Maria Victoria Hernandez Delgado – Religious of Mary Immaculate</i>	

Preface

Six years ago, I published the encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, on *Care for our Common Home*, appealing for a new shared dialogue about *our common home* – about how we are negatively shaping the future of our planet with our irresponsible behaviour. I rejoice to see that the encyclical has had a positive impact on our efforts to care for our common home in the Church, in our ecumenical and interreligious communities, in political and economic circles, in educational and cultural spheres, and beyond. After *Laudato si'* was published, I invited the Catholics to join my beloved brother, His Holiness Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch, and our Orthodox brethren, in celebrating together the World Day of Prayer for Creation Care on 1 September. I am filled with gratitude that the urgent message of *Laudato si'* has been echoed in important statements and more importantly actions from other religious traditions on our vocation to be custodians of God's creation. I remember with joy the *Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis*, the *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, the *Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders*, and *Bhumi Devi Ki Jai! A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change*.

Laudato si' is a global call to be caretakers of our common home, and so it is wonderful to see that the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has taken the initiative to gather together reflections of persons and communities from around the world on the message(s) of *Laudato si'*. The '*Laudato si'* Reader', the title under which these reflections are gathered, is indeed a fitting conclusion to the '*Laudato si'* Special Anniversary Year' that was celebrated from 24 May 2020 to 24 May 2021.

The '*Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor*' that I present in *Laudato si'* as the emblematic consequence of our failure to

care for our *common home* has been amplified lately by the Covid-19 emergency that humanity is still struggling to control. Thus, an ecological crisis, represented by the “*cry of the earth*”, and a social crisis, represented by “*the cry of the poor*”, have been made deadly by a *healthcare crisis: the Covid-19 pandemic*. So true are the words of my predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, that “*the way humanity treats the environment influences the way it treats itself, and vice versa.*”¹

Nevertheless, let us not forget that crises are also windows of opportunity: they are a chance to recognise and to learn from past mistakes. The present crisis should make us “*turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it*” (LS, 19). They are also a time for us to change gear, to change bad habits in order to be able to dream, co-create, and act together to realise just and equitable futures. It is time to develop a new form of universal solidarity that is grounded in fraternity, love, and mutual understanding: one that values people over profit, one that seeks new ways to understand development and progress. And so, it is my hope and prayer that we do not come out of this crisis the same way we entered it!

The recent past has shown us that it is primarily our children who understand the scale and enormity of the challenges society faces, especially the climate crisis. We must listen to them with open hearts. We must follow their lead for they are wise beyond their years.

This is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek – and re-plan our future, committing to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of. The time to act, and to act *together*, is now!

Francis

Vatican, 26 July 2021.

¹ *Caritas in veritate*, 51.

Special Message

The spiritual dimensions of the work of the United Nations tend to be overlooked and underappreciated. Yet, the tenets set out in the Charter – peace, justice, equality, the dignity and worth of the human person – echo the teachings of the world’s religious traditions and summon us all to reduce human suffering.

That is why, when His Holiness Pope Francis issued *Laudato si’*, his landmark encyclical “On care for Our Common Home”, it had such profound resonance at the United Nations and for me personally.

At the time it was published in 2015, Member States were deep in negotiation on two mutually reinforcing initiatives: a new framework for achieving sustainable development, and a new agreement for combating climate change. For my part, I was serving as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, striving to respond to the plight of people displaced by conflict or persecution.

Laudato si’ provided important impetus to that work. With its anguish at poverty and hunger; its concern about the perilous state of the natural environment; and its compassion for the world’s most vulnerable people, the encyclical underscored the urgency of setting the world on a more peaceful and equitable path. The subsequent months saw important successes: in September, the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its core promise to leave no one behind; and in December, the adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate change, a landmark in humanity’s efforts to confront an existential threat.

Today, the messages of *Laudato si’* retain their great power. Despite progress in some areas, the world is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Climate change

has accelerated, giving the world a new normal of fires, floods and storms of epic proportions. The COVID 19 pandemic has been a grievous blow, upending lives, damaging economies and plunging families and communities into suffering and sorrow.

As we reflect on the encyclical in 2021, the state of our common home is broken. Biodiversity is collapsing; deserts are spreading; oceans are choking with plastic waste; coral reefs are dying. Air and water pollution are killing 9 million people every year. Carbon dioxide levels are at record highs – and rising.

Humanity is waging war on nature. Nature always strikes back – and is doing so with gathering fury and force. Making peace with nature must be a priority for the 21st century. The recovery from the pandemic offers a chance to pull back from the abyss.

This is an epic policy test. But ultimately this is a moral test. The trillions of dollars for Covid 19 recovery is money that we are borrowing from future generations. We cannot allow those resources to be used to lock in policies that burden them with a mountain of debt on a broken planet by perpetuating business as usual.

As we look ahead, the United Nations is focused on four key dimensions of the challenge.

First, achieving carbon neutrality – net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050. Every country, city, financial institution and company should adopt plans for transitions to net zero emissions by 2050 and take decisive action now to put themselves on the right path. And every individual must use their power – as consumers, as producers, as investors – to reduce their carbon footprint.

The single most important step we can take in this direction is to phase out coal. Today it costs more to simply run most of today's coal plants than it does to build new renewable plants from scratch. The International Labour Organization found that despite inevitable job losses, the clean energy transition will cre-

ate 18 million net new jobs by 2030. That transition must be a just one, recognizing the human costs and the impact on families and communities.

Second: helping those already facing dire impacts of climate change. This is especially urgent for small island developing states, which are sinking before our eyes. Every \$1 invested in adaptation measures could yield almost \$4 in benefits. Developed countries must deliver the long-promised \$100 billion per year for climate action in developing countries. Adaptation must not be the forgotten component in this effort.

Third: aligning global finance with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is time to put a price on carbon, phase out fossil fuel finance, end fossil fuel subsidies, and shift the tax burden from income to carbon, from taxpayers to polluters.

Fourth: addressing the broader planetary emergency. That means halting the extinction crisis through a new post-2020 biodiversity framework; protecting the oceans from overfishing and pollution such as plastic waste; ensuring sustainable agriculture and food systems; and investing in sustainable infrastructure instead of locking in bad practices for decades to come.

Indigenous knowledge can help to point the way. We must also recognize the central role of women. As humankind devises strategies for preserving the environment and building a green economy, we need to ensure that women enjoy their right to equal participation. I also draw hope from the engagement of young people, who also deserve seats at the decision-making tables.

This is a moment of truth. If we persist with the old ways of inequality, injustice, hatred and heedless dominion over the Earth, we face disaster. Just as we need a ceasefire on traditional battlefields, so must we end our war on nature.

I have no doubt that His Holiness will continue to embody the cause of global solidarity, building on a tradition of interac-

tion with the United Nations. During a visit to the United Nations on the very day in September 2015 that the 2030 Agenda was adopted, he delivered a memorable speech to the General Assembly urging global action to protect the environment and end the suffering of “vast ranks of the excluded”.

I have vivid memories of my own audience with His Holiness in December 2019. His Holiness is a messenger for hope and humanity – for reducing human suffering and promoting human dignity. His clear moral voice shines through, whether speaking out on the plight of the most vulnerable, including refugees and migrants, or confronting poverty, appealing for disarmament, fighting hatred, building bridges between communities and highlighting the climate emergency.

His Holiness has also made a welcome call for people to have greater faith in multilateralism, in the role of international organizations, and in diplomacy as instruments for upholding our common humanity, protecting our common home and advancing the common good. This is very much in the spirit of his most recent encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, – we are, all of humanity, in this together. More than ever before, the world needs to strengthen the bonds of global cooperation to build a future of peace for all.

António Guterres
Secretary General of the United Nations

Introduction

The encyclical, *Laudato si'*, on the care of the common home, is set from the outset in dialogue with all people, organizations, and institutions, which share its concern. Thus, many bishops' conferences of all continents, religious leaders as well as saints and scientists are mentioned in its notes. It is just proper then, that on the fifth anniversary celebration of the encyclical, a similarly diverse group of people be invited to share what the encyclical has meant for them.

As is clear to all, the encyclical takes its name from the invocation of St Francis of Assisi: "*Laudato si' mi' Signore.*" With this invocation from his *canticle of creation*, Francis of Assisi reminds us that the earth, "*our common home is also like a sister, with whom we share life, and like a beautiful mother who welcomes us into her arms*" (LS, 1). The reference to St Francis also indicates the attitude on which the whole encyclical is based, namely, that of prayerful contemplation; and it invites us to look at the "poor man of Assisi" as a source of inspiration. As the encyclical states, St Francis is "*the example par excellence of care for what is weak and of an integral ecology, lived with joy and authenticity. [...] In him we find to what extent concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace are inseparable*" (LS, 10).

At the centre of the *Laudato si'* journey, addressed "to every person who inhabits this planet" (LS, 3), we find this question: "What kind of world do we want to pass on to those who will come after us, to the children who are now growing up?" Pope Francis continues: "This question does not only concern the environment in an isolated way, because the question cannot be posed in a partial way." This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and the values that are the basis of social life. For what purpose did we come in this life? For what purpose

do we work and struggle? Why does this land need us? If we do not ask ourselves these basic questions, says the Pontiff, “I do not believe that our ecological concerns can achieve important effects” (LS, 160).

These questions arise from an observation that today the earth, our sister, mistreated and plundered, is complaining; and her groans join those of all the poor and the “rejected” of the world. Pope Francis invites us to listen to them, urging each and every one – individuals, families, local communities, nations and the international community – to an “ecological conversion”, as St John Paul II had also done in his General Audience (January 17, 2001). For Pope Francis, *ecological conversion* invites us to “change course”: “from daring to turn what is happening to the world into our personal suffering and thus discovering what we can do about it (LS, 19). Concretely, it is about assuming responsibility and the beauty of a commitment to “care for the common home.” For such a call to an *ecological conversion*, Pope Francis finds support in the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who does not only remind us of the sinfulness of our abusive treatment of God’s creation (“*For human beings to destroy the biological diversity [...], degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, contribute to climate change [...], contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life: these are sins*” [LS, 8]), but goes on to challenge us also to “recognize the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; ...” (LS, 9).

At the same time, Pope Francis recognizes that sensitivity and concern for the wellbeing of the environment is also growing and spreading throughout the world. This gives him hope and generates within him an optimism about the possibility of reversing the course of the ecological crisis: “Humanity still has the capacity to collaborate in building our common home” (LS, 13). “The human being is still capable of intervening pos-

itively" (LS, 58). "All is not lost, because human beings, capable of degrading themselves to the extreme, can also overcome themselves, go back to choosing the good and regenerate themselves" (LS, 205).

Thus, Pope Francis' call for *conversion* and for *hope* in a renewed future prepares for his teaching about the concept of *integral ecology* at the centre of the encyclical, as a paradigm capable of articulating the fundamental relationships of the person with God, with other human beings and with creation. It is worth listening to his own words: "When we speak of the 'environment', what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. [...] We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature and the society which lives in it." (LS, 139)

This is the general framework within which the presentation and treatment of fundamental themes are cast in the encyclical!

After an *Introduction* (LS, 1-16), the encyclical is divided into six chapters, the succession of which outlines a precise path.

The starting point (*Chapter I: What Is Happening to Our Common Home*) is a spiritual listening to the best scientific results available today in environmental matters, to let us touch them deeply and give a concrete basis to the ethical and spiritual path that follows. Science, especially in its application, offers us privileged moments and opportunities to see the treatment of the earth and hear her cry. Extremely complex and urgent issues

are tackled. Some of them – such as climate change and above all its causes are the subject of heated debate (in the scientific field). The objective of the encyclical is not to intervene in this debate, which belongs to the competence of scientists, nor is it to establish exactly to what extent climate change is a consequence of human action. From the perspective of the encyclical and Christian faith, humanity has a grave moral responsibility to do everything in its power to reduce its negative impact on the environment and on the poor, given that human activity is one of the factors underlying climate change and its consequences: *the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor!*

The next step in the content of the encyclical (*Chapter II: The Gospel of Creation*) is the presentation of the riches of the Judeo-Christian tradition, as we read it in the biblical text and in the theological elaboration that is based on it. This tradition expresses the “tremendous responsibility” of the human being towards creation (“to till and to keep”), the intimate bond between all creatures and the fact that “the environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of all” (LS, 95).

The encyclical proceeds, in *Chapter III: The Human Root of the Ecological Crisis* to deal with the root causes of the current situation, in dialogue with philosophy and the human sciences, in order to “get to the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes” (LS, 15). The goal of this study is to help postulate and to describe an integral ecology in *Chapter IV: Integral Ecology* which, in its various dimensions, includes “the specific place that the human beings occupy in this world and their relations with the reality that surrounds [them]” (LS, 15), in the different dimensions of life, in the economy, politics and governance, different cultures, especially, those most threatened, and above all in every moment of our daily life.

On the basis of this network of inter-connectedness, in which no variable is independent (cf. also Civ. N.51), *Chapter V: Lines of Approach and Action* addresses the question of what we can

and must do, offering a series of proposals and perspectives for the renewal of international, national and local politics, the renewal of decision-making processes in the public and entrepreneurial sphere, the renewal of the relationship between politics and economics and between religion and the sciences.

For Pope Francis, it is urgent and of great importance that we embark on paths which are concrete, and *not* ideological, superficial or reductionist. Additionally, since global issues must be dealt with globally, *dialogue* becomes a useful and indispensable tool; and it is a term that punctuates the five *Lines of approach and action* of the pontiff. *Dialogue* in the form of an honest and transparent debate is what Pope Francis recommends: "There are discussions on environmental issues in which it is difficult to reach consensus. [...] The Church does not pretend to define scientific questions, nor to replace politics, but [I] invite an honest and transparent debate, so that particular needs or ideologies do not harm the common good" (LS, 188).

Finally, and on the basis of the conviction that every change needs motivation, education and an awareness creation ("*change is impossible without motivation and a process of education*," [LS, 15, 64, 200]), *Chapter VI: Ecological Education and Spirituality* proposes "an awareness creation" (LS, 202-221), inspired by the treasure of Christian spiritual experience. In this vein of Christian spirituality and contemplation, with which the encyclical began, the concluding chapter of the encyclical closes with two texts of prayers: the first is to be shared with believers of other religions, and the second with Christians.

At the end of the *Angelus* prayer on the Sunday after the week of the presentation of the encyclical (14 June, 2015), the Holy Father invited us to accompany the spread of the encyclical "with renewed attention to the situation of environmental deterioration," but also of restorative measure in our localities. This shows that the Pope does not speak only of environmental degradation or of things that go and have gone wrong, but that

he recognizes and encourages positive action, good practice, small individual, and community daily gestures that testify to an environmental conversion in one's own local area. Locally, the Pope does not have in mind only individual citizens, but also associations and civil society organizations that can do a lot to reverse the trend of environmental degradation.

So, in addressing his encyclical to all people, the Pope expects a universal commitment to an ecological conversion, so that everyone may offer their own contribution to the care of the common home, each according to their own vocation. The responsibilities lie with everyone: at the individual, local, regional, national, and international level, in relations between Northern and Southern countries, within countries, developed and developing, among the most fragile and the most vulnerable in society, including "the aboriginal communities with their cultural traditions" (*LS*, 146), within faith and scientific communities.

It is then necessary to note how various perspectives are represented in this encyclical: from the ecumenical to the interreligious, from the scientific to the philosophical and theological, from the technical to the ethical, from the social and cultural to the economic and political, from the individual to the community.

Humanity, in its relationship with the environment faces crucial challenges, which require the development of adequate policies at all levels, especially at international level. Certainly, *Laudato si'* can and does make an impact on these policy developments; but, at the end of the day, *Laudato si'* is a magisterial, pastoral, and spiritual document, whose scope, breadth, and depth cannot be reduced to the sphere of environmental policies alone. In recognition of the deeply spiritual, human, and transcendental character of creation, *Laudato si'* is a call to heed the "*cry of the earth and the poor!*"

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson
Prefect, Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Editorial

The *Laudato si' Reader* brings together a diverse and international group of people to reveal how Pope Francis' watershed encyclical, *Laudato si' – On Care for Our Common Home*, has been brought to life over the past six years. This is a book that shares those reflections in a short collective format as a testament of how the Holy Father's ideas have been disseminated, advocated and, most importantly, practiced in various settings.

The authors are a mixture of academics and practitioners, scientists and youth, organisations and economists, farmers and indigenous peoples, parents and politicians, Christians and interreligious communities. Although the formatting has been standardised, their insights reveal an impressive mosaic that ranges from meeting with Pope Francis to orchestrating the Paris Agreement, switching careers post-*Laudato si'* to holding tree planting birthdays in local communities, being inspired by school strikes for the climate or shifting investments into renewable energies and sharing examples of healing processes related to colonialism, the patriarchy and past conflicts. However, there is one common characteristic amongst the reflections – they are all partly or wholly inspired by the moving words of *Laudato si'* – and have stimulated dialogue and action towards developing new understandings and experiences to repair our common home, together.

Upon receiving the request from His Eminence Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson, we as editors had the pleasure of realising this project's dream. The dream of sharing personal stories. The dream of continuing meaningful dialogue. The dream of highlighting collective action towards a common goal – to care for our common home. We realise the contributions are short in length and each author could have each written a book about their work, but nonetheless we hope that you find inspiration in their stories.

The overall structure of the *Reader* is built around core places that the encyclical has made a direct impact on people's willingness to reflect and act on the care of our common home. As editors, we have attempted to create a coherent whole that maintains consistency throughout the variety of topics discussed, whilst bringing together a wide range of reflections that reveal the depth of inspiration and action gained from *Laudato si'* over the past 6 years.

The 81 reflections are organised into 5 major parts of unequal length. The publication starts with **Part I: Communities and Social Movements**, as organising from the ground up is a fundamental element to social change. The movements span 6 continents across various spatial and temporal scales, touching upon building strategies and acting in relation to agriculture and food, eco-spirituality, education, filmmaking, justice, mining, motherhood, peace and security, photography, social media, unity, urban planning and the empowerment of women.

The solid foundation of communities and social movements is then carried over into **Part II: Indigenous Peoples, Interfaith & Youth**, where we dive into crucial avenues for dialogue that Pope Francis holds most dearly. This is of upmost importance for various reasons – Indigenous peoples comprise of less than 5% of the world's population yet defend and protect 80% of global biodiversity; interreligious dialogue is key to building bridges to establish deep links of social friendship between all people; and it is primarily our children who understand the scale of the climate crisis and have the courage to stand up and fight for change. Despite being a shorter section, the reflections offer snapshots into the shared vision of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew I, before delving into how this relates to the world-views and experiences of Indigenous peoples in areas that cover the modern-day Philippines, Australia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Bolivia, Ecuador and Papua New Guinea, etc. This is complemented by the wisdom of young leaders and representatives of interfaith communities.

Part III: Science & Academia, turns towards the challenge of transforming education systems. Here we are blessed with trans-disciplinary insights from various fields such as climate science, sustainability, philosophy, sociology and theology. It summarises the solid (yet cautious) best available science and pleads that we must use this to make bold and brave decisions for a stable climate and thus more a prosperous, egalitarian society striving towards integral human development.

Despite being the shortest section, **Part IV: Politics and Economy**, goes to the heart of the concerns raised throughout *Laudato si'*. There is also no doubt that the world has and continues to lack the political will across business and government to address the various dimensions of our socio-ecological crises. This becomes blatantly obvious once power and profit become involved. However, such decision-makers remain important changemakers and key leverage points as it is their reforms (or not) that have the potential to change mindsets and spark transitions. Hence, in the section we draw inspiration from the likes of prominent diplomats, economists and business personal to what impact *Laudato si'* has had on the way they carry out their jobs, and lives.

Finally, the *Reader* closes with **Part V: Pastoral Leadership & Bishops' Conferences**. The subtitle reflects the importance of pastoral guidance as communities begin to navigate the complexities of an eco-spirituality conversion. The section starts with short reflections from the Archbishops of Mumbai (India), Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Luxembourg (Luxembourg) and Los Angeles (USA), before delving into personal and communal engagements of Catholics as they begin (or continue) their ecological conversion towards integral human development. Nonetheless, through their words it becomes apparent that we must accompany each other through the highs and lows on this journey.

Overall, the *Laudato si' Reader* achieves several things. Most importantly, it demonstrates the motivational power of Pope Francis' encyclical as many turn these words into action. Secondly, the reflections and stories are a valuable source of inspiration for those interested in exploring and understanding how different actors are embracing the ideas of *Laudato si'*. Finally, it is both a celebration of previous achievements and an acknowledgement that the journey towards integral human development and the flourishing of all God's creatures in our one and only common home is only just beginning, and for this reason we need everyone to join us! So read on, get inspired and let us walk together!

Fr Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam

Nicholas Fitzpatrick

Jordan Glassman

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Vatican City

24 May 2021 – Conclusion of the *Laudato Si'* Year

Part I – Communities & Social Movements

Laudato si': Ecological Conversion and Renewal of Life

ALOYSIUS JOHN
Secretary General, Caritas Internationalis, Italy

In this unique encyclical on integral ecology, placing all the reflections in the tradition of the Popes of the modern era, Pope Francis urgently appeals for dialogue on how we ought to shape the future of our planet. Based on his usual approach of learning from the past, he exhorts us to think about the future, which entails reflecting on today's lifestyle and how we challenge the technocratic paradigm.

Concern for Humanity and concern for our Earth, our common home, leads to a new reflection on integral ecology, placing human dignity at the centre of everything that we do and putting the human person at the core of all our preoccupations and actions.

For Caritas, this encyclical has been an eye-opener to engage in holistic practices that lead to integral human development. This experience in a changed context reveals how *Laudato si'* forms a basis for life dialogue through learning from day-to-day life experiences. The programmes implemented by Caritas all over the world are also developed in such a way that they enable pursuit of dialogue.

Integral Ecology as a Space for Action-Oriented Dialogue on Integral Human Development

Many Caritas organisations are engaged in reflection about how to ensure care and concern for our common home. In Bangladesh, Caritas, based on the call of *Laudato si'* (LS, 14;22), put

in place a massive tree planting campaign in September 2020. This campaign consisted of mobilising the bishops, clergy, staff, and beneficiaries of projects to plant seeds of hope for the future by planting a tree and this was undertaken by joining hands with the government. Caritas Bangladesh made care for our common home the focus of all their activities leading to the planting of more than 250,000 trees all over the country. The project manager said, "The whole world must think about our mother nature. It's time to take care of her." He added that "this is a moral obligation for all of us today."

Pope Francis through *Laudato si'* brings his special concern to bear on care for the poor and nature as they are interconnected. Rebuilding our common home in the aftermath of a global pandemic cannot be undertaken without rebuilding the human person. This implies nurturing a culture of spiritual encounter with the poor. In the Philippines, the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA), which serves as the national Caritas organisation, promoted this spiritual encounter at the climax of COVID-19 pandemic. Kindness Centres were created in parishes. These centres were a space for encounter through sharing, caring and expressing love for the poorest and those who were left without anything. The most vulnerable lost every means of livelihood and the kindness centres received them and served them with what the poorest needed. These centres helped create relations with the most vulnerable in a bond of fraternity.

Parishes brought everything they could share and the poorest and most vulnerable came to be served, out of love and concern, freely, in line with the teaching of *Laudato si'* which says, "Solidarity and love cannot but help well up within us, since we were made for love" (*LS*, 58). When people came to these centres, they were not only helped with the basic needs, it was also a moment of dialogue, discussion on their sufferings and experiences of trials.

Many Caritas organisations are also engaged in “community-managed learning farms” that will enable the communities to have access to food security, dignified life and also to become aware of the need to care for creation. Caritas Ghana, through its awareness programmes addressed these issues in their community programmes.

Caritas Poland organised a *Laudato si'* mobile embassy. Through this activity they were able to invite people for reflection, organised workshops and conferences. These activities were undertaken at the level of local communities and parishes. There was an encouraging and impressive response to these programmes.

In South Africa, Caritas in its different development programmes with migrants gives an important space to the question of the environment, raising awareness among women of the problems related to safeguarding the environment.

In Oceania, Caritas organisations, including those in small island states are seriously scaling up action on the environmental dimension and are embedding in their programmes the need to protect nature and care for the human person. Promotion of indigenous cultures and identity is taken into consideration in the different projects.

In Latin America, *Laudato si'* was addressed through re-establishing social and environmental justice as an indispensable means for promoting integral ecology. Development projects have a component of integral human development based on integral ecology.

In the same way, Caritas organisations across the world are also actively involved in addressing the root causes of poverty, and these analyses include environmental analysis. Advocacy is based on “human ecology” wherein human life, nature and ecology are addressed in an interconnected way.

These experiences demonstrate that care for our common home requires a “renewal of hearts and minds”, adopting new

attitudes towards our environment and above all requiring the participation of each and every one as active players in defending mother earth and upholding the dignity of the human person and contributing to protecting Creation.

Laudato si' has also been a book of inspiration and guideline in the management of Caritas, especially during the trials caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. "Humanitarian concern" led the confederation to undertake activities that put the human person at the centre. At a moment when people could not maintain their normal livelihood due to the collapse of the informal economic sector, Caritas was in the front line to support them in a spirit of creative solidarity and generosity by helping the small communities in the most vulnerable areas protect themselves. Caritas contributed to creating safer environments wherein the most vulnerable could lead a safer life.

At a time when we are reflecting on the localisation agenda, Caritas initiated capacity building and institutional development activities with various Caritas organisations in fragile situations and those needing support. The key question raised during these courses was to reflect on the purpose of the activities implemented by Caritas, the mission of Caritas and how to put the human person at the centre of all their activities.

There was also an awareness that authentic development cannot take place unless there is an integral improvement in the quality of life, which means understanding and comprehending the environment in which we live. These reflections changed the whole perspective and focus of the work of Caritas and fraternal cooperation. Putting into action the teachings of *Laudato si'*, Caritas organisations are putting in the forefront the value of integral ecology that takes into consideration not only the human person, but also the environment in which he or she is living.

During this past year which was a time of trial and uncertainty for humanity, *Laudato si'* was an instrument of revelation that helped us realize that we cannot solve all the problems,

but when we do our best to accomplish small things with love and concern for the poor, putting our trust in God, then the conviction of faith motivates and mobilises everybody to enter into communion with brothers and sisters who are suffering and who are fragile situations.

As a conclusion I would like to emphasize that the different experiences show that the spirit of *Laudato si'* is a motivating and guiding force for sustainable development. It puts the focus on the need to be in communion with the poor and the most vulnerable and, at the same time, be in harmony with Mother Nature. The practices of Caritas show that sustainable development and integral ecology are two sides of the same coin; they are inseparable and must be addressed in their holistic dimension. Integral development cannot be achieved without addressing the ecological crisis and the treatment of the ecological crisis must be undertaken with the vision of sustainable development.

A Reflection on the Impact of *Laudato si'* on the Struggle for Global Justice

CHIARA MARTINELLI

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For many of us who have been studying and working for social justice for years and engaged every day in efforts to eradicate poverty and injustice, 2015 was a big milestone. Indeed, it will be remembered as the year where multilateralism achieved unprecedented international agreements, such as the one on the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda, but also the agreement on financing for development and the Paris Agreement to tackle climate change. All of these pacts are the result of long processes and compromises. They are not perfect but surely important political frameworks that offer us the possibility of calling for policies and actions to bring about a more just and sustainable world for all. And we should highlight that those agreements could not have been reached without the huge global mobilization that filled the streets and applied incredible bottom-up pressure in the run up to 2015. Today, six years after the publication of *Laudato si'*, we can state clearly that Pope Francis' messages on integral ecology made an incredible contribution to the above-mentioned processes; the document, method and whole dynamic brought about by this powerful letter to the world has the strength to complement and scale up such international political commitments, providing solid roots in values and principles for all human beings called to take action to protect our common home.

Pope Francis states clearly in the first pages of his encyclical, "Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate

questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*LS*, 49). Listening to the suffering of nature and the most vulnerable communities as one sole cry, as the same call – this is a very simple and dramatic image that since my first reading of the text, I could never forget. An image, a reality, a political call – and not an abstract sentence – that contains, denounces, and proposes. It denounces that the current crises we live in (economic, environmental, social and spiritual, as well as the current pandemic) are all interconnected and the result of a dominant economic system that puts profit and the interests of a few at the center and is based on human domination over nature. But with this demand to listen both to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, Pope Francis also launches a call to build a new development paradigm where people and planet are at the centre—a system based on the harmony and coexistence of humanity and nature, a relationship of reciprocity, a relationship of love.

Over recent years, as organisations and movements were striving for social and climate justice, we experienced the messages of *Laudato si'* in action.

It is confirmation because in the run-up to 2015, while designing the Sustainable Development Goals, the international community started to recognize the link between environmental, social and economic challenges and the need for a coherent response to them. The impossibility of decoupling sustainability and development was already evident, and *Laudato si'* came out describing this link as 'integral ecology', offering us the strength of a theology that confirms that we will not be able to alleviate poverty and develop in a progressive way without recognising the connection between ourselves and nature, and the important role nature plays in enabling us to develop. Likewise, we will not tackle climate change without addressing the social, economic and political factors that drive our current development pathway and put us at odds with the stability of the planet on

which we depend¹. At the heart of this problem is a need for our own cultural and spiritual transformation, “an awareness of our common origin, our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared by everyone” (LS, 202).

Laudato si’ has been a continuous inspiration for people from all around the world, encouraging creativity and enthusiasm at all levels and provoking a path towards individual and community conversion that can establish lasting change. For example, local churches embarking on projects to deepen and live an ecological conversion; youth groups coming together to share ideas, trying to bring *Laudato si’* to life and moving towards a more sustainable way of living²; Catholic institutions investing in reducing their own ecological footprint³ and divesting from fossil fuels⁴; the universal Church gathered in Rome around the Synod for the Amazon⁵; political leaders quoting Pope Francis in key international fora. An inspiration rooted in the belief that change starts with each of us.

Laudato si’ is providing everyday guidelines for our work calling for social and environmental justice. We have been learning to follow the continuous cycle of seeing, judging, acting and celebrating as a methodology for building our messages, discerning and strengthening our actions, but also empowering the dialogue across different actors and “growing in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (LS, 210). The crucial step of active listening is described in a unique way throughout the whole encyclical: listening to the science, listening to the most vulnerable communities and the indigenous people as the

¹ https://www.cidse.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CIDSE_LS_Principles_Paper_Nov_2017_light_1.pdf

² <https://www.cidse.org/2020/05/18/five-years-of-changing-for-the-planet-and-caring-for-the-people/>

³ <https://ecologicalfootprint.cidse.org/en/>

⁴ <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/divest-and-reinvest/announcements/>

⁵ <http://www.synod.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en.html>

guardians of Mother Earth and listening to the hope of future generations.

Today, six years after the publication of *Laudato si'*, we can surely celebrate a worldwide movement engaged in efforts to bring about the radical ecological conversion needed, but still a lot needs to be done at all levels to truly tackle injustice, inequality and the climate emergency we live in. *Laudato si'* continues to be the compass we need to transform global challenges in an attempt to embark on a decade of restoration, by achieving the goals of Agenda 2030 and moving towards net-zero emissions as fast as possible.

With the pandemic we have been witnessing the exacerbation of the environmental, economic and social crisis, and today, while political leaders discuss a just and sustainable recovery for all, we cannot tolerate wasting any more time or accepting long-term promises. *Laudato si'* offers us a clear, holistic approach that could enable policy coherence across sectors at all levels and shape a new paradigm where people and planet are the central priority. Because we know that the path we were following at full speed is just perpetuating inequalities and ecological collapse.

Laudato si' sets the principles for true ambition in tackling climate change: the moral imperative to save people's lives and protect their rights, emission reduction as recommended by scientific data to avoid extinction, measures to address and limit the social and economic effects of the transition on the most vulnerable parts of society worldwide and looking beyond business-as-usual to alternatives that follow the cyclical nature of ecosystems. *Laudato si'* strengthens us, "May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope" (LS, 244).

How *Laudato si'* Gave Birth to a Movement

YEB SAÑO & TOMÁS INSUA

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Laudato si' gave birth to a movement, even before it was released.

It started in 2014 when a small group of leaders and organizations from every corner of the globe began meeting weekly on Skype. Thanks to the press, they heard that Pope Francis would be issuing a papal encyclical on the environment. As Catholics committed to the Church's teachings on creation care, they knew this new document would be a game changer. Also, inspired by the massive People's Climate March of September 2014, they felt a pressing need for Catholics to step up and come together to support and implement the upcoming encyclical.

At the same time, scientists were issuing increasingly starker warnings about the climate crisis. The following year, in December, leaders from nearly 200 nations would be gathering at the U.N. Paris Climate Summit (COP21) in the hopes of developing a common plan that would tackle the climate emergency before it was too late. There was growing momentum in the air, and an imperative for Catholics to speak up as never before.

2015 was a '*kairos*' moment. *Kairos* is the Greek word used in the Gospels to express "an opportune moment." The release of *Laudato si'* and the Paris Climate Summit were poised to transform how the Church and humanity, respectively, responded to the crisis of our planetary home. This small group felt the urgency and opportunity to come together to create something new.

Finally, after many dropped calls at awkward hours, the *Laudato Si' Movement* (LSM) was born (originally called Global Catholic Climate Movement, without knowing the encyclical's name).

The date chosen was January 15, 2015, when Pope Francis would arrive in the Philippines for a highly symbolic trip that would feature a visit to Tacloban. That city was the epicentre of Super Typhoon Haiyan, the monster hurricane that killed over 10,000 people and left 13 million homeless. The choice of the Philippines for LSM's foundation has marked the movement's commitment to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

The Archdiocese of Manila and some Philippine religious orders were part of the founding group of 17 organizations and 12 leaders from all continents that formed LSM. Thanks to them, Cardinal "Chito" Tagle, who then served as Archbishop of Manila, handed over LSM's founding statement to Pope Francis as a symbol of the movement's commitment to support the release of the encyclical and the Church's work for creation.

The statement's introduction described the movement as "a first-of-its-kind international coalition of Catholics from many nations, continents, and walks of life. We are laity, religious, and clergy, theologians, scientists, and activists from Argentina, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, Kenya, Australia, the United States, and many other nations. We are united by our Catholic faith and our work in various roles and organizations on climate change issues ... Pope Francis will be issuing an encyclical about caring for the environment. With this statement, we the undersigned now seek to help bring these teachings of the Church to the world."

Six years later, what began as a humble effort of a handful of individuals has blossomed into a vibrant global movement. Nowadays, the movement has nearly 750 member organizations, ranging from large religious orders all the way to smaller lay movements and youth groups, and everything in between, as well as 25,000 *Laudato si'* Animators who are leading their communities to embrace integral ecology in all corners of the globe. Spanning over 150 countries, "Live *Laudato si'*" has been the movement's motto, striving for unity in diversity while walk-

ing in synodality and communion with the larger Church, and all people of good will.

The movement aims to bring *Laudato si'* to life through multiple initiatives. They range from global Church-wide celebrations such as the Season of Creation and Laudato si' Week, all the way to national and local efforts driven by chapters and Laudato si' Circles. By working together, LSM members aim to maximize collective impact to match the urgency of the crisis of our common home. "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts," as the saying goes.

Grounded in a 'Contempl-activist' paradigm, the movement blends contemplative spirituality and prophetic activism. In other words, a 'slow and fast' paradox is embraced. On one hand, the movement is grounded in the slow-paced "ecological spirituality" proposed by Pope Francis (*LS*, 216), which provides nourishment for this challenging journey. This is lived out through Laudato si' retreats and many other eco-spirituality initiatives. On the other hand, the movement engages in "decisive action, here and now" (*LS*, 161), in line with the dramatic urgency of the ecological crisis and climate emergency. This plays out through various types of advocacy, such as fossil fuel divestment, Climate Strikes and Paris Agreement campaigns.

The beauty of *Laudato si'*s transformative impact is appreciated best when looking at real stories on the ground. So many hearts have been touched by the encyclical's message, which has become the omnipresent unifying thread that motivates the efforts of movement members.

An inspiring example comes from Steeven Kezanutima from Kenya, a young leader of the Laudato si' Generation, LSM's youth branch. Striving to bring *Laudato si'*s message into all aspects of life, he and his then future wife Anne Marie decided to have a 'Laudato si' Wedding,' inviting guests to plant trees as a gift. Another example comes from the Philippines, where article co-author Yeb and fellow natives from Tacloban, the epicenter of

super typhoon Haiyan, have embarked on various months-long climate pilgrimages to speak up on behalf of the victims and demand climate justice from political leaders, both at home and abroad in U.N. summits. Even though the pilgrimages are inter-faith in character, at the heart of the pilgrimages is a handwritten version of the encyclical, transcribed word for word, which is carried as an inspiration to put up with the tough challenges of those long walks. There are so many other member stories to share, far too many for this brief article.

At the heart of LSM is a commitment to “ecological conversion”, the life-long journey of transformation of hearts and minds toward greater love for our Creator, each other and all creation. Most importantly, it’s a commitment to an ecological conversion that is a “community conversion” (LS, 219). The journey ahead is too hard to walk alone. We need others, and we find such a community in this beautiful movement.

Because of *Laudato si’*, countless people now see caring for creation as part of their Christian identity. As Irene D’Agostini, a young *Laudato si’* Animator from Italy, said, “*Laudato si’* has changed my way of looking at the world because it showed me how much everything is connected and gave me new hope for the future.” She said that being a part of the *Laudato si’* Circle, a place of prayer, reflection and action is “the ideal platform to work in faith for the glory of the Father, the Son, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

This work of bringing *Laudato si’* to life is part of the new evangelization that shows how through care of creation we can live Christ’s mission of love; and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we can help cultivate God’s garden on Earth for generations to come.

We look forward to continuing to walk this journey of *Laudato si’* and will continue in joy, as Pope Francis encourages: “Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope” (LS, 244).

Laudato si' Reaches Aotearoa New Zealand

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In the Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand office in Wellington, over 18,000 kms from Rome, there was great excitement as the new encyclical from Pope Francis appeared in our email boxes. It was June 2015. We already knew from our work with communities that our changing environment was telling us there were many signs to which we needed to listen. As we gathered spontaneously around the office and started reading it aloud, it took our breath away to read the first two paragraphs: “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”, followed by the lament that “This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her”. In our far-flung shores, we knew this to be true.

Over recent decades, the peoples of our region have been witnesses to both the beauty of and tragedy afflicting God’s creation here. Together with other Caritas Oceania members and partners, over the last seven years, we have been documenting stories of environmental impact and response. We have heard stories from across the lands and waters of Oceania: stories of loss and devastation, stories of resilience and hope.

In 2014, we released our first report, *Small yet Strong: Voices from Oceania on the Environment*, on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi. Our title drew on our new Pope’s words in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Small yet strong ... all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples” (EG, 216). A teaser for the integral ecology Pope Francis would expound on the following year with *Laudato si’s*

call to “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (LS, 49).

Laudato si’s thinking has continued to shape our environmental reporting and advocacy. From 2015, through the ‘State of the Environment for Oceania’ report series, our annual environmental reports have followed five key issues affecting Oceania peoples. The issues of rising seas and coastal erosion, extreme weather, access to safe local food and water, offshore mining and drilling, and access to climate finance are made visible through the stories and images of communities from as far north as Papua New Guinea and Micronesia, to the southernmost points of Aotearoa New Zealand’s Te Waipounamu, across the Pacific Ocean and in the vast expanses of Australia.

The first of these reports in October 2015 adopted *Laudato si’s* subtitle for its name: ‘Caring for our Common Home’. Our aim through these reports is to reflect on the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor and the cry of the ocean, which here, Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa ‘the great ocean of Kiwa’ unites all our islands of this region. Our research approach draws on indigenous ways of working and is conducted in a spirit of “talanoa”, that is the sharing of stories and insights as equals, out of a desire to serve the common good, not only the good of all people in Oceania but for all the world.

As a member of the Caritas Internationalis confederation delegation to COP21 in Paris, in December 2015, I can say that *Laudato si’s* theme of interconnectedness resonated strongly with our group. Our members from the continental areas across the world could share our stories and understand how our oceans, rivers and forests were deeply important for the wellbeing of the world and of all of us. In the great hall, when the gavel came down as the nations of the earth had agreed to commit to the Paris Agreement, we wept tears of joy and relief. This would be a moment where we could tell our children about our aspirations for the wellbeing of their generation and

future generations. It was also clear to us that *Laudato si'* was reading the signs of the times and speaking prophetically to the core issues of our day – the need to address social, ecological and economic crises *together*, and look to the fundamental meaning and purpose of our sojourn on Earth. Its message has only resonated more strongly and been amplified by Pope Francis during the pandemic crisis.

Laudato si''s integral ecology approach has been incorporated into strategic planning and impacted every area of our work – development, humanitarian, advocacy, education and communications. For example, our Strategic Directions & Goals are based on Chapter 4: Integral Ecology of *Laudato si'*: “The call to healing relationships extends to the earth and all parts of creation. The strategies we adopt and the ways in which we work must reflect the needs of the earth and the interconnectedness of all creation in the achievement of integral human development”¹. So, it has influenced us in ways of consciously incorporating care for people and care for creation in working with partners overseas and in Aotearoa and evaluating the effectiveness of our work in a holistic way.

Our education resources for Catholic schools have naturally incorporated *Laudato si'* into their material. For example, our Lent 2017 resources highlighted climate change impacts in the Pacific and challenged young people to look at what they could do personally. Lent 2020 resources had a strand on ‘living *Laudato si'*’ to promote stewardship and care for creation. It also saw the launch of our Kaitiaki2Share competition which encourages young people to come up with innovative ideas to live sustainably and care for the earth while caring for people.

We have also found very positive reactions from other faiths when we have shared from *Laudato si'* and associated writings in our work on ecological concerns. It is an unashamedly Catholic and spiritual document that enables us to engage more deeply

¹ <https://caritas.org.nz/our-mission>

with all our stakeholders – be they, Catholic, Christian, of other faiths, or no faith.

As with all of us, the journey is not over. We are currently reviewing our environmental practices in light of the integral ecology vision of *Laudato si'* to see how we can further continue the ecological conversion as individuals, as organisations, as Church and communities. When considering the environmental impact of resources, we create, we look to minimise our use of plastic and reduce waste, and when we host meetings and gatherings, we seek to minimise food waste and be intentional in our food choices. We're not perfect, yet we are learning as we journey together and seek to live well.

Like many throughout the world, we have been captivated and inspired by *Laudato si'*. Not only has it affirmed the necessary integration of environmental, economic and social concerns to address poverty and environmental degradation together; but it has addressed fundamental issues about the meaning and purpose of our life on earth in a very Catholic way. It has clearly outlined the nature and extent of our ecological problems, and also provided inspiration and hope from our faith and spiritual resources. It has provided a strong foundation for the Church and her many organisations to deepen their understanding of care of creation and care of people.

The words of Pope Francis continue to echo in our ears and resonate in our hearts and actions: "Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope" (*LS*, 244).

Laudato si's Eco-Spirituality

CHRISTINA LEAÑO

Associate Director, Laudato Si' Movement

With the release of *Laudato si'* came the birth of new ways of praying. In fact, one of the most remarkable contributions of *Laudato si'* has been its call for an “ecological spirituality”, otherwise known as “eco-spirituality”. Pope Francis wrote, “I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith [to] motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” (*LS*, 216). For those of us who have been engaged in eco-spirituality practices for quite some time, this was a delightful invitation.

Rightly so, Pope Francis proposed this eco-spirituality as the path to accomplish the “ecological conversion” proposed by St John Paul II in the early 2000s. In other words, we cannot transform the way we relate to Creation by sitting indoors and reflecting on a distant natural world. Instead, an ecological conversion requires us to go outdoors and pray with Creation. It requires spiritual intimacy with Creation, in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi and so many other lovely saints throughout history. It requires ecological spirituality.

The encyclical provides some extraordinary insights about what is entailed in an ecological spirituality, particularly in Chapters 2 and 6, while proposing as a model the spiritual attitudes of the beautiful Canticle of the Creatures by the beloved saint of Assisi. At the Laudato si' Movement (LSM), we have been trying to practice this *Laudato si'*-inspired eco-spirituality in many ways, as it's no easy task and it requires intentionality for it to bear fruit.

The Laudato si' Chaplet

A few years ago, the LSM secretariat had a retreat in Assisi, which included a guided walk in the "Forest of St Francis". A local spiritual guide, Antonio Caschetto, led us in a prayerful immersion in the wisdom of the Cantic of the Creatures, the Franciscan hymn that inspired the encyclical's title with its verse "*Laudato si' mi' Signore*" – "Praise be to you, my Lord". Re-reading and savouring each line of the cantic, immersed in that age-old forest, helped us understand how Francis prayed "with" other creatures who are singing praises to God, all part of a magnificent cosmic choir.

That inspired the idea of continuing to pray with that Franciscan wisdom, but in an abridged and meditative version of the Cantic – the Laudato si' Chaplet. The chaplet is a simple prayer technique to pray with Creation, using the very same words of St Francis. To pray the Chaplet one prays the verses from the Cantic of the Creatures that praise God through the four elements, repeating 10 times each by following the Rosary beads. A fifth stanza, also from the Cantic, has been added to follow the Rosary's five decades.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Air. x10
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water. x10
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire. x10
Praised be you, my Lord, through Mother Earth. x10
Praised be you, my Lord, through all your creatures. x10

One ideally prays the Chaplet outside, contemplating the beauty of Creation, but it can be done anywhere. Contemplative exercises can accompany each of the decades, to better savour

the prayer, and additional stanzas could be added for longer prayer sessions.¹

The Chaplet can help deepen one's ecological conversion by making our own some of Francis' spiritual attitudes. First, there is the repetition of "Praised be," the sense of praise and gratitude to our Creator that flows as a natural reaction to the stunning beauty of the natural world. Second, the repetition of "Brother" and "Sister" helps cement our sense of universal fraternity with all of Creation, seeing all creatures as our beloved brothers and sisters. Lastly, the repetition of "through" reminds us that Creation is already praising God, regardless of us humans, and we join their choir. Ultimately, the repetitive and meditative nature of the *Laudato si'* Chaplet helps enhance our capacity to contemplate the beauty of Creation with awe and wonder, while deepening our interior peace and strengthening our relationship with God the Creator.

The *Laudato si'* Chaplet has become one of LSM's core prayer practices, supporting the movement's members in practicing ecological spirituality. After praying to the Chaplet in an online retreat, one participant shared how the Chaplet encouraged her to renew her commitment to more ecological practices. Another religious sister shared how she sits on her porch each morning and prays to the Chaplet. And then one of the *Laudato si'* Animators remarked that meditating on Brother Air during the Chaplet helped him see the interconnectedness of all life, how we are breathing the same air as those before us, everyone alive today, and those to come. And the list goes on.

Other Eco-Spirituality Initiatives

Beyond specific practices such as the Chaplet, at LSM we have engaged in other *Laudato si'*-inspired resources and initia-

¹ To learn more about the *Laudato si'* Chaplet, you can see more here: <http://bit.ly/lischaplet>

tives throughout the years to advance the eco-spirituality proposed by the encyclical.

One that stands out is the Season of Creation, an ecumenical celebration that takes place annually between 1 September, Creation Day for the Orthodox Church, and 4 October, the Feast of St Francis of Assisi. The season has grown in popularity in recent years, thanks to the leadership and multiple statements from the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope Francis, the World Council of Churches and many others.

This month-long celebration has become a privileged moment for hosting eco-spirituality gatherings in parishes and other local communities. This is expressed through outdoor prayer services, Creation-themed masses, prayerful walks in nature, spiritual retreats and more. All meant to help the faithful deepen their communion with Creation, given that “the ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion” (*LS*, 219).

Similarly, the *Laudato si'* Retreats have also emerged as an introductory experience for newcomers to learn about the encyclical's message and its proposed eco-spirituality. Besides listening to the beautiful “Song of Creation,” in line with the wisdom of the Canticle of the Creatures, these spiritual retreats also encourage participants to spend time with the heartbreaking “Cry of Creation,” aiming “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” (*LS*, 19). The truth is that, at a time of ecological breakdown, an eco-spirituality necessarily involves a fair amount of sorrow.

And, in turn, that painful awareness about the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor invites participants to take action. In other words, a genuine eco-spirituality is one that is accompanied by transformative action. The same way that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26), an “eco-spirituality without works is dead.” It has been heartening to see the many fruits emerging

from these retreats, and this article has been just a quick preview of the much larger set of fruits we've witnessed so far.

In summary, *Laudato si'* has catalyzed an incredible amount of interest in eco-spirituality. Creation is making its way slowly but steadily into the Church's prayer life, liturgies and ethos. It is my prayer that this trend accelerates, so that Creation becomes a prayer companion of all Christians. Only then, whenever eco-spirituality goes truly mainstream, will we see the potential of *Laudato si'* fully realized.

Birthday Tree Planting – A fruit of *Laudato si'*

STELLA MARILENE NISHIMWE
Focolare Movement, Burundi

Laudato si' has been appreciated since its publication. It became a revolutionary book that called upon everyone to change accepting no excuses. It turned the discussion onto everyone in every sphere. I remember that it was at the heart of the conversation with my parents. I, who, at the time, had little interest in the writings of Popes, found the conversation far from attractive.

Thousands of initiatives were born across the world in order to put into action something concrete in the light of *Laudato si'*. Among others, there is the story of Steeven Kezanutima. This was a story that became so dear to me maybe because it was close to my reality and meaningful to my community. It proved to me that our actions directly or indirectly influence society and nature.

In the Focolare Movement, a movement that I belong to as young person for a united world, there is a methodology that accompanies all our initiatives these days: learn, act, share. Learn – means learn and know the reality of where you live; Act –start actions that lead to change; and Share – means change that becomes contagious and heals the social fabric. You may be wondering why I am talking about this, but it is through the third point that I have got to know *Laudato si'*. Steeven's actions that I recount in this article, not only brought *Laudato si'* to life for me, but also made me discover the simplicity of implementing its principles in life, and the same is true of others who now know him.

Laudato si' invites people to do things that will help protect our common home – the earth. Steeven chose to do this through creativity. He wanted to do this through what touches us the

most: life. How? His project is called *Birthday tree planting*. The idea is to plant a tree or trees on your birthday. The motto is: *Cutting cake and planting trees, a new tradition to celebrate our birthdays*. Steeven and his friends have a dream: *to restore the Garden of Eden*. The project started in Kenya in 2018.

Steeven Kezanutima is a young Burundian living in Kenya who is involved in the Franciscan movement. He came up with a bright idea to help us change our habits, love the earth and nature. The project doesn't stop at planting a tree on your birthday, but also requires you to accompany this tree in its growth to participate and admire the beauty and the mystery of nature. He started this project as a small thing. In this project, he evolved by choosing the planting of fruit trees and medicinal trees because the goals are multiplied through the planting of these trees. It is not only to discover the beauty of nature, but it is also a learning experience, for example, for children because, by supporting the growth of these trees with the help of adults, they learn to protect nature and develop a certain sensitivity toward nature for its protection. Furthermore, it is a strategy that leads to seeing results, especially for children, who witness its growth and in the near future taste the fruit of their care for nature.

The choice of medicinal trees, on the other hand, came up in 2020 when the pandemic was hitting the world. They became aware that medicinal trees are needed in Africa where diseases can harm more people due to the unstable healthcare system. The trees can contribute to research and to other health discoveries. There is no doubt that currently, in African societies, we have forgotten the use of medicinal plants, whether to cure or prevent diseases. Planting these trees also helps to rediscover this aspect of life and discover the richness of nature.

The fruits of this project are manifold. Apart from the fact that it gives freshness and space to nature, it also unites. Everyone knows that Africa contains many tribes, and these tribes coexist but that does not mean that they coexist in peace. The idea of

planting trees at the celebration of birthday parties has succeeded in bringing people from different tribes together in joy. This leads us to truly believe that all the good deeds we do for the common good, whatever they may be, contribute to bringing change in society.

The trees are planted in parishes, children's homes for the vulnerable, schools, and religious communities because they have a strong connection with these institutions and communities and they trust that once the trees bear fruits, these communities will give them to people in need rather than selling them.

There are numerous ways of taking care of our planet and therefore protecting ourselves and nature. It all starts with the consciousness of how important our actions, on a personal level, are in making a difference. The environmental and political activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai, said "It is the little things that citizens do that make a difference. My little thing is planting trees." What is yours?

Laudato si' Through a Mother's Eyes

DR. LORNA GOLD

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When *Laudato si' – On Caring for Our Common Home* landed on my desk, I read it above all through the eyes of motherhood. I had just become a mum to two boys when Pope Francis penned the encyclical and was increasingly concerned about the state of our world. The opening line of the encyclical jumped off the page at me: “our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (LS, 1). It felt like motherhood, our capacity to mother and be mothered, was on Pope Francis’ mind too.

As a long-time activist and academic in the area of sustainable development, I was well aware of the science of what is happening to our world. Having worked on these issues for over twenty years and seen things deteriorate pretty fast, I was questioning the value of all the effort the environmental movement had put in with little return. At the same time, I was conscious of the stark injustice of climate change and the way this was already devastating the lives of people across the world. I felt I was doing my bit to try and address the issues in as much as I could with two little boys to mind, but it felt completely inadequate in the face of the mounting crisis.

As I read *Laudato si'* in detail, I kept having to pause to absorb the wonderful turns of phrase and thought-provoking ideas. I could see that this encyclical was something special, which had an appeal far beyond the Catholic Church. As I read on, I kept imagining my two little boys all grown up. What world was I leaving behind for them? What more could I do to change the destructive course the world seemed to be on? Parenting, at its

very essence, is a bridge between the past, present and future. As parents, we largely inherited who we are and what we know from those who preceded us. We want to equip our children for the future – and also to do our bit to ensure that their future is as good, if not better, than the life we have enjoyed. Against this backdrop of parental love, the kaleidoscope of devastation depicted by Pope Francis, I have to confess, had me quickly in tears. Are we really bequeathing debris and desolation to our children – or in Pope Francis’ language “a pile of filth?” (LS, 21).

Those tears of sadness and of anger provoked by *Laudato si’* were a pivotal moment for me in my life journey of personal ecological conversion. Up until then I had perhaps allowed a disconnect to creep in between what I knew to be true about the climate crisis, what I felt about it and what I actually did. This sense of cognitive dissonance is widespread in our society – it has become a coping mechanism and way to deflect blame. Somehow, *Laudato si’* seemed to break straight through that sense of disconnect for me. The message of Pope Francis was not a harsh one – although it was very hard hitting. It reads like a love letter to the earth – illuminated by a deep sense of care, a tenderness overflowing from a heart full of maternal love. It enabled me to connect with the situation the world is in, but not in a disempowering way. I didn’t feel abandoned in a place of grief and isolation as I had done reading many other environmental books. I felt gently encouraged to move through that pain into hope, even joy. I felt a liberation in acceptance, and a new energy to act.

Action for me means and continues to mean many things. It has become a way of life. First and foremost, *Laudato si’* completely changed my relationship with nature. It underpinned the love I had of nature with a deep theological understanding of God’s mystical presence in Creation. My first reaction after reading the encyclical was to go outside and exclaim “*Laudato si’!*” This realisation of the mystical presence of Christ in the cosmos

energised me, raised up in me a new sense of mystical communion in the great story of Creation. It also changed how I parent my children. Everything became wrapped up in the story of tender caring for each other and the earth. Being outside, learning about and through nature, caring for other creatures together, became a major part of our lives. As a mother, I wanted above all to teach my own children about the wonderful earth God has given us as a gift – and to nurture in each other an appreciation of the beauty of the earth. Many times, we would go for walks in the woods when the boys were younger, and those walks would become the natural place for catechesis. “Who made all this, mummy? Why did God give us such a beautiful gift?” Big questions!

From this ground of newly-found connection and contemplation, an urge to do everything to protect and safeguard the earth and the future inevitably rose up in me. *Laudato si’* was the inspiration and spur for me to capture my experiences of trying to come to terms with climate change and parenthood in a book *Climate Generation: Awakening to our Children’s Future*¹. In this book, written above all from the perspective of motherhood, I share my own experience of spiritual awakening to the state of our world and how the vision of Pope Francis has given me the courage to make a difference in my own small way.

This desire to do everything I could to respond to the cry of future generations in *Laudato si’* also spurred me on to join the climate strikes in late 2018. I heard that a young Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, had sat outside the Swedish parliament in protest about climate change and the fact the adults were not doing enough. I was deeply struck by her courage, but also by her sense of isolation. Not thinking twice about the fact, I wasn’t 16, I decided to pitch my sign outside the Irish parliament that Friday in solidarity. I wanted to simply let Greta know (via Twitter) that some adults do care – in fact many do – and we are

¹ Gold, L. (2019). *Climate Generation: Awakening to Our Children’s Future*. New City Press. Available in English, French and Spanish.

with her. As I stood there alone at first in the December rain, the words of Pope Francis came to my mind: “Will the promise last, in spite of everything, with all that is authentic rising up in stubborn resistance?” (*LS*, 112). My own stubborn resistance had brought me to the point of standing still – calmly, quietly, standing in solidarity. I was there as a mum – as someone who stood for her own children, for those unborn. Over the following weeks many people joined each week outside the Irish parliament. Amongst them there were many grandparents, priests, sisters, brothers – all motivated by the vision that *Laudato si’* had lit in their hearts. It became a place of intergenerational solidarity. Within six months, what Greta had started had grown to a wildfire of protests seeded, at least in part, by the invitation of Pope Francis to be counter-cultural and stubbornly resistant.

As I opened my heart to ‘action’, it became an increasingly wonderful adventure which continues to this day. As Greta Thunberg said when asked about how to be hopeful: “Hope comes when we act” and this has also been my experience. I quickly discovered that the ‘action’ I was drawn towards was part of a great action taking place in our world today, a great turning, which can only be explained as the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit was at work in many different hearts right across the world – and in my local community here in Ireland! Together we started to meet each other using social media and other means, exchanging ideas and planning what to do. We met up in prayer groups, book clubs and environmental groups to study *Laudato si’*, and over time developed a growing sense of a new ecclesial network – a movement emerging led by lay people and youth. And at the heart of that journey has been the *Laudato Si’* Movement, which has emerged as a vibrant network of networks sustaining and nurturing ecological conversion right across the world. The mission of that movement is simple: to turn the vision of *Laudato si’* into a lived reality! It feels like we are just at the beginning.

The act of becoming a parent is in many ways the ultimate act of hope: a belief that a new future can emerge. I am ever grateful for the coincidence of becoming a mother just as *Laudato si'* was published. I was reminded of this motherly connection just last year when on the eve of the Covid crisis, I had the joy of meeting Pope Francis for a private audience with the board of LSM. Sitting in a circle together we discussed our *Laudato si'* stories – our personal ecological conversion experiences. I shared with him exactly what I shared here – moved by the immense gratitude I feel to this Pope for the gift of *Laudato si'*. At the end of our meeting, Pope Francis brought us all outside to show us something. It was a beautiful tapestry of God birthing the universe. The tapestry reflects the act of birth: strong, yet gentle hands and a newborn baby emerging from the darkness into light. The Pope explained to us that the tapestry reflects the courage and tenderness with which we need to act today. He then urged us: “this is how you need to be. We all need to be mothers now”. I felt somehow, my little story of awakening, was perfectly reflected in that moment.

Laudato si': My Newfound Love Overflowing

MR SAMUEL ZAN AKOLOGO

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After a stint teaching from 1979 to 1983, Holy Mother Catholic Church through the instrumentality of the Servant of God Peter Porekuu, Cardinal Dery, offered me the opportunity to venture into other forms of human development work. I began with youth animation and mentoring in 1984. Now, thirty years have gone by that saw me facilitate the development and advocacy agenda on humanitarian responses to natural and man-made disasters in Northern Ghana, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Infrastructure for the 1987 education reforms for Catholic Junior Secondary Schools, participatory monitoring of government programmes and projects, human rights education, community peace initiatives, public campaigns on rural literacy, desertification in Northern Ghana, female genital mutilation, disability rights etc. It has truly been an active background in the field of human development that had deeply affected my orientation and outlook prior to *Laudato si'*.

A Shift Inspired by Laudato si'

Laudato si' arrived in 2015 when I was already steeped in a mindset and approach to development for over thirty years. Compared to others, this might still be a short period, yet long enough to contemplate the analogy of teaching an old dog new tricks. Yet *Laudato si'* was such a compelling moral voice and

presented a new *modus operandi* to me. Alongside my personal reading, which I did very quickly, we were already looking forward to *Laudato si'* as we were engaging with the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) for a successful global development agenda to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

I have vivid memories of the IGN at the United Nations in New York prior to the release of *Laudato si'*. My last attendance in the series before the publication of *Laudato si'* was the 2015 IGN where I was one of the Speakers on behalf of Civil Society Organizations. Subsequently, *Laudato si'* was published and I can testify that the posturing, language and framing of issues; especially in the draft Declaration of the 2030 Agenda was refreshed with the emphasis on qualitative issues about care, collective responsibility and inclusiveness. Hard-core econometric models were witnessing a reduction in prominence during the debates. References to Pope Francis and *Laudato si'* by both State and non-State actors during debates and formal speeches; especially in the last days of finalizing the text of the 2030 Agenda became very 'fashionable', so to speak.

As I followed the processes, it encouraged me to read and re-read *Laudato si'* and facilitate conversations among my peers locally and internationally. September 2015 remains unforgettable as I was part of the Caritas Internationalis Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly that welcomed Pope Francis to address the Assembly prior to the formal adoption of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). His presence and message increased the crescendo of *Laudato si'* on this important international public policy space, especially when the delivery of the new global development agenda was imminent. The UN General Assembly adopted the new development agenda (ie the SDGs) by consensus and with much unexpected ease. Whether it was the personal influence of Pope Francis at the UNGA or his message or the moral imperative of *Laudato si'* in the four months prior to the UNGA that delivered such a feat to the world, may

remain an issue of conjecture for analysts. For witnesses like myself, it is merely stating the obvious.

With the adoption of the SDGs, the next immediate attention was the Paris Climate Summit (COP 21). *Laudato si'* was the main tool for Catholic faith inspired groups and other faith groups who were following the COP 21 processes in Paris. It was a great privilege to facilitate a round table meeting convened by the Holy See Mission in New York for Civil Society and political leaders attending the UNGA to strategize towards Paris, which was due in December. My task here was facilitated by several re-readings of *Laudato si'*, but even more importantly, I was inspired and learned more during the discussions from diverse perspectives instigated by *Laudato si'*.

The 2030 Agenda also established a follow up and review mechanism at all levels of political organization which included the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) at the United Nations General Assembly for countries listed for the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. It was again a humbling privilege to lead the Caritas Internationalis Advocacy Team at the first of these sessions in July 2016. The influence of *Laudato si'* at the Paris Climate Summit in December 2015 was still very present in the minds of State and Civil Society stakeholders attending the first HLPF in New York for the review of the implementation of the SDGs. In many respects, references to *Laudato si'* held sway in the first year's review of the implementation of the SDGs. For our delegation from the global Caritas Confederation and other Catholic faith inspired agencies, the instrumentality and resourcefulness of *Laudato si'* in our reflections, strategies and interventions became more and more obvious to us.

It was therefore a matter of logical consequence when Catholic development agencies, with the facilitation of CAFOD, began a process to develop a manual of interpreting and interrogating the SDGs with the lens of *Laudato si'*. The outcome was published in January 2018 and titled, *Engaging in the 2030 Agenda*

through the lens of *Laudato si'*. It represented profound learning from colleagues and also a sharing of my personal experiences on *Laudato si'*, as I led and represented Caritas Ghana to deliver this handy tool for activists generally interested in responding to the 'signs of the times' of both current and emerging challenges to human development.

Love Overflowing with Small Gestures in Ghana

Papal encyclicals have generally been instrumental in shaping my thinking, spirituality, knowledge and social actions. The earlier ones that dealt with the Social Question, especially on human development, like *Populorum Progressio*, *Pacem Interis* and *Laborem Exercens* contributed much to my political thought in the 1980s. The more recent ones like *Caritas In Veritate*, *Deus Caritas Est*, *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Africae Munus* were also handy references for my work in Caritas Ghana since 2010. The advent of *Laudato si'* in 2015 was an epochal and transformational experience for me! The learning curve had been steep and the urge to take action had been compelling and overpowered any inertia.

At first, I had heard about commentaries that Pope Francis' encyclical – *Laudato si'* was on the environment. My most dramatic reawakening came from my personal reading especially of paragraphs 138 and 139 on how everything is interconnected. "It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems" (*LS*, 139). This sentence, which should not necessarily be taken in isolation from the entire paragraph, very much inspired a couple of small gestures I wish to share. These are merely brief sketches in the context of my work in Caritas Ghana from a leadership inspired by *Laudato si'*.

Strategic planning in Caritas Ghana

The first Medium Term Programme Critical Pathways (MTPCP I) – Strategic Plan of Caritas Ghana and the Department of Human Development spanned the period 2012–2016. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's Exhortation to the Church in Africa, *Africæ Munus*, illuminated the rationale and programme outline of MTPCP I. The spirit and roadmap of *Laudato si'* also provided the framework for MTPCP II: Strategic Plan 2017 – 2021. *Laudato si'* was used for our reflections with stakeholders, reviewing gaps in the previous plan and as a sort of binoculars to see what lay ahead and understand future trends that required action. As we bring this plan to a close in 2021 with nearly one full year from March 2020 to February 2021 almost lost to COVID-19, I have now understood even more clearly how “everything is interconnected” (LS, 138). The lens of *Laudato si'* in strategic planning had helped Caritas Ghana to engage in a strategy for real change which called for “rethinking processes in their entirety, for it is not enough to include a few superficial ecological considerations while failing to question the logic which underlies present-day culture” (LS, 197). Thus, direct services to the poor, advocacy for pro-poor public policies, innovations in humanitarian response and care for the environment were mutually fused as an integrated, strategic response.

Impact Investing in Care for Our Common Home Programmes of Caritas Ghana

In July 2018, while following remotely the discourse in the Vatican on Impact Investing¹ in the context of *Laudato si'*, I, too,

¹ Third Vatican Conference on Impact Investing: *Scaling Investment in Service of Integral Human Development*. Available at <https://www.viiconference.org/>

was busy facilitating the organization of a National Conference on Integral Human Development for the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference scheduled for September the same year. The conference had reflected on the theme "*The Church in Ghana today and the Promotion of Integral Human Development*" and the keynote address was on "*Signs of the times with the Mind of Pope Francis*" that touched widely on his teaching in *Laudato si'*. As for myself, I had quoted Corinthians 15:10 in my formal acknowledgement: "it was not really my own doing, but God's grace working with me". As it turned out, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Conference delegates decided that Social Impact Investing should be the new approach to Caritas Ghana's Integral Human Development. The entire paragraph 129 of *Laudato si'* in particular was very instructive and insightful! Due to the limitation of space, reproducing the last sentence of this paragraph suffices: "Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world. It can be a fruitful service of prosperity for the areas in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good" (LS, 129). Thus, my whole mindset about business and finance was dramatically reshaped.

With little or no experience in this sphere, I led Caritas Ghana to expand its *Care for Our Common Home Programme* with a social impact investing model. The message of *Laudato si'* also helped in galvanizing partnerships with like-minded organizations that had the much-needed expertise and resources. This is how Caritas Ghana's partnership with the Dutch Organization, Right Now!, was established with the support of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development at the Vatican. Today, more than 50 unemployed youths and especially those displaced in the cities by the adverse impact of COVID-19 have found decent jobs in the electronic and plastic waste recycling businesses of Caritas Ghana in Accra and Tamale. Plans are far advanced on starting Ecological Regeneration and Afforestation

in Techiman Diocese that will employ many unemployed young people.

Laudato si' Inspired Interfaith Cooperation

The inspiration of *Laudato si'* tells us that: "The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity" (LS, 201). This became an impetus for me to organize the Forum for Actions on Inclusion, Transparency and Harmony (FAITH) in the Ghana Alliance in 2016. It comprised the Office of the National Chief Imam (mainstream Islam in Ghana), Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Ghana (FOMWAG), Marshallan Relief and Development Services (MAREDES), the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission in Ghana, National Catholic Secretariat for the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, and Caritas Ghana. Since its founding, the Interfaith Platform has facilitated and championed national-level processes for social cohesion during elections, anti-corruption campaigns, joint advocacy to enforce environmental laws in Ghana, anti land-grabbing, civic education on elections and corporate accountability with the UN Binding Treaty process. As a founding member and coordinator of the FAITH in Ghana Alliance, I have encountered the wisdom and admonition of *Laudato si'* on diverse religions working together to promote the common good.

Conclusion

As an avid reader of Papal social encyclicals, while my intention is not to make a comparative analysis, I cannot conclude

this reflection without lauding the simplicity of the *Laudato si'* text. Its flow and easy comprehension lend itself to all interested readers, regardless of their faith conviction. In fact, its original text is much simpler than the commentaries of some theologians that I have read. I was not surprised therefore when members of our Interfaith Alliance welcomed copies that I made available to them and have since been making enlightened references to the encyclical. The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference had re-printed *Laudato si'* locally, thus making copies easily accessible.

Admittedly however, I have found paragraph 221 is rather heavy in Christian theology, but it always reminds me to re-start reading the encyclical to deepen my understanding further. Perhaps, like the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts, 8:31), I too need the intervention of Philip for this paragraph.

It may also be that I need to follow Pope Francis more closely in both his words and gestures to deepen my understanding of some aspects of *Laudato si'*. After all, did my reading of his recent encyclical, *Fratelli tutti* not give me more enlightenment about his reference to "universal fraternity" in paragraph 228 of *Laudato si'*, which sort of foretold the coming and message of *Fratelli tutti*.

Oh yes! Let me be more personal here as I have always felt this humble servant of the Church, Pope Francis, was talking tough and sounding harsh in *Laudato si'*: "We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good" (LS, 229).

Society's commitment to *Laudato si'* must be more authentic and practical. The testimonies about the instrumentality, achievement and moral persuasion on our faith and spirituality in these five years, now enjoin us to accelerate, catalyze and mainstream the call of *Laudato si'*. I suggest that NO bishops' conference should be left behind in being called upon to account for *Laudato si'* in their pastoral agenda and plans towards the tenth anniversary of the encyclical in 2025 and beyond.

A Healthy Planet Depends on All of Us

LAVINIA ROCCHI CARRERA

*Secretary General, World Union of Catholic Women's
Organisations (WUCWO), UK*

The World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO), as a public international association of the faithful, brings together millions of Catholic women from all around the world. WUCWO's mission is to promote the presence, participation and co-responsibility of Catholic women in society and the Church, in order to enable them to fulfil their mission of evangelisation and work for human development.

In particular, every four years, WUCWO's General Assembly establishes more specific action guidelines for all members in accordance with the Magisterium. During the last Assembly in 2018 in Dakar (Senegal), one of the adopted resolutions was that "A healthy planet depends on all of us" which is precisely in accordance with Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*. WUCWO women needed to discern, plan actions and commit to the care of Creation. The concern had started from the awareness of the global plastic waste crisis that is flooding our oceans and landfills but soon we realised that care of our beloved earth is our 'business', it is a constant permanent task and we need to make it part of our daily lives. Since then, WUCWO and its member organisations have become 'carriers' of ecological conversion, they decided to promote protection and respect for the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources, in particular drinking water.

Always inspired by the words of the *Laudato si'*, WUCWO's network has encouraged through courses, local projects, advocacy and prayer services the urgent need to respond to the cry of our common home and the call of Pope Francis for integral ecol-

ogy: "There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes" (*LS*, 211). WUCWO has focused on the reduction and eventual elimination of single use plastics and the re-use and recycling of disposable plastics. Our women have advocated for the elimination of toxic waste but have also carried out many concrete small actions to sustain the environment and care for the world.

WUCWO women have been committed to taking conservation as a way of life and working for the health of the planet in the daily life of our families and communities. With small steps we have been contributing to the life, peace and development of peoples, particularly those most affected by the destruction of the environment, most of whom are the poorest on the planet. We have shared our best practice, experience, concrete steps and small actions through WUCWO's official magazine *Women's Voice* and WUCWO's official communication channels with the hope of inspiring and highlighting the role that women are called to play in the care of the planet.

During the past few years, we have collected valuable examples of various activities and projects that our women and organisations have carried out to protect the environment, care for water, establish recycling habits, and much more. Below are some examples of these reflections and concrete and collaborative work that demonstrate different experiences inspired by the teachings of the *Laudato si'*.

From the *USA*, Maribeth Stewart Blogoslawski (WUCWO Vice President): "*Laudato si'* is our wake-up call. A cry for ecological conversion that will cause us to save our planet and each other. A beautiful synthesis of the physical and the spiritual, demonstrating how they are completely intertwined. As an encyclical, it is a part of Catholic Social Teaching that cannot be ignored by faithful Catholics. Now is the time to unite our efforts to preserve our planet and care for each other as God intended."

Our WUCWO Board Member from *Tanzania*, Evaline Nten-ga describes the action taken by her organisation, Wanawake Wakatoliki Tanzania (WAWATA): “Being guided and motivated by the writings of Pope Francis (the second encyclical – *Laudato si’*), we resolved to play an active role in contributing to make the world a better place to live in”. Some of the specific activities adopted to make this contribution tangible are tree planting, environmental care through clean-up initiatives, initiating environmentally friendly activities, fighting against the use of plastic bags and raising awareness on global warming resulting from human activities. “The path started from the single unit of the community [family]” Evaline explains, “since the words and the heart of our Holy Father are alive in our hearts, we as women have been active in bringing in our efforts to the family level”.

Remarkable progress has been seen since 2019: out of 34 Dioceses in Tanzania 30 conducted a thematic seminar in which more than 6,000 WAWATA members across the country participated. As a result, a total of 15,000 trees were planted and about 200 environmental cleaning events were conducted at the parish level. WAWATA’s environmental care movement is expected to continue, involving Diocesan Secondary Schools, where every student will be required to plant and take care of at least one tree per year. This will add a total of almost 50,000 trees annually. “Involving students in schools and children at home in environmental care will inspire them to take care of their environment and since they are the ones to carry on in the next generation, it is very likely that they will pass on this behaviour to their offspring.”

Manos Unidas in the *Philippines*: already in 2016, soon after the publication of *Laudato si’* and together with a local partner, the Bicol Consortium for Development Initiatives (BCDI), Manos Unidas (Spain) worked in the Philippines on a project aimed at preserving the marine environment and coastal waters of Luzon. There were 3,740 direct beneficiaries of the project (fishermen,

women and the indigenous population) from 24 different neighbourhoods. Among the activities carried out, we can highlight: the regeneration of coastal ecosystems, through the establishment of marine reserves, restoration of mangroves and forests near the coast, installation of water systems and the establishment of family and community gardens.

In *Malawi*, explains Catherine Nyangulu (WUCWO Board member from the Catholic Women Organisation) “in almost all Dioceses, Catholic women have been undertaking tree planting with the support of the clergy and bishops. They have also managed to partner with a local bank to plant trees at one of the local parishes. It was an all-inclusive exercise with young people being involved. More than 15,000 trees have been planted since 2019 under this initiative”.

In the same vein, and also inspired by the Pope’s encyclical, *Laudato si’*, the Catholic Women of Malawi have taken a step further by reaching out to few selected Catholic primary schools of the country in a project known as the Evergreen Schools Initiative (ESI). In this project, the CWO Malawi and Holy Childhood of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS), shared information and raised awareness of attitude change and drove children and adolescents’ involvement in the planting, supervision, protection and caring of trees and vegetables in the school environment as well as in their local communities. The CWO and PMS are working closely with the Environment Affairs Ministry, the Catholic Education Commission and Caritas Malawi as well as networks on climate change and other local stakeholders to make this project grow and continue to succeed.

Another testimony from *Argentina*, Elsa Tosi de Muzio (Acción Católica): “Our commitment as WUCWO women and as an organisation calls us to work so that we all live in the common home in dignified conditions and have the same opportunity to grow, develop and enjoy the gifts of creation. Let us turn the painful experience of the pandemic into a learning experience

of respect and protection for nature and the dawn of a more empathetic, integrated and fraternal humanity”.

Lastly the reflection of our Board member from India, Juliet Ramamurthy: “Climate change is the mother of all injustices, but it has never been put as beautifully and as compellingly as in *Laudato si’*. We need to dialogue with men and women of other faiths on the topic of the environment for the care of the whole of creation”.

In conclusion, *Laudato si’* has certainly had an inspiring and constructive impact on WUCWO women. It has opened our eyes to our inconsistencies and invited us to change our attitudes. It has moved our consciences, we have learned the importance of reducing our waste by thinking about what we buy, recycling, and being reasonable. We are more careful and buy local products, seasonal fruits and vegetables in appropriate quantities for our homes. Furthermore, also the pandemic has helped us regain the pleasure of cooking, instead of consuming ready-made products. We have also taken more time for our families, neighbours and friends, helping each other and discovering our own country and communities, instead of going to the ends of the earth without taking the time to meet and know the locals.

Through training sessions we have also been led to internalise and “make ours” the profound teaching that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (LS, 66) we are all truly united by the same concern as “everything is closely related” (LS, 137).

Reflections on Laudato si'

SR CATHERINE MUTINDI, RGS
Founder, Bon Pasteur, Kenya

My work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was the great wakeup call alerting me to the devastating effects of the destruction of nature on our Mother Earth. The revolting 'moon-scape' was profoundly appalling and made an indelible mark on me as I gazed into the face and form of a brutally butchered and mutilated Mother Earth. I heard Mother crying for a 'Good Samaritan' as she lay desolate, torn apart, poisoned with the chemicals used to extract violently what she offered abundantly.

As I pondered deeper, my mind raced back to a woman engraved in my memory: the late Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Muta Maathai. A particular image in my mind was from Kenyan TV – Wangari besieged and beaten by security officers. She could barely raise herself from the ground; blood was flowing from her forehead; her braided hair had been pulled off her head. She allegedly had organized an illegal demonstration to stop the government from destroying a public city park to develop a skyscraper project. What leads a woman to make such a sacrifice with her life for such a cause?! She explained: "we are faced with a challenge to act, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system." From small, localized efforts, she would eventually awaken people's consciousness, beyond Kenya to the world, inviting all to the awareness of "the deep ecological wounds visible across the world." She rightly reminded us in 2010 that "if you destroy Nature, Nature will destroy you."

As a Sister of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, (hereafter Good Shepherd) my response is grounded in a congregational awareness that 'Our commitment to reconciliation

demands that we promote Justice and Peace' (*RGS Const.*, 6). With Wangari in my head and the desolate mining areas of DRC in front of me, I was overwhelmed by the situation at hand. It was however clear that the complexity of the situation and the urgency of pain and suffering, particularly in relation to all the vulnerable, called for a bold and radical response.

The call to integrate and reconcile while making my contribution for improvement would remain a challenge that I would constantly be holding and continually be in touch with. I could not ignore the barren heaps of earth or the numerous tons of minerals shipped out daily to fuel the consumerist electronic culture, or the hollow faces of children in the mines, or the bodies of children, women and men buried in the mine cave-ins, or the market exploitation that holds humans hostage just to earn enough to afford a meal for the day, or the sexual violence on the women who access the mines. As we ministered, we were confronted with children fainting in class from hunger as we set up schools and we accompanied the general burden of daily insecurity. We were struck and disheartened that big political and business affairs about the mines and ecology were discussed in big hotels, far away from dust and hunger; not involving or positively impacting those most directly affected. In most cases, the real facts were denied if not ignored.

Then came Pope Francis with *Laudato si'* in 2015! A timely affirmation of the need to rethink the Mother Earth Justice agenda! Pope Francis' call, an urgent prophetic appeal for wholeness, integration, interconnectedness, was no longer only a business and political agenda, but a faith matter of sacred spirituality and basic humanity at the core of existence. Pope Francis spoke to our heart, compelling us to action. My image of Wangari merged with that of the Pope and I was ready to respond. From that place where God lives within us we claim the truth: "Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years" (*LS*, 53). With

shame we admit that “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (*LS*, 21). Certainly, such a stance was, for the Good Shepherd work, a great support. Yet, Pope Francis’ words are reminders of beliefs and practices among indigenous peoples from around the world, who have long known and cried that any threat to nature threatens the continuing survival of humans, and all life, and spirit. *Laudato si’* is for unity and integration with all peoples at all times. This resonates deeply with the mission of the Good Shepherd in the Church. It calls us to a deep realization that our responsibility is to support people wounded by (social) sin and its consequences, of which we are part. As Good Shepherd people, we approach this call to wholeness with the consciousness of environmental sustainability that is part of our strategic planning for integrated mission development.

The task is enormous, as most people globally continue to live as though all is well. Most of us continue to live as though we are wilfully oblivious of the consequences of violation against Mother Earth, especially regarding how industrialization, urbanization, and globalization remain key drivers of pollution. We continue to erode our very own roots as much as we continue to endanger our very common home. The paradoxical scandal remains: the most vulnerable of the children of the earth bear the heavy weight of the neglect of the privileged few.

To return to the DRC, how is it that such an immense land that is home to the second largest equatorial rainforest on the planet has to perennially import its subsistence food from smaller neighbours? How come this country that is arguably the globally richest in natural resources, including strategic minerals, is continually ranked at the bottom of global integral development ratings? Why is it that the country whose resources immensely fuel global development has some of the highest illiteracy rates – with two thirds of children not able to access education? How is justice defined in this context and reality? This clearly reflects

the incoherent and chaotic mismanagement of Mother Earth and her resources.

Laudato si' offers sanity from this chaos and a way forward if we only listen and connect to other prophets of our time. We are connected. Human rights are intrinsically environmental rights. It is only when these are integrally secured that we can talk of real peace, based on justice that is prerequisite for sustainable development, a prerequisite for restoration of humanity and care for one another, embracing the vulnerable. Again, Wangari Maathai reminds us that we need to recognize "that sustainable development, democracy and peace are indivisible", is an idea whose time has come. As African Ubuntu Philosophy goes, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am". Let us "be" together.

The invitation of the Good Shepherd (Bon Pasteur) Programme in the DRC to share its model of intervention at the 2018 March 7th Edition of Ethics in Action at the Vatican; and the acknowledgment by the forum that the approach could be adopted globally to address modern slavery was an affirmation that small steps can create impact beyond the implementation space, in which case they become contagious. It is the way we are told the Spirit of God moves in the world. *Laudato si'* calls us to a living faith that is expressed through loving action in the service of our neighbour and care of the environment as we remain integrated in the tapestry of creation that we are. May the prayer of Pope Francis be our reality: that we may "be 'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment" as stated in his 2020 *Laudato si'* Inaugural Homily

Gospel Nonviolence and a *Laudato si'* Future

MARIE DENNIS

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USA*

“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 We have forgotten 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” (*LS*, 2).

Pope Francis’ powerful reflection in *Laudato si'* on the cry of the earth; his assertion that everything is connected; his description of “one complex crisis which is both social and environmental”; and his invitation to ecological conversion have nourished and deepened the understanding of Gospel nonviolence that shapes the work of Pax Christi International and our Catholic Nonviolence Initiative.

With increasing clarity, we have seen that the cry of the earth and the suffering of the creatures living on this planet are intrinsically interconnected with human violence, including the cultural violence of indifference and domination, the direct violence of war and militarization and the economic violence of destructive, unaccountable extractive projects.

Humans, instead of caring for the earth that nurtures us, have damaged its ability to sustain life. The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ blueprint for nonviolence, and our growing understanding of nonviolence as a way of life, a global ethic, and a spectrum of proven-effective strategies for social and environmental transformation seem essential to the future envisioned by *Laudato si'*. Gospel nonviolence is much more than a political strategy;

it is a spirituality through which we see and interpret life, a set of virtues and principles for personal and social change. To treat the earth non-violently is to ensure the survival and wellbeing of the whole earth community.

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis highlights the need for new convictions and attitudes: "Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone" (LS, 202).

"Violence is a tendency that pulls us back, away from the recognition of unity; nonviolence pulls us forward, toward the recognition of unity ... Nonviolence is connected with higher consciousness or love ... Nonviolent behaviour is central to who we humans are Nonviolence is not only at home in this new story of unity. Nonviolence *is* the new story and the way to get there."² Nonviolence is a courageous way of life that actively challenges violence and all forms of injustice with creativity, imagination, and love. Nonviolence is a path for conversion, for deep personal and societal transformation from the 'old story' of domination and exploitation to the 'new story' of universal communion.

The human community is facing a spiritual, ecological, and social crisis inflamed daily by a worldwide culture of violence and war. Ecological conversion "entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion" (LS, 220). Nonviolence is a process for nurturing such an ecological conversion to right relationships among humans and between humans and the rest of the natural world – from the old way of domination and exploitation toward a "*civilization of love*" (LS, 231). It is personal, interpersonal, social-structural, and ecological.

Laudato si' makes clear the fundamental convergence between caring for our common home and Pax Christi's call over

² Nagler, M. (2020) *The Third Harmony: Nonviolence and the New Story of Human Nature*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, p. 166.

seven decades for a global paradigm shift away from perpetual violence and militarization toward nonviolence and just peace.

For example, war and other military activities, which are fossil fuel intensive, exacerbate climate change and have rendered vast areas of planet earth uninhabitable and unproductive. The discovery of landmines and unexploded ordnance decades after the end of a war, pollution and habitat destruction from battles and military exercises, the loss of forests and diverse species of plants and animals point to the long-term environmental consequences of conventional warfare. And even a limited exchange of nuclear weapons could cause devastating climate change, resulting in widespread drought and famine. Around the world, radioactive waste lasting tens of thousands of years has already contaminated land and water.

At the same time, many communities where Pax Christi is present have been heavily affected by the activities of companies exploiting natural resources, including oil, gas, gold, silver, iron, copper, and tin, as well as by other large-scale development projects. UNEP warns that greenhouse gas emissions, the contamination and excessive consumption of water, pollution of the earth and vital ecosystems, and biodiversity loss are just some of the threats that extraction poses to human health and the environment.

From our member organizations in Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, the DR Congo, the Philippines, and in many other countries we also have learned that organized people committed to nonviolence are the most effective protectors of the land, the water, the trees and other creatures – the clearest and most creative proponents of sustainable lifestyles. The unprecedented global transformation that is urgently needed to achieve a *Laudato si'* future will depend on mobilizing nonviolent people-power movements for change worldwide. For their resistance to the destruction of the commons in their care and their courageous actions to bind up the wound's we hu-

mans have inflicted on the earth, many have been criminalized, threatened, even killed, yet local communities around the world continue to defend the earth.

The universal ethic of nonviolence can provide a clear and stable foundation for a “*cultural revolution*” (LS, 114) toward “*justice, peace, love, and beauty*” (LS, 246). Perhaps that is already happening as Catholics around the world – parishes and religious communities, dioceses and Catholic universities, organizations and businesses – begin to realize the vision of *Laudato si’*.

Laudato si' – Hope in Dark Times!

MOEMA MIRANDA, OFS
Churches and Mining Network, Brasil

It is possible that no pontifical document, such as the encyclical *Laudato si'*, has been awaited with such expectations by people working in the defence of what we have since called 'Our Common Home'. The encyclical, launched in 2015, was not only welcomed by Christians and Catholics. Pope Francis managed, as proposed, to open an intense dialogue with the ecumenical and scientific communities, philosophers as well as indigenous leaders, environmentalists, communities affected by mining and traditional populations. He consolidated a significant place for the Catholic Church in the international agenda of global warming and the struggle against inequality, highlighting the connection between both. "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental" (LS, 139). In the context of COP21, which would take place that same year in Paris, the encyclical influenced what was considered to be the most important international climate agreement.

In Latin America, since the late 1980s, following the lessons of grassroots ecclesial communities and social pastoral ministries, part of our Church has shared a deeper environmental awareness. Ecofeminist and liberation theologians helped shape a complex and systemic reading of the world, which reintegrates the commitment to social justice with the search for respect and harmony with the rhythms of life, ecosystems and the planet. In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis follows the inspiration of St Francis collected the best fruits of this journey and, in an ecumenical dialogue, combining science and sensitivity, proposed a new way of being in this beautiful Common Home – planet earth.

The encyclical thus valued, strengthened and expanded the word of communities, as well as bishops' conferences, scientists and mystics from around the world. He wove with tenderness a guide to these Anthropocene times, such challenging times and which demand, as the Pope says, a "bold cultural revolution" (*LS*, 114): an integral conversion.

However, the mechanisms that we're at the root of the intense "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*LS*, 49), from which the encyclical starts, have not been converted. Unfortunately, they have been intensified in recent years. The Covid-19 pandemic, that is a result of processes of environmental devastation, globalization and loss of biodiversity, exposed the dynamics to which Pope Francis referred, when identifying the "human root of the ecological crisis": an economy that kills. The continuous acceleration of atmospheric CO₂ concentration rates, in March 2021, for the first time, reached the milestone of 417 parts per million (ppm); more than 37 thousand animal species are threatened with extinction and the levels of deforestation and fires exceeded all previous records in 2019/2020. With metal prices on the rise, mining companies are advancing over protected territories of indigenous people, small farmers and quilombolas, threatening their communities and expanding the "areas of sacrifice", in this Common Home so violated by the greed of large enterprises. All of this is happening in a context of increasing violence against human rights defenders and people's leaders.

Many times, in the Churches and Mining Network, we ask ourselves where our communities get the strength to continue resisting, in such a violent and adverse scenario. How do you keep fighting? What is the source of energy allowing them to continue defending their territories and, with this, our entire common home? The closer we come to what we have called the heart of resistance, the more we find the profound and unwavering presence of spiritualities that allow us to live in communion with the land and the Earth. Eco-spiritualities are what we find in

the deepest heart of resistance. Communities that have not “forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (*Gen 2:7; LS, 2*), as Pope Francis tells us. If, as he says, “there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (*LS, 118*), we can see that this “change” derives from traditional peoples, indigenous communities and small farmers and young people who protest on the streets, in defence of the future. It is among those who love and respect their ancestors, their memories, their homes. In the fragile power of these communities, threatened daily by the insatiable greed of the great conglomerates, the loud music of *Laudato si’* echoed. For them, the Pope is the dear “Francis, brother”, as indigenous leaders said during the Synod for the Amazon! With *Laudato si’* the deepest spirituality of the heart resonates in the heart of the Church.

They pulsate following the same prayer of praise and request for protection: “All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love” *Laudato si’*, in Latin America, is light for the journey. It is the clearest expression that these communities, often invisible in their wisdom, are the bearers of the future. They are the ones that today, honouring their past, bring the possibility that in this pandemic and violent present small seeds of Redemption will be cultivated, with unbreakable persistence. In these communities, women, young or old, strong and wise, illiterate or teachers mark the path of salvation. They are the ones who, on the dark night of an extended Holy Saturday, like Mary Magdalene and the other Marys, go out at night facing their fears; go out together, in community, to bring news of the Resurrection. These women, it is true, still hope, one day, to be fully recognized. And yet, they continue to pray, resisting and also strengthened by *Laudato si’*, they hope against all hopelessness!

Living Laudato si' – The Adventure Continues!

JANE MELLETT

*Laudato si' Officer, Trócaire; Member, Laudato si' Working Group
of the Irish Bishops' Conference, Ireland*

When *Laudato si'* was published in 2015 it read to me as a breath of fresh air, the encyclical we had all been waiting for! At that time, I was a parish pastoral worker in the Archdiocese of Dublin, and little did I know the impact *Laudato si'* would have on my life and work. I was invited to join the *Laudato si'* Working Group of the Irish Bishops' Conference where I met a dynamic group of people who were passionate about sharing the wisdom of *Laudato si'* with the Irish Church. In my own ministry at that time, I tried to share the radical calls of *Laudato si'* with those I met: the call to ecological conversion, ecological education and the beautiful gift of the eco-spirituality which *Laudato si'* offers us.

I remember following the news when President Donald Trump met Pope Francis in the Vatican in 2017, especially that photograph of Pope Francis handing a copy of *Laudato si'* to Mr Trump. Days later, when the then President pulled the United States out of the Paris Agreement, I felt deeply upset. Knowing that our world is facing a devastating ecological crisis, I was overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness that one of the biggest carbon emitters in the world could so carelessly jeopardise the Paris Agreement. As one individual, what could I possibly do? I decided, mostly for my own sanity, that I would meet President Trump on his territory – on Twitter. And so, began an online retreat where each evening I would tweet one paragraph of *Laudato si'* to Donald Trump. The project took 11 months, and I was surprised at my own persistence. At 10pm each evening I would get a reminder on my phone to “Tweet Donald”. No, I did not

get a response from him, but that did not matter. Many other people engaged, re-tweeting and commenting on the richness of *Laudato si'*. At the end of this project, I was contacted by the *National Catholic Reporter* which did an extensive article on my endeavours¹. My personal lectio on *Laudato si'*, a relatively small piece of activism, would now be read by thousands of Catholics in the USA. I had learned a valuable lesson – never underestimate the power of small actions! In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis reminds us to look to St Therese of Lisieux and practise the “little ways of love” which can have a ripple effect across our communities and our world: “Simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness.... Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political and makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.” (*LS*, 230-231).

Shortly after this, I was invited to lead the *Laudato si'* Project of the World Meeting of Families (WMOF) which took place in Dublin in 2018. Working alongside Lorna Gold and the *Laudato si'* Working Group, we spent many months putting together a wonderful programme to raise awareness of *Laudato si'* with all the pilgrims at WMOF2018. The project was called *Our Common Home* and its aim was to break open *Laudato si'* to the Global Church audience and the wider public, to showcase *Laudato si'* as a vehicle to “enter into dialogue” with all people who are “united by the same concern” (*LS*, 3, 7). *Our Common Home* included many educational workshops for children, teenagers and adults. But it was the Our Common Home *Laudato si'* Garden which soon became the centrepiece of this project².

When the planning group suggested we have a *Laudato si'* Garden at WMOF, I thought they were crazy. How would we pull this off in such a short time frame? We were going to build

¹ <https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/irish-pastoral-worker-tweets-laudato-si-trump-line-line>

² <https://www.icatholic.ie/wmof2018-our-common-home-garden/>

a garden in the car park of the Poor Clare's Monastery near the main venue. Could a car park become a garden? Then, along came the Holy Spirit. It is hard to describe the experience of divine providence that occurred during this project. A landscape architect, Aidan French, literally arrived on our doorstep full of *Laudato si'* excitement and offered his services, many volunteers with expertise showed up, and funding arrived. So, the dream of the *Laudato si'* Garden at WMOF2018 became a reality, a wonderful reflective oasis where pilgrims could come for 'time-out', be close to God's creation and be inspired by the wisdom of *Laudato si'*. Cardinal Tagle officially opened the garden and during his blessing reminded us of the importance of the garden in the scriptures: "In the Bible the garden is very significant... The garden is where you have creation, the fall, but God will always go back to the garden to make God's power and love felt, it's a place for re-creation."

It was during the Papal Mass at the World Meeting of Families that I heard about The Climate Pilgrimage³. Christina Leaña from the *Laudato Si'* Movement (formerly the Global Climate Catholic Movement) was sitting beside me as Pope Francis closed the events and mentioned it to me. "What pilgrimage is this?" I enquired. "Oh, do you want to go?" And so, a few weeks after WMOF I found myself in Italy meeting a group of pilgrims from the Philippines, the USA and Europe who had set out from the Vatican to walk to the UN climate talks in Katowice, Poland (COP24). I journeyed with these pilgrims, 1,000km across Europe from Italy, to Slovenia, Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. This was a true journey of ecological conversion for me. The aim of this pilgrimage was to bring the message of *Laudato si'* to COP24 but also to share its wisdom with all those we met in the many towns, villages, cities, schools and parishes. Some of our group were survivors of Typhoon Haiyan, a super-typhoon which struck the Philippines in 2013, killing

³ <http://www.climatepilgrimage.com>

10,000 people in just two hours and displacing millions. Listening to their heart-breaking stories I began to really see and hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. The climate crisis became, for me, a more personal crisis because this affected my friends, no longer statistics on a scientific report, but real people, real families, real grief. *Laudato si'* urges us 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" (LS, 19). We had a difficult journey in many ways. Walking across Europe in the winter months is no joke but also one of our fellow pilgrims, Alan Burns, passed away suddenly one night in Slovenia. Alan's death was a huge shock, however we soon realised that we had to continue. Alan was a climate activist his whole life and this was his third Climate Pilgrimage, in many ways Alan felt at home on the Climate Pilgrimage. He would not have wanted us to stop, Alan's spirit lives on as he continues to inspire each of us to this day. We met many inspiring people on our journey, local communities, parishes and families who are doing all that they can to live *Laudato si'* and to affect change from the grassroots. The climate pilgrimage is in many ways still hard to explain and to write about because it was such a deep experience, one that continues to unfold. Yeb Saño (Greenpeace Southeast Asia and LSM), the leader of this pilgrimage, would frequently say to us, "Our physical destination is COP24, but our real destination is the mind and hearts of all those we meet on this road". These words remain true for all of us as we continue this *Laudato si'* journey.

When I returned to Ireland an opportunity arose to work with Trócaire and the *Laudato si'* Working Group as their *Laudato si'* Officer. This required a change of direction for me, leaving full time parish ministry and embarking on another new adventure. In the past year I have journeyed with hundreds of people online, exploring *Laudato si'* in online book clubs, through prayer and reflection and engaging with many people across the island

on how we might emerge from this Covid-19 crisis. I do believe the *Laudato si'* movement in Ireland and globally is growing and is full of life. Pope Francis has given us, in *Laudato si'*, a blueprint for the way forward and I am excited for what is to come.

As I look back on this reflection I am smiling because when *Laudato si'* was published, I had no idea what was about to unfold in front of me. So far, it has been quite the adventure. So, "*Let us sing as we go. May our struggles & our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope... Truly, much can be done!*" (LS, 180, 244).

Living *Laudato si'* in the Philippines

RODNE R. GALICHA, EXECUTIVE
on behalf by the Living Laudato Si' Philippines

It was the pilgrimage from Italy to France in 2015 that strengthened my resolve to take on the challenge of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*. The more than one-thousand-kilometre People's Pilgrimage was a rare opportunity to share stories of the global south, of island nations suffering the brunt of the climate crisis and colonial environmental abuses. In solidarity, the dialogue in European communities opened each other's' hearts to listen and act.

In 2018, understanding the role of the Church and her faithful, together with Br Armin A. Luistro FSC, we responded to the calls of Pope Francis, especially in influencing the way we look at the economy and financial stewardship. Living Laudato Si' Philippines (LLS) started as an interfaith movement initiated by Catholic lay people calling on Philippine financial institutions to divest from coal-related operations and other environmentally harmful activities.

LLS was formally launched on November 7, 2018, at Manila Cathedral on the eve of the fifth anniversary of super typhoon Yolanda's landfall in the Philippines. It aims to empower citizens to adopt lifestyles and attitudes that live up to the urgent need to care for our common home. It acts in promoting sustainable development and stopping the climate crisis and degradation through collective action among people from different sectors.

In July 2019, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) published a pastoral letter recognizing the urgency of the climate crisis. Inspired by the second encyclical of Pope Francis, known as *Laudato si'*, it called for an 'ecological con-

version’ in all dioceses, parishes, and ecclesial communities as a response to the need to take care of our common home.

This ecological conversion is rooted in the recognition of the Rights of Nature; these are principles based on how human beings are a part of the environment and that any attack on it is an attack against humanity. Given the current state of our world, there is a need to re-establish our connection to others; as everything is interconnected with each other, we have a moral obligation to assist those in great need yet have little in resources and capacity.

Financial Stewardship

Under the CBCP’s pastoral letter, Catholic institutions in the Philippines are calling for financial resources not “to be invested in favour of coal-fired power plants, mining companies and other destructive extractive projects” and that “divestment from such investment portfolios must be encouraged”⁴. It also calls for practices constituting an “indirect” divestment, wherein citizens can live a lifestyle that respects nature and discourages support for harmful environmental practices.

Since then, together with the Most Reverend Gerardo A. Alminaza, DD, ordinary of the Diocese of San Carlos and our bishop-advocate, we found ourselves attending annual stockholders’ meetings of some of the top banks in the Philippines. With our Church and secular partners, we formed the *Withdraw from Coal*⁵ initiative asking our banks to stop investing in dirty energy, the climate crisis, and the continued suffering of coal-affected Filipinos.

⁴ <https://www.withdrawfromcoal.org/>

⁵ CBCP – Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (2019). An Urgent Call for Ecological Conversion, Hope in the Face of Climate Emergency. July 16. Available online: <https://cbcponline.net/an-urgent-call-for-ecological-conversion-hope-in-the-face-of-climate-emergency/>

Withdraw from Coal released two bank scorecard reports since 2020 assessing how dirty their energy investments are. The latest report shows that 15 Philippine banks were found to have channelled 13.42 billion (USD) worth of financial services to coal developers and projects. At least four Philippine-based banks have already announced their coal exit stances: Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC), Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), Development Bank of the Philippines (DBP) and Asian Development Bank (DBP).

Recognizing the urgency of the problem and the requirements of our faith, we are calling also on our Catholic institutions – our parishes, our dioceses, our religious orders, our schools, our Catholic communities – to come together and make our voices heard in the most powerful way we can today. We enjoin them to stop allowing their financial resources to be used to support these harmful activities. One strategic way to address this sad reality is to tell the appointed stewards of our financial resources to withhold deposits, investments, and loans to institutions that are engaged in or enable the growth of businesses and ventures that harm the environment.

Working with other faith communities, LLS has initiated the annual Philippine Interfaith Summit on Climate Emergency since 2019 which serves as a platform for different religions and religious denominations in the Philippines to discuss how their respective religious doctrines and traditions talk about the morality and spirituality of caring for the planet through divestment from fossil fuels and other environmentally destructive industries.

Small Actions, Big Impacts – #LS211

Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si': On Care for our Common Home*, highlights some doable and effective ways of how

to show our love and care to our common home. For example, paragraph 211 teaches us ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us. The ‘#LS211’ campaign encourages young and adults alike to be “eco-citizens” anywhere, any day, be it in school, at home or in the workplace:

1. Waste Management – avoid the use of plastic and paper, segregate refuse, and reuse
2. Water Conservation – reduce water consumption
3. Responsible Food Consumption – cook only what can reasonably be consumed
4. Care for Other Living Beings – care and protection of life
5. Sustainable Transport – use public transport or car-pooling; walk, travel in groups by car, use bicycles
6. Tree-growing – plant trees, watch them grow and restore the whole ecosystem
7. Energy Efficiency – turn off unnecessary lights, and unplug other appliances, gadgets and the like when not in use; advocate just and fair transition to renewable energy

Seeds to Grow – #LaudatoSi Schools

Together with pioneering Catholic educational institutions in pre-*Laudato si'* environmental action and management, we started the process in creating a framework guidance based on *Laudato si'* to be integrated in the strategic plan of Catholic schools. The further development of this document was encouraged by Fr Joshtrom Kureethadam SDB, coordinator of Ecology and Creation at the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The creation of the framework was guided by the words of Pope Francis’ encyclical, where he exhorts that “Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life” (*LS*, 213) and that “Environmental educa-

tion should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning” (LS, 210). The framework is composed of seven eco-actions anchored on passages in the encyclical as a guide for schools and universities to promote and practice *Laudato si’* as a lifestyle:

1. Transition to Clean and Renewable Energy (LS, 26)
2. Responsible Water Utilization (LS, 30)
3. Ecological Solid Waste Management (LS, 22)
4. Greening Institutional Management Systems, Divest-Invest, and Campus as a Natural Environment (LS, 95; 142)
5. Integrated Ecological Curriculum and Environmental Sustainability Research (LS, 42; 210)
6. Integrated Ecological Spirituality and Transformative Lifestyle (LS, 206; 211; 218)
7. Policy Advocacy, Campaigns, and Solidarity (LS, 70)

Eco-Parishes, Actions from the Grassroots

The celebration of the 500th year of arrival of Christianity on our shores is concurrent with the ecological revolution we face today. In line with our missionary task to make “believers recognize the ecological commitments,” and that, their duty as Christians “towards nature and their Creator, are an essential part of their faith” (LS, 64), Living Laudato Si’ Philippines (LLS) is adopting 12 parishes across the Philippines to empower local Christian communities in reaffirming their faith by promoting ecological justice through establishing ecological desks, assisting in care for creation programmes and providing support to sustain this ministry by sharing its resources and materials.

We aim to form and help sustain parish-level ecology ministries and instil ecological conversion among the parishioners of our adopted parishes through campaigns, courses and relevant training. To date, LLS has been assisting two parishes in the Di-

ocese of Romblon: Santo Niño and Santo Tomás de Villanueva. Ecology ministers have been commissioned and the first two Living Chapels with *Laudato si'* Gardens have been blessed and inaugurated.

Walking the *Laudato si'* Journey

Inspired by Pope Francis, we continue to encourage people, especially the Catholic community, to proudly wave the green flag for the environment and live by the Church's social teachings. As part of the Church's social teaching, *Laudato si'* is particularly relevant to the Catholic faithful here in the Philippines. We are Asia's largest Catholic community, and we are one of the most dramatically affected by the environmental changes the Pope so eloquently speaks about in this encyclical.

Living *Laudato Si'* Philippines commits to serve and build a more compassionate and just Church as she continues to stand with the people in caring for our common home. Working with other faith communities in solidarity and dialogue, together, we shall make our country and the world a better place to live in where no one is left behind. And in today's world, let Christianity in dialogue and solidarity with other faith communities serve as a beacon of light for hope, justice, and permanent, genuine peace.

Laudato si', from Casa Velha

MARGARIDA ALVIM

(TRANSLATED BY BEATRIZ LISBOA AND JOÃO CARLOS DIAS)

Casa Velha – Ecology and Spirituality Farm, Portugal

Casa Velha (“Old House”) is the name of the family house where I was born and raised, a farm in a rural area very close to Fatima, in a village called Vale Travesso. I am the youngest of four sisters, the fourth generation of the Alvim family in this land we inherited. The great ancient oak trees that grow here give us back our precious smallness, as part of God’s creation that takes us and calls us to take part in it. They awaken the contemplative openness that allows us to revere our Creator, Life, those who preceded us and those to come. In constant exercises of grateful memory, we are given back our proper place in a greater history. One which includes and transcends us, which claims, unites and helps us grow in the mission of, taking care of our common home through *Casa Velha*.

*Associação Casa Velha – Ecologia e Espiritualidade*¹ was born in 2012, the fruit of a long journey of personal, family, and collective discernment, deeply rooted in the faith and evangelical commitment of those who preceded us. This association was created as an answer to a call to care for people, our house, and this land in crisis, in a region deeply affected by rural abandonment. Since then, *Casa Velha* has been converted into a space for hospitality, coming together, and human and local development, in a mission shared by a growing family of different vocations, age groups, and educational backgrounds.

The publication of *Laudato si'* in 2015 was a very special landmark in our history. It was a moment of profound consolation, receiving an encyclical that substantially mirrored and

¹ <https://casavelha.org/>

confirmed the intuitions and experiences of the path we were taking. That encyclical, coming from the centre of the Church, that sometimes seems so far away, was addressed to us personally, as well as to the Church as a whole and all men and women of goodwill. It was a new moment of communion; of internal and external acknowledgment. It was the spreading of the Good News through links with other small local projects, interconnected by national and international networks, in an ecosystem of communicating vessels, generating care and life. Our small experience began to be imbued with a different awareness of the development projects in which we were already participating as local partners. Its strength, vitality, and regional/community roots illustrated and inspired strategic reflections and fixed agendas at a global scale, through what we have come to call “elevator dynamics”. The *Change for the Planet, Care for the People* campaign from CIDSE² (corresponding to the *Juntos pela Mudança* [together for change] project promoted in Portugal by FEC – *Fundação Fé e Cooperação*³ [cooperation and faith foundation], in partnership with *Casa Velha*) revealed the full potential of this interconnection, in a joint action that mobilized and united catholic agencies and young activists from different countries in Europe and the global South. In 2017, with the visit of Pope Francis to Fatima, we were able to feel and celebrate this journey together in an international camp and *Laudato si’* pilgrimage, which began at *Casa Velha*.

“Realities are more important than ideas” and “less is more!” These words from Pope Francis became criteria of daily orientation, helping us grow in simplicity and a feeling of belonging. In the face of much-needed change, how valuable it is to simply and effectively take care of the place where we live, the community to which we belong to and which is entrusted to us. We do so with the awareness that we are taking care of the whole, with-

² <https://www.cidse.org/>

³ <https://www.fecongdom.org/>

out exception, in deep communion with all of God's creation, as small seeds of God's Kingdom, as the body of Christ. Awakening the will for each one to discover and take care of the "*Casa Velha*" entrusted to him/her, has perhaps become the main *Laudato si'* mission of *Casa Velha*, as "a space of relationships, a catalyst of ecological conversion"⁴.

We often hear at *Casa Velha* – "I feel at home!". This is a deeply restorative experience, encouraging a call for care, which gives us an identity and mission. In this context, a generous and free concern for the care of God's creation emerges in each and everyone's life. This is a restlessness and vocation we all share, that we seek and deepen throughout life. "What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? ... The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn." (*LS*, 160). Processes of change need these fundamental questions, this principle and larger horizon of our existence as a reference. "We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile." (*LS*, 212). This was perhaps the most repeated quote from *Laudato si'* in the more than 70 conversations, presentations, conferences, and educational projects in which *Casa Velha* was invited to take part in the last 6 years. It shared this path with children and adolescents of different schools, religious communities, parishes, couples, at summer camps, academic meetings, workshops, NGDO networks, and with families inspired to adopt similar paths.

The Laudato si' process helps oppose our innate tendency to feel like "saviours of the world", carrying our work with an

⁴ *Visão 2025, Plano Estratégico Casa Velha 2020 – 2025*

unnecessary weight that stops us from cooperating with others, hindering the joy and beauty we can experience while collaborating with Jesus in Salvation. Here we would like to give four interconnected examples that show how *Laudato si'* is in itself a common platform for dialogue and integrating efforts. It allowed, in a way perhaps never tried before, the coordination between different levels of involvement: from personal to global, between Churches and the civil society, where each party can go beyond “its” mission and recognize more deeply its proper place and value in our common mission, as well as the meaning and place of others, integrated in the relationship with God and the earth.

At Casa Velha

Over time, we have adopted, as *Casa Velha's way of life*, eight pillars that today are recognized as the values of this work and that resonate so much with Chapter 6 of the encyclical: **living open, grateful, in truth, with patience, in simplicity, committed, in communion, and joyfully. Over the past 10 years, the fragility and simplicity of Casa Velha has made** it possible to welcome and involve all those who come and take part in its reconstruction-conversion. Fragility allows us to feel how, in fact, everything is connected; how everyone is needed and can make and be the difference. This is the “miracle of the multiplication of the loaves” that was the basis for the external transformation of the garage into the Good Shepherd's Chapel, the hay barn into a shelter, the sheep shed into accommodation and, more recently, the hen house into a house for the groups that gather here. Taking care of the vegetable garden or in the clearing of forests together to prevent fires gave the space and time where we learned, above all, to live together – which is already so much! This is the place that allows the birth of the “we”; the

place of praise and reverence for the earth, of which we are also part. The external transformation that has been happening at *Casa Velha* reveals the personal and collective internal transformation, to the point that today we recognize ourselves as a community, called to a common vocation in this place, or, through this place, to be “*Casa Velha*” in other places, with other communities. In our strategic plan for the coming years, we recognize its “fragile, unfinished and simple” state as the *Casa Velha*’s identity, which we continue to recognize as a strength for the future.

With Casa Velha

Besides the physical place, *Casa Velha* is also a place of communion with other places and small communities/houses that, like ourselves, take care of our common home. Through *Laudato si’* and our collaboration with the Ecojesuit network⁵, we have been part of a “Community of Communities” for two years, connecting three houses that take care of the common home: *Casa Velha*, *Balay Laudato si’* in Bendum, the Philippines, with Fr Pedro Walpole SJ and Sukaria, Indonesia, with Sr Ana Pina aci. Originally, we planned to implement an Integral Ecology Exchange in Bendum in the summer of 2020 to create and connect communities of life and mission for young volunteers. This was to be an opportunity to “see, listen and discern” together, within the scope of *Laudato si’* and the Sustainable Development Goals. Due to the pandemic, this plan has been postponed, but monthly meetings of sharing and prayer have been held, from which we continue to grow in the sense of belonging and communion; inspiring each other.

⁵ <https://www.ecojesuit.com/?s=casa+velha>

With Civil Society

Over the last few years, *Laudato si'* has been integrated into the strategic planning of different organizations and Catholic development networks at the national and international level (CIDSE, Ecojesuit), with which *Casa Velha* has been collaborating. This has allowed more integrated interventions with the local communities, providing a coherent, relevant connection between local challenges and global policies. The recent strategic planning exercise for 2020-2025 at *Casa Velha*, has also systematised the edification of our mission in *Laudato si'*, expressed in the Vision that we adopted for the coming years: “a space of relationships, a catalyst for ecological conversion”². It is not about reinventing the wheel, but making the wheel move, in each context, connecting different local agents – school communities, small farmers, decision makers, and between contexts, involving national policy makers in a dialogue with decision makers and other local agents in the area and vice versa. With all its potential and fragility, this weaving and nurturing of close relationships, generates sustainability and true intrinsic transformation. This was a great learning experience for the *aTerra* project⁶, promoted by *Casa Velha* in partnership with FEC and CIDSE.

With the Church

Over the last few years, it is noteworthy how *Laudato si'* has led to a transformation of the Church's view on ecological issues, especially in Europe, where the impact of climate change is quite mild compared to the vast majority of the planet. In Por-

⁶ <https://www.cidse.org/2016/04/01/aterra-project-connecting-local-food-systems-and-communities/>

tugal, inspired by the “Eglise Verte”⁷ process in France, the Rede Cuidar da Casa Comum⁸ [care for the common home network] was created, which *Casa Velha* has been part of since the beginning. Different religious communities, parishes and movements have also asked for our support in their ecological conversion processes. We also participated in several meetings that brought together religious leaders, the scientific and technical community, artists, and educators. In September 2015 at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, *Casa Velha* together with other partners, promoted , a public presentation session on *Laudato si’*, attended by Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ and Elena Lasida (Institut Catholique de Paris). In 2019, in the context of the Amazon Synod, two volunteers from *Casa Velha* went literally *On the Way*⁹, on a *Casa Velha* – Rome pilgrimage, passing through 8 countries and more than 12 projects, connecting communities.

In other countries, *Laudato si’* has promoted new approaches by the Justice and Peace commissions on highly sensitive issues such as the Right to the Land. Early in 2015/2016, I witnessed this through the participation, on behalf of FEC/CIDSE, in 2 meetings about the Earth, promoted by SECAM¹⁰, in Nairobi (the Conference on Land Grabbing and Just Governance in Africa, November 2015) and Beira, Mozambique (meeting of the Portuguese-speaking Justice and Peace Commissions, June 2016).

Conclusion

Finally, we should celebrate once again being able to be part of this publication that closes the *Laudato si’* Year, thanking the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for the

⁷ <https://www.egliseverte.org/>

⁸ <https://casacomum.pt/>

⁹ <https://www.fecongdo.org/on-the-way/>

¹⁰ <https://secam.org/>

way in which it assumes, with so much commitment and wisdom, the role of mediator and elevator. We should thank *Laudato si'*, for being able to recognize together the true potential of the “elevator”, echoing the words of St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians: “And now I kneel in the presence of the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth has received its name. May he strengthen in you the inner self through his Spirit, according to the riches of his glory; may Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; may you be rooted and founded in love. All of this so that you may understand with all the holy ones, the width, the length, the height and the depth – in a word, that you may know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled and reach the fullness of God. Glory to God who shows his power in us and can do much more than we could ask or imagine; glory to him in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations for ever and ever. Amen.” (*Eph*, 3:14-21)

New Perspective, New Rhythm: Cinema, Faith and *Laudato si'*

LIA G. BELTRAMI
CEO Aurora Vision, Italy

Laudato si' came like an olive branch in a storm. At the time, what was missing was a clear indication, a point of reference to safeguard creation starting from a spiritual point of view. It was missing for Christians, but also for non-Christians.

When it was published, I was about to leave for a trip to Uganda, so *Laudato si'* accompanied me as a sign of hope. We were going to film a documentary around the island of Ngamba on Lake Victoria. There, on the little island, a reception centre for chimpanzees rescued from trafficking had been built. In the evening, outside the tents, we used to read some passages from the encyclical and realized its enormous power. From then, our small film production company started to reflect and take action. The first act was to be in line with the principles of the encyclical, resulting in *Aurora Vision Ecolifestyle*, with actions such as carbon offsetting for each film produced, green processing on the sets, and a commitment to produce at least one documentary a year that included themes related to safeguarding creation. But the ground-breaking aspect was the vision of integral ecology – the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor stemming from the same source, and mutually reinforcing each other. All our productions were focused precisely on giving voice to the voiceless and on the peripheries of humanity. The ecological dimension was finally revealed as praising God for every creature, in every sense.

After the production of 'Heroes Without Capes' in Uganda, several documentaries underpinned by the concept of integral ecology followed, such as 'The Wonderful Tapestry of Life' in

Ghana. 'Tears & Dreams' was filmed in the Golden Triangle where a Buddhist monk is reforesting northern Thailand with the help of girl victims of human trafficking taken in by the Sisters of Providence. 'Amazonia, la Loma Santa' was filmed in the Bolivian Amazon, in Sant Ignacio de Moxos, where Ignatian remains still survive and the preservation of the Amazon is linked to the survival of the native peoples. 'A Burst of Song' tells the story of how three girls came out of the slums of Calcutta and achieved their dreams. 'Wells of Hope' talks about Arab women of different religions, fighting against trafficking in Syrian refugee camps, using the elements of "sora acqua", "frate foucu", earth and air.

A part of the world of cinema and international festivals has already been touched by *Laudato si'*, as well as by the new commitment of so many people. Productions related to environmental issues have increased significantly, especially in the field of documentaries. I have seen this as a jury member for several festivals, particularly in the short film categories, which are more accessible to young people. There are hundreds of festivals with an environmental theme. Here, it is easy to see the extent to which *Laudato si'* has been extremely impactful: from mere pointing out, often in catastrophic terms, we were all inspired to move on and work hard through integral ecology and a sense of profound hope. Inspired by *Laudato si'*, in 2020 we dedicated the Religion Today Film Festival to the theme of creation, with the title "Earth, I care". This included sixty films, exhibitions, conferences and book presentations with extensive work in schools. Cinema is an open field, in which much can still be done, bearing in mind that a filmmaker is an opinion multiplier.

Together with the 'call to action' and the work to spread awareness, *Laudato si'* immediately leads to praising God, to the spiritual dimension that expands like the tents of Abraham. We have taken up the call to prayer for our common home with the Women of Faith for Peace movement which, for the past five years, has brought prayer for creation to Orthodox Jews,

Haredim, Muslims, Christians of various inspirations, Buddhists, Hindus, and those of other spiritualities. Integral ecology is a common ground in every form of interreligious dialogue.

After my trip to Uganda, I began to speak about *Laudato si'* in various artistic circles, finding great acceptance in Bangladesh. The country is greatly affected by climate change; floods in recent years have caused incalculable damage. The pollution of the waters of the Ganges and other rivers has changed people's lives. The impact of manufacturing industries has created a very difficult social situation. In this context, the message of hope of *Laudato si'* has been grasped with open arms by young filmmakers and photographers. One in particular, Asaf Ud Daula, a Muslim, developed an interest and interpreted it with great sensitivity in 40 pictures that became the exhibition "Emotions to Generate Change" presented for *Laudato si'* Week 2021. It is a visual journey, with a selection of phrases from the encyclical developed over a two-year period to interpret the meaning of integral ecology.

Five years after *Laudato si'*, I think it is important to draw attention to creation through cinema – an art that knows how to tell, show and make heard and felt. Today more than ever, we need the power of storytelling, art, sound and light to think about our place on this planet, and how we can rethink it in order to leave behind a sick, blind attitude. Interconnection, interdependence: there is no point in dividing categories of being into "human" and "nature." Human beings are ecological beings, because ecology is the curious relationship between things, organisms and elements, the different forms of life and non-life, and we live in a profound relationship with everything. If anything, these difficult times are showing us precisely this. A look at the ecological crisis through cinema and religion gives us insights to think creatively and three-dimensionally to rebuild these relationships that, today, are in crisis.

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis talks about balance, sight, and rhythm. A more sustainable future can only happen if, in light

of our profound interconnection, we rethink our relationships, ie our mutual ecological ties, through balance, a perspective of love and care, and rhythms that respect the movement of others, without imposing a rhetoric of rapid growth. Balance, sight and rhythm: cinema and faith are just like that: they are matters of balance between different manifestations of being, of a perspective that is ever different and renewed, and a rhythm that gives freedom and lightness through discipline. Creation, cinema and faith: whereby the God of poetry, beauty and art brings harmony, a relational harmony and thus an ecological harmony.

The Journey of a Filmmaker

NICOLAS BROWN
Documentary filmmaker, UK

I have a confession. In my youth I was a faithful Christian. But in my teenage years, my belief slowly waned as my interest in science grew. And as the years passed, I developed a nasty prejudice. I assumed that if someone was deeply religious, then they were unlikely to also love nature the same way I do. I assumed that a faith in God equated to “little or no faith” in science. And for Judeo-Christians specifically, I assumed that the passage in Genesis 1:26 that says “let them have dominion (over animals)” meant the Bible permitted humans to treat the non-human world however they wished – a thought that still rankles.

Like most prejudices, I sustained mine by being lazy. For 30 years, I never questioned it, and continued my career making documentary films about nature. Through film I shared my conviction that protecting the natural world is the most important issue facing humanity. And all the while I simply assumed that people in faith communities did not share my concern.

To say I was surprised by *Laudato si'* understates the case. And I'm not alone in having my prejudice shattered. Many of my friends who have taken the time to read *Laudato si'* have also had Matthew's proverbial plank of wood removed from their eyes. Not only has Pope Francis revealed that my assumptions were wrong – he has also shown me that we conservationists still have a LOT to learn about how to protect the planet. As Pope Francis writes, “*If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.*” (LS, 63).

For all you conservationists out there, if you read *Laudato si'* carefully, it may also dawn on you why conservation efforts are failing. In short, we don't understand what motivates people. And worse still, we can be terrible at communicating important ideas with anyone outside of our own 'bubble'.

If humanity hopes to slow the advance of climate change (and the resulting droughts, floods, fires, and other natural disasters) then we must listen carefully to Pope Francis. Indeed, every great conservation issue, from protecting biodiversity to expanding our circle of compassion for animals, will only succeed once we apply the wisdom contained in *Laudato si'*.

Why is *Laudato si'* such a revolutionary document? What does the Pope know that legions of scientists, activists, artists, and filmmakers have missed? The answer isn't simple, nor is the *Laudato si'* a simple document. It took me a year to digest, and I'm still grappling with the ideas. But I think it comes down to the way Pope Francis fundamentally understands how our internal lives become reflected in the external world.

In my own life and work, *Laudato si'* is helping me shift my approach. Where I once stressed 'how' to protect nature (external), since reading the *Laudato si'* I now emphasise 'why' (internal). Before *Laudato si'*, I might have warned others about the dangers of climate change and felt good that I was creating a sense of panic or fear. But since *Laudato si'*, I now ask others about what they love about nature. I ask them "how do you celebrate the natural world?" *Laudato si'* has shown me the value of carefully listening to others.

I might describe my previous mindset as "external" and "top down". I assumed that my sense of urgency (as well as my knowledge) about protecting the environment was the most important thing to communicate. What Pope Francis has shown me is that every person must undergo their own "ecological conversion". It is something you might help someone with, but you can never force it upon them. In this way, a true love for nature may

be less of an external struggle as an internal one. In other words, the ecological crisis is not created by what is happening “out in the landscape”—it is a crisis that exists inside our own hearts.

My own personal demons can help illustrate this. Looking inward, I’ve become acutely aware that I don’t practice what I preach. I know that we are destroying the climate, yet I fly around the world burning jet fuel. I believe in recycling but will easily “slip” and buy a coffee in a throwaway cup or obsess over purchasing something new. My commitment to protecting nature isn’t as deep as I thought it was. My internal love for nature conflicts with my external actions.

In this way, Pope Francis’ concepts of “ecological conversion” and “integral ecology” are demanding. Like prayer, faith, or meditation, they require constant appraisal and renewal. But the beauty is that unlike “emissions targets” or “environmental regulations” – the ideas expressed in *Laudato si’* are ones we can carry with us. They are a core set of values. Internalise them, and meaningful change is much more likely to happen. (You will also become better at spotting ‘greenwashing’.)

In this way, I read *Laudato si’* like a self-help book full of take-home value. It offers those of us with internal conflicts a way to seek out integrity. Consider a passage found on the very first page. Pope Francis writes: “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.” (*LS*, 2). Pope Francis is pointing out that our own internal failings (ones we all share) lie at the root of environmental destruction in the world around us. These same failings are also at the root of poverty – and, by uniting these issues, he is helping us calibrate our own moral compass. It is a deeply holistic approach.

Pope Francis stresses that too often we see ourselves as God-like. As such, we feel that we needn’t worry about the

consequences of our actions. We believe that our all-powerful technology will solve any problem. And we believe that our happiness will be fulfilled by material goods. Rationalising our sins becomes a way of life. Pope Francis shows us another way, suggesting that if we have an “ecological conversion” we will discover how Nature has the power to heal us. And if we practice “integral ecology”, we will discover that healing power can be extended to our local communities and beyond.

I have always felt that Nature has the power to heal troubled hearts and minds. Think of Craig Foster in the recent Oscar-winning documentary *My Octopus Teacher*. In Craig’s case, “creation” in the form of an octopus had the power to heal him once he took the trouble to make a connection. This is powerful medicine – and it is not unlike the story of St Francis when he met the lepers outside Assisi. St Francis maintained it was his connection with the lepers that healed him, and not the other way around.

Laudato si’ shows us how the technocratic solutions of governments – sustainability goals, less carbon, more protection – are merely one part of how we solve the mess we’re in. The other part is a demanding but equally liberating shift in our internal lives. By stressing the inward journey that draws us closer to nature and the poor, *Laudato si’* points the way towards true healing. Pope Francis writes in *A prayer for our earth*: “Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.” (LS, 246).

Tightly knitting twin issues together: “the cry of the Earth” as well as the “the cry of the Poor” is a stroke of “moral genius”. It is the kind of creative insight that I think can only come from a seasoned moral leader like Francis. Of course, he gives credit for this idea to St Francis: “(Francis) shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” (LS, 10).

I don’t think I fully appreciated these connections until a recent visit to the Middle East. I interviewed refugees from the Syr-

ian Civil War and people who had lived through the Arab Spring uprisings. What their testimony proved to me is how interconnected we all are. Climate change – caused by all of us – was leading to droughts as far away as Australia and Russia, but the effect on international wheat prices was being felt on the streets of Egypt and Tunisia. Like falling dominoes, environmental issues became hunger issues, which became political issues, and eventually played a role in the European migration crisis, Brexit and a rise of nationalism and xenophobia.

Today the world is living through an even more shocking example: our mistreatment of animals (bats and pangolins) in “wet markets” in China is the most likely cause of the coronavirus pandemic. In this, I think it is safe to say *Laudato si’* is a prophetic document. It predicts how unforeseen disasters happen when we abuse nature for short-term material gains.

I now know how wrong I was to ignore people of faith. Meeting people involved with the *Laudato si’* movement has been like suddenly discovering an army of allies during a losing battle. These faithful, as well as *Laudato si’* itself, have shown me that there are creative new ways to look after our common home.

In truth, we do have a form of dominion over creation, especially today. As my friend Martin Palmer asks, what do we do with that power? What St Francis, and now Pope Francis have shown us is that “dominion” may in fact mean “responsibility for”. In word and deed, Pope Francis has clarified this – he demonstrates that to be a ruler is in fact to be a servant. And to serve creation can be a great act of love – hence the translation of St Francis’ celebratory song, “*Laudato si’*” – which means: “praised be!”

Part II – Indigenous, Interfaith & Youth

The Vision of a Pope and a Patriarch

FR JOHN CHRYSAVGIS

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Introduction: A Dialogue of Personal Friendship

Even before his election and enthronement in 1991, I was privileged to work very closely with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the issue of care of creation. During this period, I witnessed not only the endless time and ceaseless effort that he has committed and expended over the years, but also experienced my own evolution and transformation resulting from his unique vision. Whether organizing international events or spending time with him at the Phanar, I remain grateful for this unprecedented journey with His All-Holiness and the numerous blessings and insights that it has afforded.

Among these opportunities and occasions, I would especially count the honour of attending the formal publication of the “green” encyclical *Laudato si’* released by Pope Francis in Rome on the morning of June 18, 2015 in the new synod hall (Aula del Sinodo) of the Paul VI building at the Vatican. Of course, while the papal letter was long awaited and historical in many ways, this was the first time that a non-Catholic – in this case, an Orthodox hierarch – was invited to launch the encyclical jointly with the director of the relevant pontifical office. Thus, the document was jointly released by Peter Cardinal Turkson (then of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace¹) and Metropolitan John of

¹ Now the first prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development.

Pergamon, as senior bishop and executive spokesman of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.²

Needless to say, theologians and environmentalists, politicians and pundits have already interpreted the encyclical in numerous and diverse ways – often, as Cardinal Turkson would remark, often reading into the text far more than the drafters themselves probably envisaged. Nevertheless, while it was not entirely surprising for Pope Francis to single out and highlight the exceptional example and eminent initiative of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, affectionately dubbed “the Green Patriarch,” it was the first time that a formal papal encyclical referred at all, let alone so prominently and extensively, to an Orthodox prelate.

Indeed, in the opening pages of the document – following pronounced and recurrent reference to historical encyclicals published by his immediate predecessors – Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI (paragraphs 3-6); and prior to appealing and compelling reference to his namesake, St Francis of Assisi (*LS*, 10-12) – the Pope penned three substantial paragraphs under a sub-heading entitled: “United by the same concern” (*LS*, 7-9). The *New York Times* (June 18, 2015) recorded: “Francis tapped a wide variety of sources in his encyclical, partly to underscore the universality of his message. He cites passages from his two papal predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and draws prominently from a religious ally, Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church.”

Clearly, then, Pope Francis was aware of the ecumenical foundations and implications of his encyclical, even plainly stating that he “shares the hope of full communion” with the Ecumenical Patriarch. Here are some excerpts from the relevant paragraphs:

² See <http://www.lastampa.it/2015/06/18/vaticaninsider/metropolitan-zizioulas-laudato-si-is-an-occasion-of-great-joy-and-satisfaction-for-the-orthodox-9OC5q2xdD2pJqXY3ArkqzI/pagina.html>

7. I would mention the statements made by the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with whom we share the hope of full ecclesial communion.

8. Patriarch Bartholomew has spoken in particular of the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet ...

9. At the same time, Bartholomew has drawn attention to the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems ... (*LS*, 7-9)

In this context, communications between the Phanar and the Vatican throughout the lengthy drafting process of the anticipated encyclical demonstrated yet another aspect of ecumenical conversation and dialogue, of “speaking the truth in love” (*Eph.* 4:15) in the search for common ground and mutual action.

I would like to offer some modest personal insights into the ecumenical and ecological contexts of this important papal statement, which is addressed to and pertinent for all Christians, all believers, and all people of goodwill concerned about the welfare of humankind and the sustainability of our planet.

A Document of Encounter and Openness

Let me, then, share certain less familiar historical circumstances predating the encyclical in order to provide certain insights into this document; namely, the paramount importance of the personal relationship and ecumenical dialogue between a Pope and a Patriarch in the modern world.

Almost exactly one year before the publication of *Laudato si'*, on May 24–25, 2014, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew travelled to the holy city of Jerusalem in order to commemorate and celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the historical visit there in 1964 by their illustrious and prophetic predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I. Those visionary prelates broke a long silence that spanned some ten

centuries and led in 1965 to the mutual lifting of the anathemas that had divided the Western and Eastern churches since 1054.

‘Fast forward’ to March of 2013, when Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew personally decided to attend the inaugural mass of Pope Francis in St Peter’s Square. His spontaneous gesture signalled another first: it was the first time that any leader of either church had ever participated in such an event. Bartholomew intuitively sensed a unique honesty and humility in the newly elected pontiff. It was another piece of an ecumenical puzzle enriching and completing the commitment to dialogue planted in the hearts of these two leaders and reflecting the aspiration of their trailblazing, sometimes controversial forerunners.

What I would submit, therefore, by way of providing a deeply personal and distinctly ecumenical background for the papal encyclical on creation care issued by Pope Francis in 2015, is that it had long been anticipated not only from an ecological perspective, but also in the context of inter-Christian openness and exchange between two contemporary religious leaders, who are sincerely and steadfastly committed to restoring communion between their two churches, which Constantinople likes to characterize as “sister churches”³ and Rome is fond of describing as “two lungs” breathing together.⁴

A Perspective of Responsibility and Repentance

If commitment to communion is what has attracted Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to a joint ecumenical witness in a world otherwise divided by political and economic tensions as well as by religious and racial conflicts, then responsibility for compassion is undoubtedly what contin-

³ A phrase dating back to Ignatius of Antioch in the first century.

⁴ A phrase coined by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995).

ues to impel them toward a shared unease for the exploitation of people and the planet, both of which they consider to be living members and sacred traces of the body of Christ.

For almost thirty years, then, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has emphasized the spiritual dimension of the ecological crisis and even introduced the revolutionary concept of ecological sin by way of expanding our understanding of repentance from what we have hitherto considered purely as an individual wrongdoing or social transgression to a much broader, communal, generational, and even environmental abuse of God's creation.

After all, what else is repentance or conversion of attitudes and actions other than the openness to patient dialogue with others and the readiness to humbly confess that the world is larger than any one of us – more complex than any single perspective, and more beautiful than we could ever imagine? What else is the refusal or rejection of dialogue other than the stifling ignorance of the image and likeness of God in every human being or the imperceptiveness and insensitivity to the presence of God in every Christian confession and religious community – in the last grain of sand and the least speck of dust throughout God's creation?

A Commitment to Caring and Compassion

What the papal encyclical *Laudato si'* has reminded us so powerfully and permanently is that preserving nature and serving neighbours are inseparable; they resemble two sides of the same coin. In fact, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew have repeatedly underlined the profound connection between environmental justice and social justice, declaring their solidarity with people suffering from war and persecution, as well as poverty and hunger. The two religious leaders have,

from the very outset of their institutional and individual relations, demonstrated that they understand the role of the church. They know what matters, or at least what should matter, in the church; and they understand what the responsibility, priority, and ministry of the church should be in the contemporary world.

Theological dialogues and ecumenical relations are of paramount importance, but admittedly they are often carried out in order to gain something, whether to achieve greater clarity or advance toward fuller unity. In the minds of some, they may even misguidedly look to manipulation or mastery. Nevertheless, on April 16, 2016, the visit to the island of Lesbos in Greece by Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew – accompanied by the local host Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece – was in fact aimed at giving something: namely, hope to the hundreds of detainees and desperate refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa.

In this regard, the event in Lesbos, which received international attention, indicated a practical and pastoral response by the churches of the East and West to a tragic crisis in our world. At the same time, it marked a powerful reassessment of how ecumenical relations can advance human rights at a time when the world is either turning its face away from the victims of religious extremism and persecution or else deciding their fate exclusively on financial terms and national interests.

The power of ecumenism lies in beginning to open up beyond ourselves and our own, our communities and our churches. It is learning to speak the language of care and compassion. It is giving priority to solidarity and service. This was highlighted at the launching of *Laudato si'*, where – beyond the theological and spiritual dimensions of the ecological crisis – Metropolitan John also underlined the ecumenical and existential significance of the papal encyclical, noting that it contains “an important ecumenical dimension in that it brings the divided Christians before a common task which they must face together.”²

Two Subsequent Corresponding Documents

What becomes immediately apparent in *Laudato si'* is the emphasis on the wider socio-economic dimensions related to climate change. The ecological crisis is not simply about what people have done to God's creation, but also – and especially – about the societal nexus that surrounds the natural world. The narrative about creation in Genesis chapters 1–3 and the story of the flood in Genesis chapters 6–9 serve as bookends for the vicious relationship of Cain toward Abel in Genesis chapter 4 and the detailed lineage from Adam to Noah in Genesis chapter 5. These broader aspects of our response to global warming are the focus of attention in two subsequent and consequential documents that were created coincidentally and independently around the same time – moreover, during the novel coronavirus pandemic – by the Vatican and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Fratelli tutti was announced by Pope Francis in September, 2020, and released on the feast day of St Francis of Assisi in October, 2020.⁵ *For the Life of the World* was endorsed by the Holy Synod in January, 2020, and published during Great Lent in March, 2020.⁶ The first document calls for greater fraternity and social connection; the second calls for greater awareness of and engagement in social responsibility. The papal encyclical was the third issued by the current Pope, while the Orthodox document was the first ever commissioned by the Ecumenical Patriarchate on “the social ethos of the Orthodox Church.”

The two documents cover many similar topics. *Fratelli tutti* discusses racism and immigration, interfaith relations and international politics, care for the poor and underprivileged, “liberty, equality, and fraternity,” women and war, capital punishment and private property, economy and equity. *For the Life of the*

⁵ For the full text, see http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

⁶ For the full text, see <https://www.goarch.org/social-ethos>

World discusses the role of the Church in the public square, the course of human life from conception to death, wealth and poverty, civil and social justice, violence and war as well as the struggle for peace, ecumenical relations (both inter-Christian and inter-religious), human rights and religious freedom, as well as science and technology (including the environment).

This is why it came as no surprise when the Ecumenical Patriarch drew parallels between the two documents in his address to the papal delegation to the Phanar on the occasion of the Feast of St Andrew (November 30, 2020): “The recent Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* of His Holiness Pope Francis exceptionally proves the multidimensional interest of the Church of Rome in the vast social questions. In the same vein, three years ago we commissioned a group of esteemed Orthodox theologians, assigning to them the responsibility of drafting a document – based on decisions of the Holy and Great Council, while grounded on theological principles of our tradition – about the social ethos of the Orthodox Church. This document was published last March, in print and on the internet, with the title *For the Life of the World. The Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church* and has already provoked fruitful conversation.”

Conclusion: A Dialogue with Global Implications

It is, therefore, hardly coincidental but indeed quite providential that these two bishops are leading their respective churches at this critical moment in time. This may well be why so much – sometimes unreasonable, perhaps unrealistic – hope is placed on the shoulders of religious leaders, such as Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. It was possibly the reason why the June 2015 papal encyclical was received with such fervour – and at the same time challenged with such ferocity – in religious and secular circles alike. By the same to-

ken, the creation care work of His All-Holiness Bartholomew has met with both great praise and great resistance over the past thirty years.

There is of course no doubt that the Pope and the Patriarch have attracted criticism from the global markets and corporations, whose priorities and preferences the religious leaders have questioned and challenged. What the two leaders have succeeded in doing – each in their own way and in their own communion – is demonstrating that ecological awareness and practice are part and parcel of the Christian mandate and mission. It is not something additional to our vocation as Christians; it is not merely something political or economic or technological, or scientific; it is actually a deeply religious, spiritual, and doctrinal issue.

Religion may not always transform people, but it can certainly mobilize them. This will not be achieved by politics, which will inevitably divide people; even culture can sometimes prove divisive. Religion, however, can have a huge influence and impact. Whatever the case may be, there is no doubt in my mind that the favourable reception – and, in fact, at the same time I would also venture to add: the adverse reaction to and harsh criticism – of their advancing and advocating for the care and protection of our planet is arguably the greatest testimony and evidence that Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis are most definitely on the right track. Their dialogue for creation is undoubtedly creating reverberations throughout the world among believing and secular people alike.

How Laudato si' Has Impacted Lives Among Indigenous Peoples in the Asia Pacific

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The Jesuits have been journeying with indigenous peoples for decades, and in some areas, for over a century. Although there are a lot of success stories in this journey, we cannot help but ask ourselves why we have not gone as far as we should. Some communities have acceded to the inflow of development at the expense of their ancestral domains, culture, and identity. Some have resisted the change and have been left struggling on their own in the periphery. Others have been duped and victimized by scheming people leaving them lost and defenceless. Where do we go from here?

A lot has been sacrificed in the name of progress and development. Indigenous peoples have been lured into fast cash through indiscriminate slash-and-burn farming, the use of inorganic fertilizer, weed killer and pesticides, the employment of GMO for easier and faster return of investment, the shift to cattle feed and commercial wood production at the expense of food farming, the turn to oppressive credit system from opportunistic agricultural financiers for lack of capital, among others. This leads to the destruction of forests, disruption of the sustainable food production cycle and the monetization of everything of value.

Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* profoundly articulates the yearning of Jesuit missionaries to support indigenous peoples: "to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development" (*LS*, 13). This invitation has challenged us to revisit our efforts and programmes, assess their impact in terms of longevity and future viability, review how inclusive the plans

and programmes are for all stakeholders and evaluate their holistic impact.

Pope Francis' challenge to us in *Laudato si'* encouraged us to start the following initiatives. To demonstrate the interconnectedness (which indigenous peoples have taught us) between our faith life and God's creation, our parishioners and students are required to grow trees in their own backyards for life and faith milestones in their family life like Baptism, Confirmation, First Communion, weddings, and graduations. They do this after a brief orientation on the interconnectedness and interdependence of creation and human beings prior to the celebration of such milestones. Our retreat house is beginning to offer Creation Spirituality retreats and reflections using *Laudato si'*. In fact, graduate students from a state university have committed to incorporate a day-long reflection for all their Masters in Public Administration students on Creation Spirituality.

Very much inspired by the encyclical, Nuestra Señora De Guadalupe Parish in Cabanglasan, Bukidnon, in the southern part of the Philippines has begun an integral and sustainable programme called LIFE (*Laudato si'* Integral Faith and Ecology) Camp. Established in 2018, the Camp sits on the parish's 10-hectare property. It serves as a demonstration farm for natural farming methods that do not employ inorganic fertilizer and pesticides. The farm showcases a self-sustaining agricultural system that includes multi-crop farming, livestock, fisheries, and vegetable garden with a rain shelter system and a ram pump that provides water from a nearby creek. The camp also includes a training centre that will host the parish's various agricultural livelihood training programmes. The LIFE Camp team is also exploring the installation of a solar power supply for the farm. Several projects are also in the pipeline: maintaining semi-free range livestock of native chickens for eggs and meat; producing charcoal briquettes from corncob and rice husks, which is the dominant agricultural waste in the locality; and producing fish,

pig, chicken, and other livestock feeds from the farm's agricultural produce. Once the camp earns enough, it plans to fund a scholarship programme, a health centre and pharmacy, and livelihoods for the indigenous peoples of the parish.

In Ban Pa Pae, Chiang Mai, Thailand, the Karen People are teaching the world that their traditional upland crop rotation is a sustainable alternative to slash-and-burn farming. They have allocated a portion of their dense forest for farming and kept the rest as a protected area. By rotating crops in a specific area, they allow portions of the land to regenerate while the needs of the community continue to be sustained from the other part of the cleared forest. This kind of farming also protects the existing forests from being converted into agricultural land. During our visit, they explained that by limiting their farming to the specified area and practicing crop rotation there, they ensure that their forests (they even 'ordain' the trees to stress the sanctity of these protected forests) are protected (no cutting of trees for lumber and no hunting wildlife). In return, they turn to their forests for medicines and food to sustain their community.

In Bukidnon, the indigenous elders are turning to their young people to lead their tribes. Through the Jesuit's scholarship and training programme, the college-aged indigenous young people are sent to colleges and universities. Aside from acquiring mainstream education, the students receive leadership, cultural, social, psycho-emotional, and eco-spiritual training. The Jesuits work hand-in-hand with tribal elders in order to develop a suitable programme for the young people and their tribes. They are also given responsibilities and projects that they can implement in their respective communities so that they can remain rooted in their tribe while engaging with the demands of the world. The Jesuits and elders provide them the necessary guidance to navigate the tension between the demands of the world and their rootedness to their land and identity. It is the dream of the elders and the Jesuits that this next generation of indigenous leaders

can really lead their tribes towards integral human development.

In celebration of the 40th year of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Asia Pacific, JRS, in cooperation with the Jesuit Companions in Indigenous Ministry, and the Reconciliation with Creation desk of the Jesuit Conference in Asia-Pacific, launched the "40-4-40" Growing Canopies, Building Communities initiative. It encourages communities connected with Jesuit institutions in Asia-Pacific to grow 40,000 trees for the 40 years of JRS. This aims to stress the interconnectedness between the land and the communities living thereon. The project description says it all. "The survival of these communities depends on the sustainability of their natural resources and cultural rootedness. Growing and protecting forests is a community endeavour, enhancing their ecological and social strength. We are called to an ecological conversion and live a life that respects and promotes integral ecology." Participants from Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Laos, and the Philippines are now preparing their proposals for implementation in the latter part of the year.

Laudato si' is not just any old encyclical that should just be read, studied, and appreciated. It is a treasure-trove that offers endless possibilities for the whole of creation. It provides opportunities for wholeness and integration in persons, communities, and the world we live in. However, it also demands accountability and responsibility. More importantly, it requires a shift in our paradigm that should be rooted in our living faith in Jesus, the Christ. And this is where the Spirit can come in to grant us the conviction and the power to recover our true identity that was lost after we were created. If anything, this reflection simply wants to say that sustainable and integral development is possible. Pope Francis shows us the way through *Laudato si'*. We are challenged to live it out and prove God right when he exclaimed after we were created, "it is very good!"

Martuwarra Fitzroy River of Life Flow

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The Kimberley, in Western Australia's far north, is a magnificent ecological and cultural landscape with a human history of at least 65,000 years of sustainable ways of life. In 2015, the University of Notre Dame Australia's Broome Campus accepted an invitation to work towards implementation of the wisdom of *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, in the Kimberley and beyond.

The research and development project is called: *Kimberley Transitions: Collaborating to Care for Our Common Home*¹, it officially began in 2016 following the Kimberley launch of *Laudato si'*. On the night of the launch, I showed my film, "Martuwarra River of Life"². I heard the sacred words of his Holiness in 2015 on Climate Change. This is the voice of our sacred ancestral being:

"Welcome to the River Country, Mardoowarra, the sacred River of Life. My name is Mardoowarra. When the Europeans came, they called me by another name, Fitzroy River, but I hold to my name which was given to me in the Bookarrakarra, the beginning of time. I hold my totem, Yoongoorrookoo, the Rainbow Serpent who formed the valley tracts as Woonyoomboo, the first human being, stood and rode on my back, holding the spears firmly planted in my rainbow skin. As we twisted and turned up in the sky down in the ground

¹ <https://www.notredame.edu.au/research/transitions/researchers>

² RiverOfLife, M., Poelina, A., & McDuffie M. (2016). *Mardoowarra River of Life – Laudato Si'*, <https://vimeo.com/547764703> Madjulla Inc: Broome.

together, we carved our way forming the Mardoowarra, singing the Warloongarriy River Law song for country.

I was so happy in 2011, seeing everyone working together, black and white Australians, telling their stories of heritage, culture, and environment. Telling the Australian government to listen to all of the collective wisdom helped me to become listed as National Heritage. I hear the voice of Lucy Marshall, Senior Elder, and custodian saying, "Those people grew up playing with nature, they must be stopped." She's very wise. She knows that together, shoulder to shoulder, we can work together to look after my rights. I am the sacred River of Life. Her sister, Jeannie Warbie, agrees with me and I hear her standing and calling strong, "No river, no people." And where without our continuing law of relationship between human and non-human beings, there will be no life.

Here in the West Kimberly on the River Country, my peoples are being asked to make way for intensive agricultural and mining projects without consideration for the degradation of nature and their culture or my right to life [To live and flow]."

The global evidence from the International Union for Conservation and Nature (IUCN) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) confirms the last bastions of cultural and biodiversity hotspots globally is held on the lands and living waters of indigenous, First Nations peoples. We have upheld our First Law, the law of the land and living waters. We continue to coexist with our non-human family; the birds, the fish, the animals, the 'we not the me'. We have not walked away from nature. We have not severed our relationship with the 'Garden of Eden'. We have been faithful custodians bound by the First Law of obligation, through an ethic of care, love, harmony and deep relationship with nature.

The global message Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*, complements the work we are doing in the Kimberley. Jacqui Remond, the Australian champion for *Laudato si'* extended the opportunity to build my professional and research partnerships by engaging with like-minded people, in a 'Kimberley Transition'. This connection is strengthening my capacity to take new ideas, learning and share them in various and multiple contexts; communities, research, decision-makers, and other partnerships.

In one of the Vatican dialogues, I heard the words, 'the pulpits are empty, this is no longer about religion, it is about healing, igniting and sharing the human spirit' and 'how do we unite for the greater good of all and our planetary wellbeing'. Six years later we are poised on the tipping point of climate chaos. In 2021 we need to ask ourselves, "Do we want climate change and how do we make peace with nature and indigenous people and our universal spirit?" We need unity to protect our sacred ancestral living being, Martuwarra the Fitzroy River, the River of Life³.

Martuwarra Fitzroy River Right to Live and Flow

"Martuwarra Fitzroy River

Largest Aboriginal cultural heritage site in our hands

733 kms winding throughout our lands

Don't bring us harm

We have friends of the Martuwarra with whom we are building a Coalition of Hope

Dreaming a forever dream

River must have the right to live and flow

I love *E* River cause *E* love us to.

River all around us

³ RiverOfLife, M., McDuffie, M., & Poelina, A., (2020). Martuwarra Country: A historical perspective (1838-present). Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council; Nulungu Research Institute, The University of Notre Dame Australia. <https://www.doi.org/10.32613/nrp/2020.5>

River watching us
Wondering what we going to do
River holds the memories of all of us passing through
Past... Present... Future hold in this moment of time
River must have the right to live and flow

Yoongoorookoo, Galbardu, Kurrpurrngu, Mangunampi, Pali-yarra and Kurungal

Are the names we call the serpents from the beginning of time

Nyikina, Warrwa, Bunuba, Walmajarri, Gija, Ngarinyin, Mangala, Gooniyandi

We hold the River for all of us

We need the River to have a fair go

River must have the right to live and flow

Let's stand in unity, one mind one voice, one River Country
Aboriginal and National Heritage Listed for you and me
Birds, fish, animals, trees, all people sharing, trade, ceremony
Living waters, First Law first, rules from our ancestors
Keep the living waters alive, flowing free
Spirit of Martuwarra Law to live and flow
River must have the right to live and flow"

The violent history of colonial invasion and occupation in the Kimberley region, particularly Martuwarra Fitzroy River, has morphed from extreme physical violence into endemic systemic racism, structural violence and pervasive poverty.

Martuwarra Fitzroy River and her people are now at a cross-road, the colonial invasive development continues with plans for water extraction, extensive clearing of our lands for intensive agriculture, and multiple forms of mining, including fracking. All we can see is foreseeable harm to our cultural and spiritual ways of life, our health and livelihoods.

Genuine partnerships involving government, industry and indigenous people are required to ensure a) the sustainable management of water resources and b) dedicated investment is committed into indigenous-determined economies, to ensure equitable distribution of wealth creation from diverse 'new and forever economies'. It is only when the spirit of reconciliation is at the foundation of development that it can be considered a form of moral progress. The notion of the 'greater good' needs to be expanded to include indigenous people as stakeholders of their resources and managed estates.

Furthermore, there needs to be greater recognition of the enduring First Law of guardianship and authority of the Martuwarra Traditional Owners who are responsible for the natural assets that are located on our estates. We've managed our estates sustainably from the beginning of time. In this time of climate change, we live with global economic, human, social, cultural and environmental uncertainty. It is time to redefine the moral compass, as it refers to development, by introducing the concept of a 'social licence' into water planning. Sustainable water management requires holistic applied research to ensure Indigenous ways of life and reciprocal economies and values are included in the 'greater good of all'. It is time to decolonise development and shift the paradigm towards justice and equity, on just terms. Without creating peace with nature and with indigenous people we will not be able to right-size the planet and give humanity a chance⁴.

⁴ Dr Anne Poelina "Wake Up the Snake! Collective wisdom brings nature back to balance | TEDxPerth <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZmflOQa-rnM>

Laudato si' – A View from Indigenous Peoples'

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Laudato si', as it is colloquially called, is an encyclical by Pope Francis, that has become close to indigenous peoples because it shares key perspectives in indigenous cosmovisions, such as the fact that everything is connected (*LS*, 16), that all human beings are earth (*LS*, 2), and the hope that humanity still has the capacity to collaborate to build our common home (*LS*, 13). These phrases from the Pope's reflection in *Laudato si'* have been for centuries, and continue to be, ways of daily coexistence among indigenous peoples that have made it possible to care for the integral life of the planet.

Therefore, when *Laudato si'* talks about "the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected" (*LS*, 16), indigenous peoples are raising their voices more strongly to denounce the extractivism that hurts Mother Earth. They also stand against the human extractivism that is experienced in the impoverished peripheries, because we are all part of the same *tejido*, a connection and interdependence of threads that together make a compact but flexible system, where each thread maintains its uniqueness while weaving together and building us. If you attack the earth, you also attack human beings. We must raise our voice, because what happens in the peripheries also affects the centre because everything is interconnected regardless of economic and social levels. Sooner or later if the fabric becomes torn, it affects every corner, every liee.

For indigenous peoples, this interconnection is rooted in the fact that everything and everyone was made with the same love

and from the same earth, as told in their creation myths that are passed down from generation to generation to inspire care for nature as part of the community. But, like the Pope, they recognize that at present, "We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (*Genesis*, 2, 7). Our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshments from her waters" (*LS*, 2). This forgetfulness has given rise to power relations that seek to dominate rather than coexist.

So, peoples who know they are the depositories of knowledge that connects human beings with nature, and also know about farming techniques that conserve ecosystems while still producing what is necessary for human societies, are open to sharing their knowledge in learning processes. These processes combine current technologies and knowledge with ancestral wisdom; recognizing that both are necessary and valid to manage the socio-environmental crisis that we are experiencing. When the Pope affirms that "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental" (*LS*, 139), indigenous peoples do not lose sight of the fact that this crisis also has a spiritual dimension. Spirituality is part of the daily life of human beings, of the common home and, therefore, every social intervention expresses its spirituality.

Indigenous peoples, in the sobriety of their daily life, are sustaining complex systems of relationships based on collaboration, based on the Andean world of the *ayni*. These are relationships of reciprocal service that allow us to affirm our interdependence with the whole of life and promote the care of the common home, not by competition but by joint responsibility. In other words, the relationship is one of collaboration and joint responsibility, not competition or consumerism. This relationship allows the interaction, in equal dignity, of all those who are part of the common home in order to stop the ecological and

human damage that is disfiguring the face of God manifested in creation. As the Pope says, “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home” (*LS*, 13). This is the time when all the peoples of the earth, indigenous, Amazonian, riverine, Quilombola, urban, rural, young people and adults, from the centre and the peripheries, need to look at each other, contemplate each other, to make us jointly responsible for the integral care of life in our common home.

From these four key elements of relationship common to *Laudato si’* and to indigenous cosmovisions, it can be sensed that the joint journey of indigenous peoples and the Church is a collaborative path towards an integral ecology that implies healing wounds from the past to take care of the future of the next generations.

Pastoral and Socio-Environmental Priorities in the Light of *Laudato si'*

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The Ecclesial Network of the Congo Basin (REBAC)¹ is a response of the Catholic Church in Africa to the Holy Father's call in *Laudato si'* to safeguard this region. "When these forests are burned down ... within the space of a few years countless species are lost and the areas frequently become arid wastelands." (LS, 38). This encyclical has woken up many of us.

Indeed a few days before June 18, 2015, its official publication, I was attending a seminar in Guayaquil, Ecuador in Latin America. Participants, mostly Jesuits from all over the world, in charge of social ministry in their regions were also present. This seminar started on June 14, 2015. Many were waiting for the moment when the encyclical already signed on May 24 would finally be made public. In preparation for its release, many already had a dissemination plan. My colleague in charge of Ecojesuit² had already prepared the editorial of his online issue. Various magazines of the Jesuit social centres had a specific project to disseminate the encyclical. The conversation was about how this encyclical would revolutionize the social teaching of the Church. In the group, I was the only one who did not have a precise plan for this encyclical and was wondering what I could do to narrow this gap.

On the agenda of the second day of the seminar we had information on the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM). Participants were amazed by the work done to save the Amazon

¹ www.rebaccongobassin.org

² <https://www.ecojesuit.com/>

rainforest. Then came an unexpected question: *"What is being done to save the Congo Basin, the second lung on the planet?"* According to experts in Guayaquil, all this effort aiming to fight climate change could not be won if the Church in Africa did not also undertake initiatives like the one in Amazon. Being the only representative of the African Catholic Church all eyes then turned to me.

However, the story of REBAC does not start here. In March 2015, during the continental assembly of justice and peace commissions, the African Church had taken a decision to address this issue.

"Following the example of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial network (REPAM), African justice and peace commissions are committed to create an African church Network regrouping in particular the neighbouring countries of Equatorial forest for transparent and responsible management for this common legacy which is meant for the entire humanity"³.

It only needed someone to shape this project. In my capacity as coordinator of the Jesuit social ministry in Africa, member of the Symposium of Bishops' Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) justice and peace governance team, and member of the Centre for Studies for Social Action (CEPAS) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the country which covers 75% of the Congo Basin forest, I felt that this could be for me a call, a vocation to take initiative.

In collaboration with SECAM justice, the peace commission, and Caritas Africa, I called for a meeting in Kinshasa from 7 to 10 October, 2015. Six countries, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) were identified as concerned in this first phase. The objective of the meeting was

³ SECAM – Justice and Peace Commission (2015), *Justice and peace at the service of reconciliation and integral development of Africa*, Dobra, Windhoek, 15th March.

to reflect, in the light of *Laudato si'* on the contribution of the Catholic Church in Africa to safeguarding the ecosystem of the Congo Basin. During this workshop, participants also committed to setting up a common pastoral project.

“We commit ourselves to act within the Church in a concerted and coordinated manner for the protection of the Congo Basin forest... Popularize the encyclical letter of Pope Francis *Laudato si'*... in our different Church structures (regional, diocesan, parish, grassroots communities) in our countries. To work with local communities, civil society organizations, governments, parliamentarians, partners on the need to support actions aimed at protecting the planet”⁴.

The following REBAC workshop held in Brazzaville from 23 to 24 June 2016 set out its vision, mission, and organization. Participants considered that before developing a regional pastoral plan, the Church in each country should carry out a survey of their pastoral and social-environmental challenges.

The Pope called for a Synod on the Amazon and the hope in the African Church to be invited encouraged REBAC to accelerate the mapping process. A questionnaire to identify pastoral challenges and ecclesial actors involved in ecological pastoral care was sent to 22 out of the 93 dioceses in the six member countries of REBAC.

“The overall objective of the mapping exercise was... to collect information on how the Catholic Church responds to pastoral, social, and environmental challenges in the Congo Basin... To seize the ecological challenges and opportunities in the Congo Basin... Provide concerted and coordinated pastoral responses to the socio-environmental challenges facing the people of God in this region.”⁵

⁴ Jesuit Social Apostolate in Africa and Madagascar, Caritas Africa, Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (2015), Final Communiqué at the end of the consultative workshop on the establishment of the ecclesial network for the Congo Basin, Kinshasa, 9th October.

⁵ REBAC (2019). Report on the mapping of pastoral and socio-environmental challenges in the Congo Basin region, Kinshasa, CEPAS, p. 7.

Ecological Priorities

This research has helped the Church of the Congo Basin identify a number of challenges that today constitute priorities of its integral ecology pastoral ministry. Among these is the fight against massive deforestation by international timber companies. These are responsible for the degradation of the ecosystem, disappearance of biodiversity, and of rare and precious trees. The church also committed to the protection of indigenous peoples in all the countries of the Congo Basin. The study showed that deforestation threatens the lives of many of these groups. Their living environment is disrupted, and communities are forced to wander in the forests.

The church is committed to promoting sustainable agriculture and fighting land grabbing used for cultivation of palm groves, rubber, and cocoa because it deprives local populations of the agricultural land necessary for their survival. The Church is also concerned about the flooding caused by cyclones and torrential rains due to climate change. These floods have destroyed homes and crops and pushed millions of people into poverty.

Another pastoral priority of the Church is mining. The study showed that the majority of mining activities do not improve the lives of the local population. They are the source of pollution of rivers and streams and the proliferation of new diseases among indigenous peoples. Mercury, metal, and acids used in the mining industry and other toxic waste discharges into rivers threaten aquatic life. They are causing the decline in fish populations and the extinction of aquatic animals. Another church concern is the work of artisanal miners of gold, diamonds, cobalt, coltan, etc. Work conditions are inhumane and lead some to engage in drugs, crime, and prostitution.

The church also deplores the anarchic hunting of animals. In more than one place the local population is confronted with the gradual disappearance of certain animals. This phenomenon

is also accompanied by the poaching of elephants and other endemic animals and birds.

All of these activities are responsible for the loss of biodiversity in the Congo Basin. Currently, the situation is worsened by the intensive use of pesticides, which disrupts the biological and wildlife chain in the forest with consequences that today are still largely ignored.

The mapping drew attention to limited access to drinking water caused by pollution which in some places permanently affects lakes, rivers, and streams. This has resulted in an increase of water-borne diseases in the Congo Basin due to limited access to clean drinking water. Women, girls, and children have often to travel long distances to access safe drinking water.

Finally, the research has drawn attention to the increase in human rights violations as a result of the tensions that often pitted local populations against forestry, mining, and agricultural companies. These conflicts result in arbitrary arrests, torture, and even murder. All these phenomena have, above all, an impact on young people forced into rural exodus and migration.

Laudato si' – A Global Trailblazing Call to Action that Inspired UNEP's Faith for Earth

IYAD ABUMOGHLI

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My journey with *Laudato si'*, the Vatican, and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development began in 2017 after being appointed as the Director of UNEP's Faith for Earth Initiative. My mission was to come up with a global strategy for engaging with faith-based organizations for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While conducting the necessary background research, I came across *Laudato si'* being presented as the Papal letter 'On Caring for our Common Home'. Reading the encyclical, I was amazed by the depth, inclusivity and breadth of the document. Soon after, I started calling it the Catholic Agenda 2030 as it cuts across almost all the SDGs in an inspiring manner to all religious believers from all religions. The encyclical, in its analysis of the global environmental situation, links fundamental social and economic considerations, placing an inherent responsibility on Catholics to reassess and prioritize their relationship with nature.

Since the inception of Faith for Earth, my relationship with the Vatican and the Dicastery has inspired me to seek the achievement of a common goal to take "swift and unified global action", as called by His Holiness Pope Francis in terms of our efforts towards achieving the SDGs and fulfilling Agenda 2030. At the first global meeting of *Laudato si'* held in Rome in 2018, Pope Francis convened high-level faith and interfaith leaders to further highlight the fragility of the current economic system, the role of faith, faith leaders, and culture in accelerating the

achievement of the SDGs. This interfaith approach to advancing environmental stewardship not only presented *Laudato si'* as a global initiative but also inspired our work in adopting the Faith for Earth Strategy¹.

During the Fourth United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA 4) in 2019, Faith for Earth hosted the first ever global interfaith dialogue during the meetings of UNEP's governing body. The involvement of high-level members of the Vatican and the Dicastery was a shining star of the event where senior level discussions took place between UNEP and the Vatican delegation. Consequently, in July of the same year, UNEP's Faith for Earth offered to host the second international conference on *Laudato si'* commemorating 5 years of its launch focusing on Youth and Africa. The conference was organized in collaboration with the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa², the World Wildlife Fund³ and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development⁴ at the United Nations Offices in Nairobi, Kenya. The conference was an incredible display of solidarity for the environment by over 300 participants from 50 countries integrating perspectives from scientists and other religious belief systems. It was a showcase of the practical work of indigenous and local knowledge and practices involving youth groups and their vision regarding the economy for the years to come.

The Conference further inspired the 'Laudato si' Generation', the creation of Nairobi-based 'Eden's Stewards'⁵, and further strengthened the relationship between the Vatican delegations

¹ <https://www.unep.org/resources/policy-and-strategy/engaging-faith-based-organization>

² <http://cynesa.org/>

³ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/>

⁴ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/sviluppo-umano-integrale/index.htm

⁵ <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/blogpost/faith-earth-initiative-inspires-formation-edens-stewards-ministry>

and UNEP's Senior Management Team. *Laudato si'* presented the international community with a unique and innovative approach to addressing issues of the utmost pertinence. It sparked a global movement inviting other religions, faith communities, and faith leaders to #ActNow.

In our efforts to further support *Laudato si'* and its inspiring message, UNEP was pleased to partner with 'The Living Chapel'⁶ and launch it during the World Environment Day in 2019 along with the Vatican and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The Living Chapel is yet another inspiration of *Laudato si'*; demonstrating that the concept of spirituality and the care for our common home are intrinsically linked. The Living Chapel drawn from Saint Francis of Assisi demonstrates that the principles of sustainability and spirituality can work together in providing the much-needed approaches to living in harmony with nature. Reflections like these were echoed by Pope Francis and Cardinal Turkson at the 'Faith for Nature: Multi-Faith Action Conference' that was held by UNEP and the Government of Iceland in October 2020 and produced 'Our Sacred Commitment'⁷ that calls for the creation of the 'Faith for Earth Coalition'⁸, an institutionalized approach to strengthening the role of faith actors on tackling the planetary crises we are facing today.

While *Laudato si'* has inspired many religions and their followers as an enlightening path towards the spiritual connection with nature, it particularly inspired me to think of mobilizing other religions to adopt a similar global and comprehensive approach to mobilizing faith believers. As such, with leading Islamic scholars and institutions, we embarked on the development of an Islamic Covenant for the Earth. Entitled 'Al-Mizan'⁹, which

⁶ <https://livingchapel.com/>

⁷ <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/faith-nature-our-sacred-commitment>

⁸ <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/faith-nature-our-sacred-commitment>

⁹ <https://www.unep.org/al-mizan-covenant-earth>

translates in English to ‘the balance’. Al-Mizan seeks to apply Islamic teachings to a host of modern environmental challenges that the world is facing. In an ambitious attempt to speak to a global community of 1.8 billion Muslims, the Covenant presents another spiritually-based approach to urgently mobilize action to live in harmony with nature. Al-Mizan, like *Laudato si’*, will be a game changer for all people.

We are hoping that the support that the Vatican and the Dicastery have afforded the Initiative will extend to the launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030)¹⁰ on World Environment Day in 2021. *Laudato si’* had a notable impact at various levels. It has not only inspired Catholic organizations and individuals, but also generated momentum within other Faith communities. Faith for Earth’s engagement in the implementation of *Laudato si’* has been vast. The Achievement Reports of 2018/19¹¹ and 2020¹² paint a more robust picture, with an entire section dedicated to *Laudato si’*.

¹⁰ <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/take-survey>

¹¹ <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/faith-earth-achievement-report-2018-2019>

¹² <https://www.unep.org/resources/annual-report/faith-earth-achievement-report-2020>

“We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth” (Genesis 2:7)

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History is built on events that somehow change the way we understand the world. *Laudato si'* synthesizes a series of historical events that brought it to the place it occupies. For an encyclical, or a document in general, it comes to life through the testimonies of the many people who base their daily work on it, thus giving it the value it truly has. In the Amazon and in Latin America, this encyclical is welcomed as a great life plan for integral ecology, which is in tune with the ancestral wisdom of the indigenous peoples.

There is only one reality, but the way we understand the world – in Western cultures – has made us think that only the fragments of the reality that are closest to us exist. Integral ecology proposes a way of looking at our fragments, our limited understandings of the world, as parts of something bigger, that intertwines with everything; granting us the understanding of how to contribute to that whole. This perspective connects perfectly with what indigenous peoples have been telling us for hundreds of years: life, whether from our material or immaterial understanding of it, is one. And they speak to us not only about our existence as humanity but of our planetary existence. Nothing happens in just one sphere; every action or inaction has a planetary impact.

In the following reflection, I will explain the impacts of *Laudato si'* through three main concepts: integrality, sensitivity and responsibility.

Integrality

Laudato si' portrays a detailed snapshot of the reality of our planet. First, it provides a series of objective, scientific, unquestionable data on the seriousness of environmental damage. Second, it gives a clear portrait of the profound social inequity and the risks that development brings to humanity. Third, it looks at this reality from the perspective of faith. This, in other words, is the way to explain why it is so important for Christians to embrace the cause of the socio-environmental crisis. Finally, it presents integral ecology as a life proposal helping us to heal, reconcile, redistribute, reverse trends and seek justice in every dimension of life.

It is very clear that Mother Earth, who has been so wounded and constantly seeking to be heard, must be cared for with the same mercy that Jesus had for the unprotected and rejected of his time. This is when our faith again becomes important in the social, political and cultural dimensions, in the search for justice. It invites us to integrate our rational understanding of the world and our faith's calling to this cause.

For many decades, long before *Laudato si'*, several hundreds of missionaries made this choice to integrate themselves into a different reality within their whole existence, living in consistency between their thoughts and their mission. Their passage through life was the seed of many processes that still exist today. *Laudato si'*, by representing one of the main lines of action of Francis' papacy, appears to embrace this history of the universal Church with its lights and shadows. Today it shows the face of a Church that is close and fraternally related to the causes of the land and its peoples. It also highlights the importance of strengthening horizontal relations in defence of the most vulnerable and most forgotten causes. It also offers us the opportunity to break with an individualistic view of life and thus to opt for collective causes.

We still have a long way to go to understand how humans are not the centre of everything and that the invitation indigenous peoples have offered us, is to feel ourselves part of all creation. *Laudato si'* invites us to recognize ourselves as custodians of creation, as subjects with the intelligence to understand the seriousness of positive and negative impacts on it.

The cultural and biological diversity that coexists in the Amazon region offers us a path for transformation. It lets us see that within each culture lie the keys to feeling part of the whole. Cultural diversity confronts us with the greater challenge of valuing the spiritualities of indigenous peoples as equally valid to the spirituality we profess. All of them are the face of the same creative energy, of a God who, in the greatest work of love, gives life to all creation. In diversity we can find the transforming force of humanity.

Sensitivity

“This sister – Mother Earth – now cries out to us” (*LS*, 2). The earth suffers day by day in every one of the ways in which it is broken, unbalanced and wounded. That pain must not only be ‘understood’ by us. It must be felt. Otherwise, it is not guaranteed that we will feel motivated to take action, undertake daily deeds that seek to heal the pain and make the choices needed to reverse the systematic damage that has been done to it. We are invited to feel from the sensitive dimension what we may be able to understand rationally, and in terms of faith, to feel how our relationship with God is not detached from everything that exists around us. On the contrary, the Gospel-based worship invites us to connect daily with justice that transcends the individual sphere.

The Church has made its preferential option for the poor and *Laudato si'* explain to us how Mother Earth is poor among the

poor. In the Amazon region, this is entirely palpable because it is a severely diseased biome. Its sickness is a consequence of human exploitation of resources that sustain societies that deepen inequity and injustice. In one way or another, the entire planet benefits from the Amazon region and at the same time no one takes responsibility for the effects that exploitation leaves on it.

Today, scientific data is increasingly heard in several contexts not just academia, but also in the Church and civil society. The pain of the people and creatures who are the main victims of environmental devastation has been contextualized. This information is not confined to the field of knowledge, but also pierces us emotionally and overcomes the apathy of our comfort.

Responsibility

Laudato si' has allowed us to make visible the urgency of protecting the goods of creation, especially of taking care of those who have ancestrally taken care of the richest territories on the planet: the indigenous peoples. It has also allowed us to give visibility to the faces of the Church that have made historical commitments to land-related processes and causes. But it also challenges us to take action every day, to seek any occasion where it is necessary to guarantee justice.

For this reason, it is essential to contextualize the Church's preferential option for the poor. Today, in areas such as the Amazon region, the preferential choice for the poor means prioritizing indigenous peoples, migrants, persecuted community leaders and victims of violence of any kind. To care for them is to care for a planet that is wounded, close to being condemned to destruction.

The call of responsibility is perhaps the hardest. It involves dramatically separating from the joy of comfort as a privilege to discover the many ways in which we can join forces to care for,

preserve, protect and repair what is needed. From the comfort of privilege, it is impossible to feel mercy. And I do not mean mercy in the sense of guilt but mercy that lets us recognize ourselves as brothers and sisters of situations where there is the most pain and allow us to act generously.

Conclusion

We are fortunate to be the generation that has seen the encyclical *Laudato si'* born and its message spread all over the world. We must not lose sight of what this encyclical means in the history of our Church. It arises from a series of important historical milestones since the Second Vatican Council, creating a path on which to walk as God's people. The whole journey up to *Laudato si'* has been shaped by profound revelations coming from regions, human groups and concrete causes. It is a history that has cost many human lives and deeply wounded the planet.

Now that there are so many parts of the world agreeing on the importance of this unprecedented moment in history that is shaping our own future, it is time to act. It is time to direct all of our actions to the pursuit of socio-environmental justice. That is the greatest act of love we can give to our planet, humanity and all creatures that exist. Every struggle that represents a cry from those who are most unprotected is a struggle that deserves to be fought to the end, even if it may seem small and irrelevant. Every process of transformation begins with just a small seed of nonconformity.

People's Landscape of Faith, Hope and Action

PEDRO WALPOLE SJ

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(RAOEN) and Ecojesuit, Philippines*

I still remember the night I read *Laudato si'*; it was as if the Church had found a treasure, the Book of Creation and dusted it off, opening it wide after several hundred years on the shelf. That night flowed with gratitude and the absolution I felt for the years accompanying the Pulangiyēn people in their love of the land. In time, Pulangiyēn young people came to understand the letter and were surprised that someone on the other side of the world understood their cultural struggle and the deeper search for integrity and justice. Eventually, Mercy Pakiwag and Jason Menaling, from the community met The Holy Father and understood the commitment to solidarity and reconciliation with creation that is a shared dream. Querida Amazonia continues to carry us forward with hope and vision beyond present obstacles.

Within days, *Laudato si'* broke upon the international scene gathering beautiful responses like a thousand flowers blooming. People affirmed what the document had affirmed: the cry of the people in their struggle to care for creation and how faith nurtures action. Many people too in the COP21 preparations expressed their gratitude as it contributed to the depth and the urgency to act. I remember joining the social forums in COP1 in Rio de Janeiro with a group of bishops and religious. Water, indigenous peoples and biodiversity were our concerns then, and now these integral concerns are at the centre of our faith action. Faith-based organizations have become a credible voice over the years and especially in supporting the voices of those in the margins.

The prayer of St Francis imbues us with our own scenes and brings all the sky, clouds, mountains, trees, birds and insects

into our prayer. Landscapes and seascapes, sunrise and sunset, the starry sky and the moonlit clouds as we work and rest, provide food, water and nourishment for the soul and strength for the mission. When we are rejuvenated in nature, of course we care and *Laudato si'* encourages us to come together and learn how to care together. Contemplation is not an abstraction of self from the world, but a refocusing and deepening of commitment to live and serve in the world. We need an 'escape' to reflect on and know ourselves freely in God's love. We need a space for envisioning where we can be before returning to our busy days, able to experience the reconciliation with profound and humble gratitude.

Jesuit novices are here on mission trials and one of them made a comment the other day as he took a banana from the stalk hanging on the post. He said the bananas were different and I said that *morado* (red-skinned bananas) were not available in the markets in Manila. But he meant something else. He said that when he eats a banana in the house, "it is mine, it has been bought and paid for. But here they are a gift from creation." Everything here we receive from the land. It is humbling, as the banana plant was grown and harvested over two years and freely given by the land and community. We all receive, often indirectly from the unknown and often underpaid farmer or labourer, and so we are called to give of ourselves in another way.

Another novice said, "seeing God in creation each morning is wonderfully transforming. The unexpected experience is in working with others and experiencing God labouring with us! We are friends, no difference between us; this is very clear in *Laudato si'* as we are called to labour in solidarity with all."

The conversations of young people and their call for action grows. This intertwines with *Laudato si'* the hope and action of 'speaking to power' is inspiring and grows in trust as the struggle goes on. Young people give life to *Laudato si'* and the Economy of Francesco is a great inspiration. We may realize there is much

more that needs to be done and may feel we are not the people for this work or are not in the places to make a difference, but we are challenged to keep making the connections.

Laudato si' helps people professionally by broadening the scope of discussion to be more inclusive of others and broadening interdisciplinary thought, and sharing further insights about how to operate or sustain the integral nature of our society.

The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region helps us all understand *Laudato si'* as a living, growing experience. To start the ecclesial processes of engaging the whole local church, its surroundings and environment opens a new door on the world of participation and reconciliation. Solidarity and synodality together throw new light on the growing church.

The oceans still lack a voice, the natural biomes that are not made up of catalogued specimens of biodiversity but living and evolving ecosystems including the climate that makes life liveable, but we refuse to change our systems of agro-extractivism and consumption. We still believe the folly that technology will solve everything and we do not have to change. Much technology is in many ways good and critical, but the technocracy will still be our undoing after the peaks of Covid. Transparency and the distribution of accumulated wealth need to be addressed. *Laudato si'* is alive and challenging us to further act.

What stands out today is the sense of solidarity that humanity must share if we are to save anything of our relationship with creation, if we are to reverse the destruction of forests, rivers and oceans, indigenous peoples and future generations. The struggle and pain at the margins where God is among the people and the peace of Christ living in the humble hearts of the downtrodden need the solidarity of all to get through the suffering and destruction.

We are not going to solve these problems in the next few years but we will with the coming generations as they continue

to struggle with them. What is new is the direct affirmation of the dignity of the struggle to care and reconcile, the rediscovery of servant leadership and the quiet celebration of how we can simplify our lives.

Protecting Papua New Guinea's Environment Inspired by *Laudato si'*

WENCESLAUS MAGUN

*Sea Turtles Restoration Project, Port Moresby City, Papua New
Guinea*

How has Papua New Guinea (PNG) stepped up to address Pope Francis' call in his second encyclical, *Laudato si'* to address consumerism, irresponsible development, environmental degradation and global warming?

Pope Francis' call comes at a time when PNG is at the cross-roads of managing its environment and natural resources sustainably against an economic-driven agenda of its government that is dominated by extractive industries.

Extractive Industries

According to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, out of a forest estate covering almost 71% of land area in PNG, approximately 2.9 million hectares of rainforest, or 15% of the total, is currently being degraded through logging, mining, petroleum, agro-industries, slash-and-burn and cattle farming¹. Nonetheless, major types of forest including dry evergreen forests, swamp forests, and mangroves have remained relatively stable since 1972.

The State of the Environment (SoE) 2020 report said that: "Most of PNG's development and budgetary aspirations can be seen as driving resource exploitation." It also stressed that most of the negative trends in the environment and nature are a result

¹ Convention on Biological Diversity, Country Profiles – Papua New Guinea <https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile/?country=pg>

of unplanned and unregulated development including commercial activities. This also applies to urban planning and development, which also needs its Strategic Environment Assessment to better address urban liveability and green spaces.

“With the corruption and poor management by bureaucrats and politicians being rife and government fast-tracking project developments, resource exploitation is becoming a major concern among many, including NGOs, development partners and local landowners,” the SoE 2020 report stated.

Logging and Mining

For more than 40 years since independence, well over 150 billion (K) has been generated from our large scale mining and oil production according to the 2014 National Human Development Report, Papua New Guinea. In addition, the 2016 Oakland Institute’s published a report, *‘The Great Timber Heist: The logging Industry in Papua New Guinea’*², that exposed widespread tax evasion in the country’s forest, and alleged that there is tax evasion and financial misreporting in the sector, leading to a loss of tax revenue exceeding \$100 million (USD) per year for the country.

This is further confirmed by PNGs first SoE Report 2020³. The report confirmed that, “large-scale commercial logging accounts for 48.2% of forest change in PNG while subsistence agriculture accounts for 48.6% of forest change. Special agriculture and business leases (SABLS) threaten the forest conservation and management efforts PNG is committed to because of poor capacity, monitoring and enforcement by regulatory bodies” (Barbon and Gowae 2013).

² Mousseau, F. (2016). The Great Timber Heist: The logging industry in Papua New Guinea. The Oakland Institute. <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/greattimber-heist-logging-industry-papua-new-guinea>

³ Papua New Guinea State of Environment Report 2021 – <https://png-data.sprep.org/dataset/png-state-environment-report-draft-layout>

The SoE 2020 report reiterated that, “even though logging contributed immensely to the development of the country, there still exists disturbing facts about the industry. It was reported that there is little or no profit made in the logging industry, hence 30% of the required income tax was not paid to the government, with transfer-pricing occurring within the industry” (The Oakland Institute 2016).

Fishing and Coral Reefs

In the fishing sector, the SoE 2020 report stated that offshore fisheries operations and management had improved as a result of PNG being handed a ‘yellow card’ penalty by the European Union (EU). This followed its export of tuna to the EU market, which indicated that the increased commercial harvesting of tuna species had put more pressure on offshore fisheries. It recommended that PNG strengthen its enforcement, compliance and monitoring of tuna stocks, in particular bigeye tuna and other endangered species, caught as bycatch. The report added that there was need for close collaboration in improving the overall statistical capacity of PNG which had declined in 2005-2013 as reported by the World Bank. In addition, the report stressed a need to monitor coral reefs and reef fish diversity and density to understand the trends in the inshore marine environment.

Livelihoods, HIV/AIDS, Governance, Climate Change & environmental degradation

Furthermore, the SoE 2020 report pointed out that despite the income obtained from the extractive industries there was a lack of sustainable livelihoods, special disparity, and low levels of formal education and literacy, nonexistent or deficient legis-

lation, policy and plans, conversion of economic growth into human development, extreme cultural diversity and poor databases for monitoring of MDGs.

This is exemplified by the reports statement, “Issues such as HIV/AIDS, increasing population and development activities that put stress on the environment and development, lack of governance, deficiency in services delivery, climate change, and environmental degradation were yet to be addressed in most sectors.”

Papua New Guinea on Environmental Protection

The government, in its attempt to ensure our natural resources and the environment are preserved and sustainably managed, whilst at the same time driving its economic agenda, developed several policies and strategies to align them with its Constitution. The fourth National Goal of PNG calls for us to preserve our natural resources and the environment:

“We declare our fourth goal to be for Papua New Guinea’s natural resources and environment to be conserved and used for the collective benefit of us all and be replenished for the benefit of future generations.”

According to the SoE 2020 report this goal calls for: “The wise use of natural resources and the environment in or on the land or seabed, in the sea and in the air, in the interest of development and in trust for future generation, the conservation and replenishment of the environment and its sacred, scenic and historical qualities, for our benefit and prosperity, and all necessary steps to be taken to give adequate protection to our valued birds, animals, fish, insects, plants and trees.” This sets the goal in the establishment of new policies and strategies to ensure our environment and natural resources are sustainably managed and used in PNG.

Campaign

What have I done to contribute towards achieving Pope Francis' call? As founder and national coordinator for Mas Kagin Tapani Association Inc. (MAKATA), a local charity, we campaign to save God's creation in PNG by ensuring that the root causes of human greed, which lead to creating ecological crisis, are abated.

I have led the campaign to stop sand mining in the Sumgilbar LLG, Madang Province on behalf of my group⁴. I have also played a key role in the campaign against seabed mining⁵. I continue to play a key role in campaigning to save the critically endangered leatherback sea turtles in ways that also meet the needs of local communities who share their beaches with the turtles. The leatherback sea turtle is one of the seven marine turtle species. They are protected under the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) and are protected under PNG's Fauna (Protection and Control) Act 1966/76. They are a keystone species, critical to the health of the entire marine ecosystem. Leatherbacks have been pushed to the verge of extinction, and have declined more than 90 percent in the past 20 years, primarily due to habitat loss⁶.

I call on all of us to respond to the call by Pope Francis in his encyclical, *Laudato si'*. We are obliged to save the earth as responsible stewards of God's creation.

⁴ Magun, W. & Gabi, D. (2021) Stricter standards needed for sand mining. March 19. Available at: <https://www.thenational.com.pg/?s=Stricter+standards+needed+for+sand+mining>

⁵ <https://youtube.be/HC4sb5a4pil>

⁶ International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – Red List <http://iucnredlist.org>

Laudato si' – Learning from our Indigenous Communities

CHIARA PORRO

Ambassador to the Holy See, Australia

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis highlights the ecological hazards affecting our indigenous communities, many of whom are facing pressure to abandon their homelands, but also their close and unique relationship with natural resources: “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” (*LS*, 146).

Indigenous populations are present in over 70 countries worldwide, from the Arctic to the South Pacific. They are the holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs, and possess invaluable traditional knowledge for the sustainable management of natural resources.

In Australia, we are lucky to have one of the oldest living cultures in the world, dating back more than 60,000 years. Our Indigenous population is made up of two distinct cultural groups – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – but there is great diversity within these two broadly-described groups exemplified by the over 250 different language groups spread across the nation.

Demonstrating their close connection to land, indigenous Australians' identities are closely linked to their 'traditional country' (geographical location) and they may describe themselves as 'saltwater people' for those who live on the coast, or 'freshwater', 'rainforest', 'desert' or 'spinifex' depending on their ecological environment.

But as *Laudato si'* highlights, this closeness makes indigenous communities among the first to experience the direct im-

pact of climate change. Desertification, salinization, drought, and flooding of their traditional lands and waters reduce these communities' access to food and medicines, among other things. These communities are among the most vulnerable, but they also have valuable perspectives and expertise to inform our response and pathway forward. *Laudato si'* reminds us of this invaluable expertise and the importance of ensuring indigenous voices are heard.

In Australia, we are drawing on this expertise to inform our approach to natural resource management. For example, we are combining artificial intelligence and other new technologies with indigenous knowledge to protect our unique biodiversity. We are working with indigenous rangers and traditional fire management techniques to manage bushland before the dry season to reduce the chances of uncontrolled bushfires. And we are including indigenous social and economic treatment of aquatic resources to inform water management and planning. Given this expertise, I am very pleased that an indigenous Australian is participating in the COP26 Faith Leaders' event, organised by the Holy See with the UK and Italy, which will be held in October 2021.

In Australia, even small gestures of recognition are important. We always acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, whether that is a Welcome to Country delivered at an event by a traditional owner or custodian of the land, or an Acknowledgement of Country, recognising and paying our respects to the people on whose land the event is taking place. This important gesture reinforces the connection to our common home and demonstrates our gratitude and care for the world we inhabit.

Every year, Australians celebrate the important contribution of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during NAIDOC Week, which will be held this year from 4 to 11 July. This year's theme – Heal Country! – fits perfectly with the message of *Laudato si'*. It calls for all of us to continue to seek greater

protections for our lands, our waters, our sacred sites and our cultural heritage from exploitation, desecration, and destruction.

The theme is beautifully captured in this artwork, by young Gubbi Gubbi artist Maggie-Jean Douglas that was selected for the celebrations. It is entitled “Care for Country” and shows different communities, animals and bush medicines, spread over different landscapes, to tell (as the artist describes it) “the story of the many ways country can and has healed us throughout our lives and journeys”.

Laudato si’ calls on us to reconsider our relationship to Mother Nature: from whom better to learn than those who have inhabited our lands from time immemorial and who have a unique bond with our natural environment.

Laudato si' and Intergenerational Solidarity

RIDHIMA PANDEY

Youth Environmental Activist, India

I live near the city of Haridwar in Uttarakhand, India – one of the most religious places in the world. It's located in the lap of the mighty Himalayas and the holy Ganges flows through it. Having grown up here, love for the environment has been a religion for me.

In 2013, when I was 5 years old, a devastating flash flood occurred in Uttarakhand. The Ganges broke its banks, destroying fields, houses and human life. I asked my parents the reason behind the flood and that was the first time when I heard about climate change and global warming. As I started learning more, I began to realise that the future of my generation is in danger because the generation that lived on this planet before us is taking more than it needs and is actively destroying our environment to fulfil its greed. That is how I made a decision to try my best to protect our Earth for my future and the future of coming generations.

Reading Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* moved me because in it he speaks of all that I have personally felt and witnessed in my young life. Usually, adults do not take children or our environmentalism seriously, but Pope Francis talks of intergenerational solidarity. He quotes the Portuguese bishops, saying "The environment... is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next". His views on education are particularly enlightening. For children like me, the idea of an education that creates 'ecological citizens' is the need of the hour. I am an environmental activist and care deeply for nature only because of the things I learnt in my childhood. My parents, who work in the environmental field in India, have always

taught me to protect and respect the Earth. Unfortunately, while our education system seeks to create 'good' citizens, it does not necessarily include environmental consciousness and sensitivity in its definition of what makes a good citizen. It gives information and talks of the good habits that the Pope also speaks of, but fails to instil these and motivate pupils to transform. So, I hope more schools and colleges will start speaking of ecological citizenship, so that more young people think of taking action to preserve the environment because, as he says, the environmental crisis is also a social crisis. Problems arise because we view it separately from society when, in fact, it is very much related to our everyday lives.

Finally, what I liked most about the Pope's letter is its hopeful tone. Even though he acknowledges that the world is in a crisis because of the challenge of climate change, he does not indulge in doomsday predictions. Neither does he restrict his views to law and policy alone. His vision is all encompassing, and it has room for everyone, including children. He asks people to follow good habits and bring about personal change and gives them hope that by doing this they can avert the crisis. This is a very important message, coming from him and I hope, like me, it inspires everyone to change for a better world.

Laudato si' – A Guiding Light

GOPAL D. PATEL

Co-Founder and Director, Bhumi Global; Co-Chair, United Nations Multi-Faith Advisory Council; Co-Chair, Faith and Biodiversity UN Coordination Group; Advisory Board, United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

Since 2009 I have worked at the intersection of faith, sustainable development and climate change. This work has taken me to different parts of the world – India, the United Kingdom, East Africa and North America. I've seen the impact of climate change first-hand, worked with local communities to build climate resilience, and attended international climate conferences organized by the United Nations.

During these years I have seen many statements issued by faith leaders and organizations from a variety of spiritual and religious traditions. The 2015 publication of *Laudato si'*, however, stands out from others as having the widest impact and significantly changing the environmental movement. The launch of *Laudato si'* was a seismic moment, whose the ripples are felt to this day across various disciplines.

Within faith communities, I often see *Laudato si'* used as a guiding light. It is something we return to time and time again to ground us in the hard work of addressing the environmental crisis. Within it we find solace and hope. It speaks to us with care and urgency. It comforts us, while also reminding us of the important changes we need to see in the world.

It is outside of faith communities, however, in gatherings of business leaders, development experts, policy makers and diplomats, where I have seen the biggest and most profound impact of *Laudato si'*. I have seen people's eyes light up and conversations take a more spiritual tone when *Laudato si'* is mentioned.

The ability of *Laudato si'* to speak across religious traditions and into non-religious forums is the greatest testament to the power and impact of its words and spirit. It is both a timely and timeless document. It speaks of our current environmental concerns but will also speak to future generations for many years to come.

For myself, *Laudato si'* marked a major turning point in my life. On its publication I was deeply moved by its message and felt the global Hindu community needed to offer something similar. With colleagues and friends across the world we drafted and issued the 2015 Hindu Declaration on Climate Change. Taking inspiration from *Laudato si'*, the Declaration was grounded in science, theology, and the urgency of the moment. The Declaration had over 60 signatories from Hindu leaders and organizations – the most ever for a Hindu statement on the environment.

The publication of this Declaration established the Hindu voice on the global stage for environmental concerns. To this day it is still referenced by Hindu and other faith leaders as the primary go-to statement on Hindu understanding of climate change.

I want to thank and applaud Pope Francis for his vision and work on the publication of *Laudato si'*. The environmental movement and the world are forever changed for the better because of his efforts.

Supporting the Community, Young people and Living Laudato si' in Action

ARNEL SANTANDER

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Philippines*

When young people in the community of Bendum are asked, what are they grateful for, they always tell you about the fresh air, water from the spring and the forest that surrounds them. These are expected answers and people from the lowland say, wow, how wonderful it all is, and how the cosy community appears.

But, like any other communities, the different layers of social and environmental reality call for cooperation and seek responses that are rooted locally. The context in rural communities is increasingly determined by shifts in financial arrangements with traders and so increasingly individualistic and less based on interdependent relationships of people. So, the context may be dominated by financial transactions and sometimes politics more than culture.

To deepen the understanding of these contemporary challenges, we designed Balay Laudato Si' Work Experience and Reflection Programme for indigenous young people, including a few from migrant families. This is a kind of accompaniment programme with the young people experiencing *Laudato si'* and cultural inspiration. While they started to learn daily patterns of learning and work, in the process they also learnt to express themselves by finding a way towards a common understanding of a shared vision.

Laudato si' profoundly expressed that "All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and

talents" (LS, 14). The programme provides us the following experiences and points for reflection to move forward.

The first experience is living in a *gaup* (ancestral domain). Every day, they witness the sunrise, work beneath the sun and watch the beautiful landscape on a peaceful night's sleep under the moon as Mars and Venus pass over above them. Little of this is ever grasped or considered as a moment of gratitude. The world knows how blessed it will be to live in a place where you feel not simply belonging, but are a part of the bigger picture of life. Indigenous people who still live in their own land are very familiar with this experience and this will remain a good story for them from this to the seventh generation.

In partnership with Jesuit Worldwide Learning, a distance learning programme, young people are learning to communicate across the world and how to participate in global networking and dialogue. Communication is fundamental in every culture and for the *Pulangiyan* in Bendum, when they learn English, they can keep sharing their stories for collaboration with government officials and the private sector, and participate in an open discussion for the life of the land.

The second experience is how supporting young people in reflecting on culture makes for cultural change. The context of the *dalēpaan* (long-house for temporary stays) and the Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education, a community-school provides an interesting story of the different challenges of encouraging them to keep up their studies and sustaining their interest in learning. A holistic approach to support is critical, and it is based on the daily guided life experience. When they start to share with confidence their opinions, feelings, worries or what makes them happy, it is important to guide them to form a clearer understanding of that which speaks for the common good.

The story of failure and how it can come out as a good story that others can learn from is an important life experience. In mainstream schools, failure is bad or used as judgement for poor

quality of performance. We have to acknowledge that life is not designed by default to be perfect. There is always a constant flow of trial and error until the right fit is found. Maybe some will find it very easy but for others it is difficult, while some just want to skip it and proceed on another course. Like in mission work, we may have an idea on how to proceed but it doesn't mean we know the answer to every circumstance. There is a construction and deconstruction of approaches based on reality time after time.

"Local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instil a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. They are also concerned about what they will eventually leave to their children and grandchildren. These values are deeply rooted in indigenous peoples" (*LS*, 179).

Supporting young people is a long-term process, because it is not only about teaching them necessary life skills but it is also a way of preparing them to be responsible for the future so they can be a generation that has a sense of commitment to continuing to pass on the cultural values, responsibility, and a readiness to take on leadership for service. It requires wisdom from the community so they can see it with clarity. This is a great challenge for all of us in being called for the mission.

The third experience is providing young people with a common vision of the dignity of work. Learning new skills can be easy for a young person who is interested able to perform in a work environment. Better skills also mean better income for the family, but what can experience beyond money? It is the dignity of work forming ourselves and contributing to good relations with others. Work as a service is a form of giving of one's talent and skills and indeed it is the other best version of self. It is part of culture to remember people who lived in the past and were doing great things in different fields and we do remember them,

maybe not how they looked exactly but what their actual contribution to the society was, and the real stories of their work and vision that led them to keep pushing their skills and knowledge to the limit.

The deeper meaning of the individual's contribution is also in providing service for the public good. Leadership of service requires a genuine intention and constant searching for a balanced decision for all.

The fourth experience is how the text of *Laudato si'* becomes part of young people's lives and can be used as a basis for open dialogue and advocacy to call for action with the community. *Laudato si'* at the beginning sounds strange for the young and does not mean anything for them. When they start developing their life experience and hear themselves talking about their aspirations, fears, hopes and the bigger reality, they realize what it takes to care for our common home. It is a question of where they are in the community and where the community is for them.

Laudato si' became an instrument for discussion, a guide for deepening reflection and an instrument for dialogue since it speaks of culture, shared responsibilities and commitment to sustainability of our common home. This present younger generation is worthy to be called to take on the challenge and its action will be supported through and through.

The fifth experience is how they weave their experiences together and believe in dreams. Understanding the value of dreams in culture, not simply for the individual but how they can be a guide for how to move forward, generating solidarity and cooperation in a common vision that is something new. If you ask young people now about what they are grateful for, they may begin to tell you about the simple life and the daily experience of peace that comes from within, as they begin to reflect on their lives and the action they want to take.

We Are the Laudato si' Generation!

ALLEN OTTARO

Founding Executive Director, Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA), Kenya

Three years before the publication of the *Laudato si'*: On Care for Our Common Home', a few of my friends and I had come together with the desire to explore Catholic Social Teaching. We were particularly interested in how Catholic Social Teaching invited us, especially as young people, to get involved in environmental action in our communities. We scoured the internet and found various resources – pastoral letters from various bishops' conferences and speeches and messages from Popes. We were particularly inspired by the 1990 and 2010 messages for the World Day of Peace, written by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI respectively. Both reminded us of our urgent responsibility to protect creation, particularly as Christians, and the importance of due consideration of future generations. While all the resources we found pre-2015 were of great help and interest to my group and I, the publication of *Laudato si'* was a turning point for our network – the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA). I will delve a little deeper into this turning point, but before that, I wish to share with you a short story about my personal journey and how it connects to *Laudato si'*.

As a young boy growing up in the small town of Njoro, situated in the Rift Valley province of Kenya, I marvelled at the green and forested hills I saw on the horizon. However, I was also perturbed by the many trucks that I saw ferrying hundreds of logs every day to local sawmills. As I grew older, I noticed the closure of the sawmills, which coincided with a dramatic change in the landscape I was used to as a young boy. The forests had been de-

pleted. Water shortages began to bite in Njoro, and the variety of vegetables and other farm produce in the local market declined. However, I still was not sure if I could do anything about the situation. After re-discovering my faith in my early twenties, Catholic Social Teaching helped me to see clearly the links between my faith and social justice concerns. Gradually, my passion to engage my faith in caring for creation became intense and more concrete in founding the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA) in 2012.

I vividly recall the anticipation with which my colleagues and I at CYNESA waited for the official presentation of *Laudato si'*. It was great to be able to follow live proceedings online. For us, *Laudato si'* was a moment of affirmation of our journey as young people, and a challenge to reach out to other young people and invite them to walk with us on the path to ecological conversion. We felt it was now easier to enter into dialogue with others, Christians or not, about our collective effort to care for our common home. Since *Laudato si'* was an encyclical, we felt that our desire to discover how our faith invites us to care for our common home, was being brought to fruition – and beyond just discovering. We could go a step further and act, with the sense of urgency that Pope Francis conveys.

Six years later, our journey continues, albeit with highs and lows. From a small band of young Catholics interested in exploring environmental issues from the prism of Catholic Social Teaching, we are now a growing network present in 10 African countries, offering training, networking and advocacy and environmental action planning – inspired and guided by *Laudato si'*. I remember several bus trips taken to visit various dioceses in different countries in Africa, to meet with diocesan youth leaders and other young people, to speak with them about *Laudato si'*, and getting the sense of being 'missionaries'. I also remember being completely at ease in international environmental meetings like the UN Environment Assembly or the UN Climate Con-

ference, while discussing with policymakers the moral and ethical dimensions of decisions under consideration, with *Laudato si'* as a reference point. This is the power of *Laudato si'*. Perhaps one of the greatest consolations I have received is to experience the possibility of bringing people together in a dialogue that *Laudato si'* has made possible. In 2019, a dream came true. For the 4th anniversary of *Laudato si'* and the 5th of CYNESA, and with the partnership of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the World Wildlife Fund's Regional Office for Africa, an international conference was successfully organized and held in Nairobi. This was no ordinary feat. Young people from Africa were centre stage, expressing not only their concerns, but their proposals for shaping our common future, while caring for our common home. It was a true moment of intergenerational dialogue, with young people stretching out their arms for guidance, cooperation and partnership with their elders. To see this 2-day gathering unfold on African soil, to witness scientists, faith leaders, civil society actors, diplomats and policy specialists, and community leaders enter into conversation, was for me a true expression of the vision of Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*.

Yet, as Pope Francis reminds us, dialogue is not enough without action that is the fruit of discernment and caring for the most vulnerable in our communities. In my view, plenty of potential still exists to transform our lifestyles, to be innovative and to ensure that the poorest in our communities can live in dignity. As a young African, I am convinced that young people have it in them to realize this potential. It is my hope that young people receive the support they need, and that as the *Laudato si'* Action Platform takes off across the world, we will all remember the words of the Pope: "Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the suffering of the excluded." We are the *Laudato si'* Generation!

Laudato si', Mother Earth and Pakistan

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Just when, on May 24, 2015, His Holiness Pope Francis was signing *Laudato si'*, alerting the whole of humanity to the urgency of protecting Mother Earth from the serious threat of global warming, an unusual climate change event was waiting to strike my homeland. Barely 20 days later, my dear Pakistan suffered one of the deadliest heat waves of recorded history. Between 17 and 24 June, our southern province of Sindh – of which Karachi, my hometown, is the capital – literally baked under the sizzling sun. The temperatures rose in the range of 41-49°C, causing ~2,000 deaths – one thousand in Karachi alone – mainly from dehydration and heat stroke. Poor zoo animals and a huge number of cattle also perished according to reports in the local media.

The rare climate change event that rendered endless lines of dead bodies in the mortuaries of Karachi was a nightmarish sight, difficult to behold for a second. I had the misfortune to see one of the morgues as part of my duty as a journalist. The death and damage were not easy to forget. I carry the trauma with me, but along with it the realization that the environment cannot be taken for granted and that I need to be an agent of change in whatever capacity I can. But 'how' was the question for me – a commoner not holding a position of authority. Allow me to say here that *Laudato si'* served me as a good guide in this context, suggesting that attempts at change can start with oneself. And it does not necessarily mean attempting great change, but small things – like changing how to eat, dress, read, live, travel and interact with others, before starting to contribute to bigger, more serious tasks aimed at caring for Mother Earth. Delivered five

years back, the message has made an enormous contribution towards making us Pakistanis more environment-friendly individually and collectively.

All in the Same Boat

Meanwhile, the terrible heat wave of June 2015 in Pakistan coincided with similar events in other parts of the world like California's most severe drought in a millennium; the heat wave in Europe that saw temperatures soar to an unprecedented 45°C; and Myanmar's worst flooding in decades, affecting one million souls. The near simultaneous events proved that we humans are all in the same boat no matter where on the globe we live, that Mother Earth is our common abode faced with a serious climate crisis and that we should work for the collective good, in our personal and professional capacities. This, for me, sums up the *Laudato si'* call.

The cited climatic upheavals emphasize the pertinence of what was actually a wake-up call delivered by Pope Francis well before the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the United States had declared July 2015 as the warmest month ever recorded for the globe. The Pope's call also preceded, by half a year, the Paris Agreement that "aims to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to limit the global temperature increase in this century to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing the means to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees."

We all know that global warming and environmental protection are not new concerns. Mother Earth had been in distress long before the calamities mentioned above occurred, but nobody was ever bothered. While there was much talk on the subject, there was no action. So, the Holy Father took it upon himself to raise his prophetic voice in order to create awareness

about the plight of Mother Earth. Concerned about the state of the “divine gift to mankind” and about how “we want to leave our common home as a heritage for our children”, His Holiness sent an encyclical to churches all over the world meant to convulse all those who matter out of their deep slumber over the growing environmental challenge.

The Pope’s Message as I See It

To me, the Pope’s message for humans is pretty clear: Mother Earth is suffering. And it is we, her children, who are hurting her. Conscious or naïve, we are doing everything we can to turn her gentle moans of discomfort into shrill cries of agony, dragging her to the grave piecemeal.

- We are cutting trees to reduce oxygen supply to Mother Earth, depriving her of the cold and humidity required to produce rains so that she can keep cool, and causing depletion in food resources due to reducing the amount of water available for irrigation.
- We are polluting her lands by releasing waste from our homes, our shops, our factories, our agricultural lands and our industries – littering it as far and wide as we can and spreading health hazards.
- We are poisoning her waters with domestic and industrial solid and liquid waste as well as oil spills from fossil fuel extraction, and commercial shipping – depriving life to aquatic creatures.
- We are contaminating her atmosphere – the air – through vehicular soot; harmful emissions from manufacturing industries; pollutants released from household activities like the use of detergents, paints and other such items; and toxins from the application of pesticides and fertilizers for agriculture.

- We are digging her up and parcelling her into urbanized tracts of lands and sprawling residential complexes for us to live in with peace and security – achieved only through polluting fossil energies (coal, oil, gas), deforestation, loss of freshwater resources, added air pollution, etc.
- We impose mining on her – inflicting erosion and sink-holes; causing air pollution; contaminating *soil* as well as underground and surface water; and bringing about loss of biodiversity.
- We are deafening her senses through the various types of noises like from road, rail and air traffic; construction activities; appliances like generators, fans, washing machines; loudspeakers; gunfire; celebratory fireworks; songs and music; etc.

There is a need to realize that the consequences of human activities – those listed above and a lot more – are coming back to haunt humans themselves. These activities are causing global warming, which is resulting in crippling climate change events such as uncontrollable wildfires, devastating earthquakes and tsunamis, shattering cyclones and hurricanes, flooding triggered by glacial melting, persistent droughts, and intense heat waves. These are claiming the lives of 60,000 people every year globally, according to researchers Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, who are associated with the UK-based website *Our World in Data*. Mother Earth is already 1°C warmer and the temperature is certain to rise because destructive human activities, inimical to the environment, continue unabated.

Global Warming and My Homeland

How could my homeland be an exception to the consequences of human activities? It has had its fair share of calam-

ities and continues to do so. Despite the paltry contribution my country makes to greenhouse gas emissions, it ranks eighth among the countries most vulnerable to climate change – as measured by the Global Climate Risk Index 2021. The country has experienced 173 climate-related events between 2000 and 2019. Already cash-strapped, this poor Third World nation is losing more than US \$4 billion a year due to climate change disasters; and according to a report by the local Climate Change Ministry, it lost \$80 billion from 1996 to 2016 because of the climatic calamities. Over the past few years in particular, we have witnessed a considerable increase in the intensity as well as the frequency of extreme weather events. These events, since year 2000, include:

- 2000 Balochistan drought: A severe drought in the north-western province claimed the lives of more than 100 people while affecting 1.2 million people overall. Millions of animals also perished due to the accompanying famine. The town of Nushki that lies near the Afghan border was among the worst hit areas.
- 2003 Sindh flooding: At least 484 people died and 4,476 villages in the southern province were badly affected by terrible flooding triggered by above-normal monsoon rainfall. While Thatta district was the worst affected, Karachi also suffered urban flooding.
- 2005 Kashmir Quake: In what is undoubtedly the country's worst natural calamity, the Himalayan Kashmir region and the north-western parts of the country were jolted on October 8, 2005. The 7.8 magnitude quake sent around 80,000 people into eternal slumber and rendered nearly 3 million homeless, according to official reports.
- 2007 Cyclone Yemyin: Flash floods triggered by the cyclone resulted in the deaths of at least 730 people in the coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan in July 2007. Around 350,000 people were displaced, 1.5 million

were affected and more than two million livestock perished.

- 2010 Hunza Lake Disaster: A landslide in the biting cold of January at Attabad village in the Hunza Valley of northern Gilgit-Baltistan region led to ~40 houses sliding into the Hunza River resulting in the killing of 20 people. Debris from the landslide caused the formation of a large lake which threatened to flood downstream areas. Some 20,000 people were forced to leave their homes by June in the wake of this climate phenomenon termed Glacier Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). The lake is still there, having washed away a sizable portion of the Karakoram Highway and several houses.
- 2010-2014 Flooding: Flooding remained a regular climatic event from 2010 to 2014 in Pakistan hitting parts of Sindh, Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces, besides the Jammu and Kashmir region. More than 2,500 people lost their lives in the successive annual flooding while an overall 21 million people were affected. Livestock losses remain incalculable. Over 1.7 million acres of arable land were inundated in the 2011 flooding in southern Sindh province alone.
- 2015 and 2017 Heat waves: Some 2,000 people in Sindh, half of them in Karachi, succumbed to an intense heat wave in June of 2015 when temperatures soared as high as 49°C. Dehydration and heat stroke turned out to be the main causes of the deaths. The heat wave also affected Lower Punjab and Balochistan. The heat wave struck the southern parts of the country again with even greater intensity two years later, in April 2017. This one broke the temperature records for many cities for the month of April. Larkana experienced the highest temperature of 51°C, breaking the previous record of 50°C.
- 2020 Urban flooding in Karachi: Pakistan's financial cap-

ital located in its south received the heaviest single-day rain of its history in the last monsoon. 484mm rain fell on Karachi in August 2020, including 223.5mm in just 12 hours on August 27 – the highest amount of rain ever recorded in a single day in the city. The whole civic infrastructure collapsed, and it took several days for life to get back to normal. The death toll for the whole Sindh province stood at 136, with 300,000 people needing food assistance.

The climate catastrophes mentioned above are proof of why my homeland is listed among the top few countries most vulnerable to the impact of global warming, and why we need to take green initiatives – at personal, community and state levels – and set examples for others to follow.

Laudato si's Influence on My Country

Frankly speaking, not too many even look for the silver lining given the enormity of the challenge Mother Earth is faced with. However, the Pope's belief that "everyone can make a difference and achieve real transformation – one that really heeds the cries of the earth and of the poorest – if we work together as one to care for our common home" does show the light at the end of the tunnel.

This belief has turned out to be a real source of inspiration for a large number of people in Pakistan, especially those associated with Christian faith. The Catholic Church in Pakistan has welcomed it with an open heart and continues to participate regularly and actively in related activities. This includes:

The Pakistan branch of Caritas International mobilised schools and religious associations across the country to take action that aims to embody the Pope's vision of integral human

ecology. In December 2016, Caritas Pakistan launched the 'One Million Tree' project with the aim of planting one million trees in the country. However, such was the motivation that by November 2019, when the 'One Million Tree' project had ended, Caritas had planted 1,062,277 trees. Immediately afterwards, Caritas launched the 'One Million More Tree Plantation' project to combat global warming with plans to complete it in 2020-23. Tree plantation weeks are regularly organized in all major cities and towns of the country viz, Lahore, Karachi, Faisalabad, Multan, Quetta, etc – under the guidance and supervision of bishops.

Personally, I am part of a community project that aims to turn a barren tract of land – spread over eight acres or nearly 40 thousand square yards – into a family park. A team of volunteers, working under the guidance of an expert living in the community, carried out the colossal task of clearing the place of a huge amount of rubbish, after which the development and plantation work was formally inaugurated at a ceremony. We are enthusiastic about turning the place into a model park to make the neighbourhood cleaner and greener; offering space for people to jog, walk and socialize, promoting community cohesion and contributing towards efforts to make our common abode liveable.

Pakistan seems to have heeded the Pope's call in all its earnestness as the country attempts to adopt and implement a rather ambitious climate action plan under its very climate-conscious prime minister, Imran Khan. In its sixth year now, the worldwide green movement, inspired by the Holy Father, offers hope and infuses life in efforts to mitigate the sufferings of Mother Earth. Together we can and we will make a difference!

Part III – Science & Academia

Laudato si' – A transformational climate alliance between science and religion

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Pope Francis' *Laudato si'*, popularly known as the climate encyclical and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, are likely the two most influential writings for guiding humanity towards a sustainable pathway. This pathway elevates human dignity and natural wealth at least to the same heights as, if not higher than, material wealth. In this article, I will focus on the profound influence of the ideas and sentiments in *Laudato si'* on my personal approach to climate science and climate solutions.

Climate Justice and the Cry of the Poor

The most memorable statement in the encyclical for me is the one that urges: the Cry of the earth to be heard with the cry of the poor. To quote paragraph 49 of the encyclical, it implores readers to, "realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor* [emphasis added]" (LS, 49).

Beginning in 2005, I began attending and organizing climate impact meetings at the Vatican. These meetings sensitized me to the larger problems of the ecosystem and the poor. Just by being at the Vatican and by listening to the bishops and cardinals, it was slowly dawning on me, through osmosis, that I have some

responsibility to use my expertise and look into solutions to the climate change problem.

By 2005, I had just finished a 10-year long study on how air pollution was devastating the poorest billion living in south Asia. I began to look into the cry of the poor and this work is continuing to this day. My field studies in India and elsewhere have revealed to me that there are indeed three worlds existing side by side, in every city, every town and every nation. The first world is inhabited by the top one billion wealthy people, who live at the top of the energy pyramid and are responsible for more than 50% of the pollution of heat-trapping gases. The second world is inhabited by the middle 4 billion who are neither poor nor wealthy but somewhere in between living mostly in cities and towns. The poorest three billion live in the third world, and they fall into the bottom of the energy pyramid and contribute about 5% or less to the pollution of heat-trapping gases. The bottom three billion, who live in villages and city slums, are suffering the worst consequences of climate change caused by the top one billion and the middle four billion.

Integral Ecology of the Interconnected World

The most influential scientific and social thought (in my opinion) in the encyclical is the call for an integral ecology approach, according to which, the impact of environmental degradation on natural systems should be studied on an equal footing with the impact on social systems. In addition, this new approach calls for understanding and evaluating the interactions between the natural and social systems. To restate it in Pope Francis' words, "I suggest that we now consider some elements of an integral ecology, one which respects its human and social dimensions" (*LS*, 137).

The phrase *integral ecology*, by its very definition, symbolizes the interconnectedness of all things in nature with all beings.

It also recognizes how each one of us is interconnected with every other human being on this planet, rich and poor, young and old. The most dramatic example of the interconnectedness of people is the spread of the Covid-19. Infection in one remote part of the world in December of 2019, led to a pandemic with 130 million people infected and 2.8 million fatalities (as of 1 April, 2021). Climate change is another example of interconnectedness. Emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and chlorofluorocarbons, in any corner of the planet or from any mountain top, no matter how remote or how tall it is, disrupt the climate in every part of the world and impact every human being and every species.

How do local emissions of pollution cause global impacts? Let us take carbon dioxide emitted by fossil fuels. Once released to the atmosphere from the tailpipe of your car, about half of it stays in the air for more than 100 years. This half is circulated around the planet by winds and in a few years the CO₂ gas covers the whole planet like a blanket. A blanket keeps you warm on a cold winter night by trapping your body heat. The blanket of CO₂ traps the heat from the surface and the atmosphere and heats both the surface and the air everywhere, since CO₂ covers the entire planet. Let me summarize this interconnectedness in a more graphic manner:

COVID infection anywhere will lead to disease and deaths everywhere.

Heat trapping gases released anywhere will disrupt climate everywhere.

The Role of Science in the Encyclical

After the release of *Laudato si'* in 2015, Pope Francis was criticized by some as being out of step with science and med-

dling with science. I know from personal involvement with the encyclical that these criticisms have no factual basis. Far from it, science had a profound influence on the climate encyclical. Let me start with some facts. The Vatican and the Pontiff have the benefit of having under its wing the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, which has 80 of the world's leading experts in natural sciences, 21 of whom are Nobel Laureates in biology, physics and chemistry. This academy reports directly to the Pope and briefs him in all matters related to nature, ecology and human affairs. Very few, even most Catholics, catholic bishops and community leaders, know about this prestigious science academy.

A heart-warming aspect of the academy is that its members are chosen for their scientific excellence without concern for their religious affiliations. I am a member of this academy and was elevated to be a council member in 2016, although I am neither a Catholic nor a Christian. In fact, the President of the Academy (until 2019), Professor Werner Arber, a Nobel laureate in biology, from Switzerland is not a Catholic. I know of no religious institution that hosts such a diverse science academy embracing scientists from all cultures and all religious persuasions.

Several months before the publication of the encyclical, I was asked by Cardinal Turkson to review the climate change science portion of the encyclical. The church also contacted several other scientists to review the encyclical before it was published. The church took great steps to make sure its statements on climate change science were consistent with the prevailing views of scientists. To give one example, in the chapter on Climate as a Common Good, it concludes: "It is true that there are other factors (such as volcanic activity, variations in the earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity" (*LS*, 23).

The Pope was not meddling in science but rather took great care paying attention to scientific findings and shed some light on the human dimensions of climate change in unique ways. The encyclical went to great lengths to bring forth the moral imperative to solve the problem by those who caused it.

The Encyclical's Influence on Me

The encyclical had a profound influence on how I approached the climate problem the last 6 years. Let me elaborate on three.

Personal Responsibility for Climate Change: A year before his encyclical, Pope Francis convened a meeting of scientists in 2014 at the Vatican to ponder climate change. I had the honour of organizing this meeting of thought leaders from around the world along with the economist, Partha Dasgupta, and the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo. As co-chairs of the meeting, Partha and I proposed the title: 'Sustainable Nature and Sustainable Humanity'. Bishop Sorondo immediately approved it and appointed Archbishop Minnerath as co-chair with us; who in turn added another phrase, 'Our Responsibility' and the meeting title became '*Sustainable Planet, Sustainable Humanity and Our Responsibility*'. This addition had a profound impact on me, since until then no meeting dealing with climate change that I had attended or organized in the previous 40 years had made "Our Responsibility" the primary theme. We posed the following three questions to the forty attendees. Are humanity's dealings with nature sustainable? What is the status of the human in a world where science predominates? How should we perceive nature and what is a good relationship between humanity and nature? The invitation had a personal message from the Holy Father "today no one in our world feels responsible; we have

lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters.” Until that May 2014 Vatican meeting, I was one of those who did not feel responsible!

On 6 May, the last day of the four-day meeting at Casina Pio IV, the home of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Bishop Sorondo passed a small slip to me which simply said: “The Pope will see you all now”. I, along with the 40 colleagues from the meeting, hurriedly made the 10-minute walk to the car park of Domus Sanctae Marthae, the residence of Pope Francis. During that walk, Bishop Sorondo informed me that I have to summarize the major outcomes of the 4-day meeting to the Holy Father, and that I had all of two minutes to do so. When I protested to him about the impossibility of this task, he, along with the Pope’s close associate, Juan Grabois, suggested I tell the Pope what I presented at the meeting on who is responsible for climate change pollution. Pope Francis got out of a small car and headed directly towards us. I was completely disarmed by his compassionate smile and I gave my briefing to the Pope in the car park. My 2-minute car park pitch was along the following lines. We are all concerned about climate change; about 50% to 60% of the climate pollution is due to the wealthiest one billion people in the planet; the poorest three billion, who have negligible impact on the climate pollution, will suffer the worst consequences of climate change caused by the wealthiest. The Holy Father, who listened carefully, asked me what he could do about it. I replied along the following lines: “Holy Father, you have become the spiritual and moral leader of the world, and in this capacity, you can ask people to be good stewards of the planet”. A year and 12 days later, the *Laudato si’* encyclical written by Pope Francis popularly known as the climate change encyclical, was completed and released shortly thereafter.

My Responsibility – Climate Justice: As a teenager during the late 1950s, I had watched my grandmother cook with dung and firewood and cough incessantly after each cooking session.

She lived in a small rural town in south India. Forty years later, during the late 1990s, I conducted a major field experiment with aircraft, ships and satellites in the Arabian sea off south India and documented the massive atmospheric brown clouds over most of India and the surrounding ocean. About 40% of the pollution was from cooking with firewood and dung! It turns out, there are about 3 billion people around the world who could not afford fossil fuels and met basic needs such as cooking using firewood and dung available at no cost, but they paid severely for it with their health. About 3 million people out of this 3 billion die prematurely every year from the inhalation of the deadly cooking smoke. I started Project Surya in 2007 to document with more precision the magnitude of the cooking smoke and its effect on people's health. After the 2014 Vatican meeting, I dedicated myself to solving the problem by providing clean stoves to rural women in South Asia and Africa. I was able to convince my two daughters (one an engineer and one a social scientist/activist) to take on this project for their careers¹.

My Responsibility – Bending the Curve – Climate Solutions:

In 2015, I was asked by the President of the University of California system (comprising 10 campuses) to assemble a team of climate experts and come up with solutions to the climate change problem. I was able to recruit 50 experts in natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. We worked feverishly for 9 months and released a report with 10 climate solutions, five months after the encyclical. The 10 solutions were grouped under five pillars: Science, Societal Transformation, Governance, Technology; and Ecosystem management. What was unique about the 'Bending the Curve Report' is the emphasis it placed on societal transformation and the emphasis on environmental/climate justice. The report resulted in the University of California creating an education protocol, 'Bending the Curve: Climate Solutions', to educate over a million climate stewards. It is now

¹ <http://www.projectsurya.org>

taught in many campuses in the US and abroad, and plans are being made to take it worldwide.

Transformational Science-Religion Alliance

Pope Francis followed the encyclical by forming a global alliance of scientists, policy makers and faith leaders, and organized a series of meetings with the United Nations, including its Secretary General and with mayors from around the world to explore the links between climate change, social exclusion, slavery, and poverty among other social issues. It was at the Mayors' Summit; he came directly towards me at the stage and hugged me... my first papal hug since 2004 when I was elected to the Pontifical Academy by Pope Saint John Paul II. My first thought after the hug was that the Pope is signalling to me that he has done his part and it is now for the rest of us scientists to do our part.

My involvement with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and in particular with Papa Francisco has immensely influenced my approach to climate change mitigation, particularly the issue of 'Our Responsibility'. I am now fully aware that I am not only responsible for climate pollution, but also responsible for mitigating the pollution. An alliance between science, policy, and religion can have a transformational impact in slowing down climate change drastically. Pope Francis started this alliance and it is now up to us to continue it at the grassroots level. I have now started (with my colleagues) interfaith gatherings at the local level with scientists and policy makers. My reasons for believing in the positive impact of such an alliance are listed below:

- Religion and science both desire the protection of creation or nature
- Religious gatherings offer a non-political forum for discussing climate change. This addresses the politicization

of climate science in the US and probably other countries. If climate change information is provided in an unbiased manner in every church, mosque, synagogue and temple we have a good chance of getting massive public support for solving the problem.

- Due to the delay of taking meaningful action to slow climate change, it has become a major ethical, moral and equity issue. The first major ethical/moral/equity issue is that our children, grandchildren, and future generations will suffer from climate change due to our pollution. This is an inter-generational equity issue. The other equity issue is intra-generational equity of the poorest three billion suffering the consequences of our pollution. Again, religious gatherings offer the most natural setting for discussing and remedy such ethical/moral problems affecting most of humanity.

Climate Change to Climate Disruption

2015 also marked a major transition in addressing global warming. The planetary warming crossed the threshold of 1°C, making the planet hotter than any climate it had witnessed in the last 150,000 years. About 125,000 years ago, the ocean temperatures exceeded 0.6°C and this was sufficient enough to increase sea level by 5-7 metres. Teaming up with my colleagues at the University of California at San Diego and Texas A&M University, we have predicted that the planet will cross a dangerous threshold of 1.5°C by 2030... yes, in 9 years from now. This is due to the link between warming and weather/climate extremes, many hotspots around the world are experiencing disruption of the weather/climate systems. Examples include the Arctic for temperature extremes, the Amazon, California, the Mediterranean, South Africa and eastern Australia for droughts

and fires, Western Europe and the Middle East for heat waves, and coastal areas for sea level rises and coastal erosion. Agriculture yields and water security are threatened worldwide. These weather extremes have killed over 600,000 people worldwide and displaced over 3 billion people, living mostly in the world of the poorest three billion and the middle 4 billion. An increase in planetary warming from 1°C in 2015, the year of the encyclical, to 1.5°C by 2030 is a 50% amplification of the warming. If the weather extremes also amplify by 50% in frequency or intensity or both, the cry of the poor could extend to the middle and wealthiest populations and in my hope, the cry of the entire world along with the cry of the ecosystems will finally motivate our world leaders, wealthy corporations and foundations to take the sort of drastic actions necessary to bend the warming curve and bring it below 1.5°C before 2050. Solutions abound and we have time, another 15 to 20 years, to bend the curve and thus avoid the suffering and crying of generations yet to be born.

Laudato si' – A Reflection from a Teacher's Angle

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Born and raised in Ghana, West Africa, I sometimes have memories of old, of my father's work in banking which made us move around quite a bit, living mostly in urban settlements. I have vivid memories of the reality of dwelling in the city while suffering from occasional "closure" of taps due to water shortages. This experience has personally taught me about the essence and value of water to daily living since my youthful days and would, as a spark, light up my own understanding of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* which I reflect on in this write-up.

After my undergraduate studies, I came to the United States to pursue a graduate degree at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. Upon completion, I was offered a position as Youth Minister and subsequently became a Director of Religious Education with the Archdiocese of Washington for over 18 years, working in parishes and training both catechetical leaders and Catholic school teachers before relocating to Ohio in 2012. Since then, I have been working at the University of Dayton's Institute for Pastoral Initiatives (IPI) as a Curriculum Design Specialist and Adult Faith Formation Coordinator, designing and facilitating online faith formation courses, extensively travelling to train catechetical leaders of partner dioceses across the world, and participating in conferences also around the globe. In a nutshell, I have literally been a teacher all my adult life, and thus, make my reflection on *Laudato si'* a teacher's perspective or insight.

The University of Dayton is a Catholic Marianist University and as such, offers a number of undergraduate students a mi-

nor course in the form of *Forum for Young Catechetical Leaders* (FYCL). It attracts students from diverse departments: Education, Engineering and Business in addition to the College of Arts and Sciences. We, therefore, prepare students to be catechists or Catholic School teachers through the FYCL program. As a lecturer, I had largely concentrated on doctrine, formation, methodology and pedagogy until the release of *Laudato si'* whose initial reading touched a nerve and caused my change of trajectory regarding themes to teach. Simply put, I could not read *Laudato si'* and not be perturbed; I was shaken to the core, and I needed to ensure that these students under my care would go into the world cognizant of how they (and their interactions with others) could bring significant changes to the treatment of the earth, our *common home*.

It is no secret that Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* took the world by storm in 2015 for highlighting significant climate issues and bringing to the full view of all the growing environmental challenges facing the globe. It became markedly evident that we could not sit on the fence any longer; there was a need for attitudinal change, a change which had to begin with us, as the Holy Father courageously declared;

A change in lifestyle could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power. This is what consumer movements accomplish by boycotting certain products. They prove successful in changing the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production. When social pressure affects their earnings, businesses clearly have to find ways to produce differently. This shows us the great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of consumers. (LS, 206)

Whether societal or structural, change can only begin with each one of us. To respond to this clarion call meant me doing

something too, that future catechists and Catholic school teachers who went through our programmes became much more aware of these challenging climate issues. Among the plethora of problems discussed in *Laudato si'*, I immediately settled for water as an issue to deal with, connecting it to my youthful experience in Ghana. When I read: "Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Sources of freshwater are necessary for health care, agriculture and industry" (LS, 28), and then read about the water crisis in Flint, Michigan (which is not far away from Ohio), and which, in fact, had dominated the news headlines in the US for some time, I knew I had to effect some changes in my pedagogy². Consequently, I made a paradigm shift to incorporate "Water" in our coursework for several semesters by teaching students to be aware of global climate issues in the context of Catholic Social Teaching.

Development of Lesson Plans

Just like handing on the faith unadulterated as a catechist, I decided to consciously incorporate the themes of *Laudato si'* in my methodology with the view that what students learned would impact the lives of their future students and set in motion a domino effect. Working alongside other colleagues, I planned themes for a two-year period as a start. I engaged students in discussions regarding the use of water across the globe, narrowing it down to the United States and the Midwest in particular. So, for a typical semester, we look at water, its responsible use, storage and possible causes of pollution. We follow these discussions with practical solutions both for our current times and the future.

Water is life-giving and it is said to cover about 71-75% of the earth's surface. According to the FAO, "water is a finite re-

source,” without which, the world will be “a barren wasteland”¹. Working with the FYCL students, we brainstorm ways of using water that may cause harm to the environment, but which do not readily come to mind because they are part and parcel of our daily chores. For example, we discuss the use of water in washing machines and how different kinds of detergents find their way back into water bodies, thus causing pollution. Once students understand the harmful products that are unknowingly used in homes, they have a greater sense of seeking out the best biodegradable products for future use – already leading them to paths of exploration and discovery for better results. Students then state at least one scripture passage referring to water, for example, the separation of water and dry land in the creation story in Genesis 1: 9-10. They are then made to link these themes to specific paragraphs of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC)² in order to connect the various themes of water across significant documents of the Church: Sacred Scripture, CCC, and *Laudato si’*.

FYCL students have been touched in varied ways in our discussions, expressing the desire to implement relevant issues in their own lesson plans. We have had several occasions to discuss situations in Africa, Asia, Central and South America. No doubt, the situation in Flint, Michigan, had been an eye opener to many of us³. Some of the students initially reading the quotation below had thought that it had nothing to do with the USA, only to discover quickly that it had everything to do with it, as in Flint, Michigan;

¹ United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization
<http://www.fao.org/3/u8480e/U8480E0c.htm#Water:%20A%20finite%20resource>

² National Resource Defense Council *Flint Water Crisis* | NRDC
https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdcr/VFlintCrisisRep-F-Edited3-13-17_554317_7.pdf

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church (2019). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.) Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

One particularly serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances... It is not only a question of industrial waste. Detergents and chemical products, commonly used in many places of the world, continue to pour into our rivers, lakes and seas. (*LS*, 29)

In the realization that water problems exist everywhere, it has afforded us the opportunity to discuss the *Catholic Social Teaching* on *stewardship* focusing on official and civil responsibility at Flint and our own individual responsibility towards the resources of the earth.

Apart the *Forum for Young Catechetical Leaders*, we developed an online course, *Discovering Integral Ecology in Laudato si'*, offered at least twice a year, to draw attention to Pope Francis' call for introspection, and for finding ways to mitigate our precarious actions towards the earth. Catechetical leaders and Catholic School teachers benefit immensely from participating in this online course. Having jointly-facilitated the initial offering of this course, it was apparent that we needed leaders in all spheres of life who understood the import of *Laudato si'*, and who would not fail to work out methods for improving our environment.

Catholic Social Teaching and Students Responses

Catholic Social Teaching highlights matters concerning the relationship between God the creator, the human community and the earth we inhabit. Basically, we are to build good relations with one another while also being responsible as earthly dwellers. As noted by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it

is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation". In light of this, during a 2019 interview with Cardinal Turkson, I sought to know how the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives could tackle the dual crises of ecological education and conversion in light of Pope Francis' statement "one complex crisis which is both social and environmental". The Cardinal noted that, "conversion of the human heart leads to the wellbeing of the environment", and further explained that "at creation, three levels of relationships were established: between God and the human person, between the human person and human person, and between the human person and creation. These three levels of relationships are basic and must guide our relationships." Cardinal Turkson affirmed what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has always taught:

"God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other." (CCC, 340)

Together with students, we have brainstormed viable ways of responding to Pope Francis' question, and how responsible use and maintenance of water could lead people to a better understanding of the Church's teachings. Students discussed this particular paragraph in the encyclical at length:

"What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? ... What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? It is no longer enough, then, sim-

ply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us." (LS, 160)

Students have offered valuable insights based on our discussions. Here are but a few: the awareness of the disparities of a common denominator such as water, a determination to champion water causes in their vicinities, as well as support non-governmental agencies which seek the good of those without clean and fresh water, the desire to make the general public fully aware of climate issues, not just water, the need for institutions such as seminaries and houses of formation to form climate conscientious priests and religious who will eventually lead parishes, the need for all Catholic educational institutions to teach *Laudato si'* as part of a core curriculum and encourage other Catholic institutions to create courses based on *Laudato si'* and in adherence to the Social Teaching of the Church. Indeed, students have opened my eyes to other horizons that I, as a teacher, prior to this, had not yet considered. The very fact of listening to their perspectives gave me hope for a better future. My eureka moment was that other colleagues could do likewise and incorporate the themes of *Laudato si'* in their classes and courses.

Stewardship

Looking generally at the responses of students, one gathers a sense that our own journey with and through *Laudato si'* has given us a fresh perspective of stewardship. Our interconnect-edness calls us not only to be good stewards but to be good and caring stewards. Good stewards take on the responsibilities and full obligations of managing and rendering appropriate accounts; basically and strictly they do what is required. Good and

caring stewards, on the other hand, go beyond mere stewardship. They are affected by the plight of others which causes them to change priorities. Referring to the example of water, good and caring stewards would strategize in ways that ensured their daily actions caused no harm (water pollution) to anyone or anywhere else. Or, advanced countries could assist developing countries to repair damage done to the environment, clean up chemicals dumped into rivers for mining and assist in recycling used water containers. As good and caring stewards therefore, we must stand in solidarity with others no matter the circumstance and this, is aptly noted by Pope Francis, "We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God's plan." (*LS*, 86) Solidarity is standing together with others as creatures of God. As a Catholic educator, I am called to see myself within the bigger picture and not only as an individual seeking my personal good and interests. One frequently hears of the common good; but, caring about others is participating in their good. This should, therefore, drive good and caring stewards to seek the common good with environmental sustainability at heart. May all of us become good and caring stewards to drive our nations and states to develop capacities for a better future for the globe.

Conclusion

People often speak about future generations; however, this current generation is of utmost importance in observing the right methods of interacting with and treating our planet. In my Interactions with students, it has become evident that action is needed now, not tomorrow, to pre-empt any future catastrophe. Considering teaching as an art and a vocation, I have found it my responsibility to create awareness among students about climate challenges which are global in nature. By teaching the theme

of “Water,” I have been able to clarify aspects of *Laudato si’* to students while likewise getting to know their personal insights and thoughts regarding such matters. Among other things, I have discovered more profoundly that *Laudato si’* is firmly steeped in the Catholic Social Teaching which calls for some concerted effort in the ordinary sphere of life to moderate our use of earthly resources. In relation to water, for instance, we can regulate its use to avoid it being misused, make it available, accessible and prevent it from being polluted. Our engagement with *Laudato si’* has opened our own eyes more broadly to the interdependence that exists in creation, the profound sense of human stewardship and the value of recycling and reuse.

When all is said and done, how would history judge this generation? It seems the younger folk already have. But there is still time to turn around this tenuous crucible of fragile elements that could stifle the very breath out of us. If we see the planet as a gift – a gift, we have received and a gift to be shared – we may develop the attitude of gratitude. We have a responsibility to the next generation, to right the wrongs of the past. It is true that “once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others...the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” (*LS*, 159). Care for our common home is not solely for an individual, a community, or even one country. I have come to realize through teaching that care for our common home is a duty placed on the shoulders of all; it is an imperative of the moment that calls all hands to be on deck.

Laudato si' – Six Years Later

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To introduce a brief reflection on *Laudato si'* and its impact on me over the last five years, I need to emphasize the historical contexts that have changed our world and the consciousness of so many people around the globe. Our lives have been affected by the rapid and severe climate change taking place on every continent and by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has claimed millions of lives worldwide. In addition, the rise of autocratic and populist governments and, simultaneously, of white supremacy movements has contributed to the increase in fear and anxiety brought on by social chaos, economic losses and disparity, and severe challenges to health and human safety.

As I think back to when I first read the encyclical five years ago and the many times I have re-read the document, which was required reading in my ethics classes, one component continues to challenge me: Pope Francis' call to examine our thinking and attitudes toward the earth today. My first observation relates to "reading the signs of the times" and what is happening to our planet. For me, this encyclical gave life and narrative to the concern for the created world and the many challenges caused by climate change. The second observation that affected me was Pope Francis' emphasis on inequality, especially regarding inadequate housing for the poor of the world, people of colour in particular, who often find it difficult to access means of wealth accumulation and thereby find and secure a suitable home.

During the last five years, we have been made starkly aware of systemic inequities that often reflect the sin of racism and, in this case, environmental racism, which threatens the home own-

ership that people of colour may have attained over the last two generations. "The destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement. Every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in 'lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies.' Authentic human development has a moral character" (LS, 5).

Laudato si' was widely received, especially in the ecumenical world and across religious denominations, in large part because it speaks to the heart and soul of our world today. Pope Francis calls us to reflect more deeply on what is happening in our world, especially to our "common home," or "mother earth," as so many native peoples refer to it. To begin to realize what is at stake, I find myself looking at the many ways that society and certain cultures encourage us to look at the world solely as property; everything is for sale. Pope Francis understands that our relationships to material things, people, and the environment are often based on a choice for maximum personal gain rather than the common good. It is refreshing to hear his call to examine our actions and reflect on the moral quality of our choices – on our ways of being in the world. According to the philosopher Michael Sandel, "We live at a time when almost everything can be bought and sold. Over the past three decades, markets – and market values – have come to govern our lives as never before".¹

Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis identify the attitude of consumerism as a kind of seduction that obscures our

¹ Sandel, M. J., & Anne, T. (2012). *What money can't buy: the moral limits of markets*. Macmillan, p.5. Sandel claims we have lost a sense of the morality of the market. "The financial crisis did more than cast doubt on the ability of markets to allocate risk efficiently. We also prompted a widespread sense that markets have become detached from morals and that we need somehow to reconnect them" (p. 6).

ability to be honest with ourselves in terms of our choices and values. We tend to think that, if we can afford something, then we have the right to possess it. We need to address these attitudes of consumerism and possession, which pervade our daily lives and are reflected in our cultures. Pope St John Paul II addresses the issue of consumerism in what he refers to as the “ecological question” in *Centesimus annus*. He claims that consumerism is the reason for environmental devastation. “In all this, one notes first the poverty or narrowness of man’s outlook, motivated as he is by a desire to possess things rather than to relate them to the truth, and lacking that disinterested, unselfish and aesthetic attitude that is born of wonder in the presence of being and of the beauty which enables one to see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them.”²

Sean McDonagh provides a historical context for *Laudato si’* in the work of Pope Francis, that is consistent with previous pontiffs. Pope Francis enjoins us to not only think about these issues but also to make decisions that reflect a new way of being in the world – a way rooted in a new vision and a new hope that embraces our world as sacramental. Francis is also consistent with his own spiritual journey. According to McDonagh, “From the outset, he made it clear that concern for the poor and creation could be central themes of his pontificate”.³

I particularly appreciate Francis’ emphasis on the world as sacrament. “As Christians, we are called ‘to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless

² John Paul II, “Centesimus Annus: On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (John Paul II, 1987),” in O’Brien, D. J., & Shannon, T. A. (Eds.). (2016). *Catholic social thought: encyclicals and documents from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis*. Orbis Books, § 37.

³ Francis, P., & McDonagh, S. (2016). *On Care for Our Common Home, Laudato si’: The Encyclical of Pope Francis on the Environment*. Orbis Books, p.14.

garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet'". (LS, 9) We are called to retrieve and renew a vision of a redeemed world – all of it, not just humanity, as part of our faith life. For the first time, our faith tradition calls us to recognize the integrity, sacredness, and beauty of the non-human created world.

To achieve this vision, we need to be conscious of the world as integral to all human development. For me as a Christian, such consciousness requires that I see the world differently. Our journeys will be richer, more hopeful and life-giving if we can imagine ways in which God calls us not only to "know" the world but also to "love" it. In doing so, we become part of a new creation story in which we recognize the essential, inherent dignity and sacredness in every part of creation.

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis calls us to reflect on beauty, awe, and wonder. He often speaks using the imagery of a closed fist, which represents the walls we build around ourselves, and the open hand, which depicts the letting go of walls that preclude any openness to truth and, ultimately, God.

"If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled." (LS, 11)

On a practical level, we need time for reflection and the motivation to look inward. Often an experience of beauty, expressions of love and care, and acts of compassion prompt us to "look within". Many people affected by the COVID-19 lock-

down shared the experience of having time to reflect or fret. Many expressed that working from home provided time and space not absorbed by commuting and eliminated the stress related to long and tedious travel. For people who find it difficult to adjust to quiet and silence, however, the isolation was troubling. Another common experience was that family meals became more of a priority and were a time of sharing and being present to one another.

Many people continue to express the need for more quiet time in their lives and the opportunity to “see” things in a new light or understanding. We long to retrieve the beauty in our lives and wonder at the world as sacrament. Pope Francis reminds us to examine the soul of our contemporary world and offers us a way of connecting our contemplation with action. He calls us to recognize that the earth is suffering and that our redemption and that of the universe are inextricably linked.

I am reminded that, in many American Indian traditions, the world is a sacred hoop or circle of life – a circle of kinship and relationships with all animals. Every being in the circle has dignity and unique virtues to contribute to the whole. In addition, one need not fear the wilderness, as it is inhabited by one’s relatives. Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna Pueblo/Sioux Indian inspired me many years ago with a description of a world of relationships that I think might help us appreciate Pope Francis’ invitation to see the world differently. “The American Indian sees all creatures as relatives (and tribal system relationship is central), as offspring of the Great Mystery, as co-creators, as children of our mother, and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole. ... At base, every story, every song, every ceremony tells the Indian that each creature is part of a living whole and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their participation in the whole of being.”⁴

⁴ Allen, P. G. (1992). *The Sacred hoop: Recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions: With a new preface*. Beacon Press, p.59, 61.

Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, SJ, provides a similar description of traditional African creation stories. "A generic term for creation is Life. Human beings, animals, plants and objects of nature are all imbued with life. This belief is at the origin of the much-talked-about African respect for creation: life as it is present in creation is sacred. ... Based on this awareness of their affinity with creation or nature, one of the primary concerns of Africans is harmony with nature, a balanced relationship with the entire universe."⁵ We are joined to a larger network throughout the world that see things differently, that hear the cry of the earth and the poor. This, too, is an awesome reality to contemplate.

Pope Francis reminds us, as did Pope Benedict, that many of us were formed by a culture that emphasized our relationship with the world was one in which "everything is simply our property." Such a claim has been evidenced in untold harm to our personal relationships with other people and the non-human world. For me, the call to embrace a new spirituality that places me within a larger creation is a rather awesome reflection. It summons me to examine how and what I consume in terms of contributing to the life and wellbeing of the planet. One practical way in which I have embraced this call is in my attitudes toward my salary, the property I own, and the wealth accumulated in my retirement benefits. I prefer to consider these as resources that I am a steward of rather than referring to them as "mine." As a steward, I have a responsibility to use these gifts prudently and lovingly for others in need, to make changes in what I consume, and to contribute, however I can, to reversing the harmful effects of climate change.

As I stated above, the impression of *Laudato si'* that impacted me the most was the insight and awareness that the attitude we have toward the earth is also reflected in our ignorance and inaction in understanding why and how so many people, especial-

⁵ Orobator, A. E. (2008). *Theology brewed in an African pot*. Orbis books, p. 48.

ly the poor and people of colour, lack affordable housing. Our attitude of consumerism is operative when it comes to attitudes toward the poor and systemic racism. It is evidenced in practices and policies that devalue the lives and wellbeing of people of colour. The recent killings of unarmed black people in the United States have made us all examine the “system” that has enabled and protected such cruelty and brutality for centuries.

In many ways, this encyclical and the pandemic have made me much more aware of the challenges of achieving the common good for all, including the earth. For me, this last year has been like tearing a bandage off a wound that will not heal until we address the root causes of the infection. Systemic racism is like a wound. I realize that this claim goes far beyond the issue of affordable housing. Providing equitable and affordable housing for all is a system issue and it requires further reflection on how we got here in our thinking and what we need to do to change some of our assumptions and attitudes. The issue of systemic racism is complex and complicated; in many ways and for many people, the practices and policies of systemic racism are invisible and unexposed.

As American Indian communities say, “All things are connected”. I will focus this next brief analysis on an often-understated reality: fair housing opportunities. Francis’ environmental critique follows upon his concern for the soul of our world communities, especially related to the lack of housing. In the United States, as in other countries, issues of unfair policies and laws regarding equal housing opportunities for all citizens is a much larger and more complicated reality of systemic racism. Climate change frequently affects the poor and people of colour, reflecting persistent racial injustice and “environmental racism” – that is, environmental injustice that occurs within a racialized context. Carl Zimring claims that “waste management practices in the United States reveal the constructions of environmental racism. Since the end of the Civil War, American sanitation systems,

zoning boards, real estate practices, federal, state and municipal governments, makers and marketers of cleaning products have all worked with an understanding of hygiene that assumes that 'white people' are clean, and 'non-white people' are less than clean". This assumption is fundamental to racist claims that are detrimental to the rights of people of colour to a healthy and safe environment.⁶

"Lack of housing is a grave problem in many parts of the world. ... Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families. This is a major issue for human ecology" (LS, 152). The history of housing in the United States is one of discrimination. Safe and affordable housing has been deeply affected by racial discrimination against people of colour, as evidenced by the real estate industry's practices and policies, which undermine black homeownership, and the role of banks in the criminal subprime mortgage scandals that helped set off the global financial crisis of 2007–08. These scandals in the housing market in the early part of the twenty-first century caused the loss of homes and property, which led to evictions and the rise of homelessness. In addition to these practices, there is the reality of 'redlining' [denial of services to specific neighbourhoods or communities] as a form of control.⁷

⁶ Zimring, C. A. (2017). *Clean and white: A history of environmental racism in the United States*. NYU Press, p.217-222. In *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), Isabel Wilkerson also addresses the issue of "purity versus pollution" in our thinking about race. Wilkerson's comments reflect my experience of being missioned to Florida in 1965. "In Florida, the books for black children and white children could not even be stored together. African-Americans were prohibited from using white water fountains and had to drink from horse troughs in the southern swelter before the era of separate water fountains. All private and public human activities were segregated from birth to death, from hospital wards to railroad platforms to ambulances, hearses, and cemeteries" (p.116).

⁷ Ta-Nehisi Coates writes of growing up in Baltimore in a community that clearly depicts the painful, sinful, and dehumanizing realities that many people of colour must live with day after day. "The black world was expanding before me, and I could see now that that world is a photonegative of the people who believe they are white. 'White America' is a syndicate arrayed to protect

Professor Anita Hill illustrates the personal tragedy of treating people of colour as “property.” Hill claims, “For me, home is inextricably linked to the story of how my family, in one generation, went from being property to owning property. ... Nothing better represents the twisted path of racial and gender equality in America than the search for home as a place of refuge, financial security, and expression.”⁸ The attitude of treating another person as “property” has re-emerged through our attitudes toward migrants. People of colour are referred to as less human and less deserving of a safe and affordable home. How do we challenge ourselves to recognize the unconscious bias of race in our attitudes toward immigration and redirect resources to the poor and people of colour – just for starters!

So many people of colour, especially African Americans, are affected by practices and policies that frequently do not protect the living and learning environments of the people who live in communities with high levels of pollution, poor water systems, lack of access to safe and adequate public transportation, and other injustices. Harriet Washington addresses the tragedy of chemical impairment caused to unknown communities of colour. “In short, African Americans and other marginalized Americans of colour are preferentially affected by chemicals known or strongly suspected to lower intelligence because they are far more likely to live in sacrifice zones – communities assaulted by environmental poisons and hazards.”⁹ It is important to real-

its exclusive power to dominate and control our bodies. Sometimes the power is direct (lynching) and sometimes it is insidious (redlining). But however it appears, the power of domination and exclusion is central to the belief in being white.” *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 42.

⁸ Hill, A. (2011). *Reimagining equality: Stories of gender, race, and finding home*. Beacon Press, xiii-xv.

⁹ Washington, H. A. (2019). *A terrible thing to waste: Environmental racism and its assault on the American mind*. Hachette UK, p.12. The rise of dominance as an attitudinal stance toward the earth and people of colour is all part of a connected worldview that privileges relationships of superiority and inferiority rather than an attitude inspired by the creation story of a sacred world created by God and redeemed through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, in

ize that environmental hazards have a disproportionately greater impact on racial minority groups, though it is not a burden borne solely by them. I encourage the Vatican and Catholic bishops' conferences throughout the world to work with communities of colour to shine a spotlight on such practices and policies and work with local communities to address these rapidly growing problems of racial inequity.¹⁰

which all creation has been called to reflect the beauty, goodness, compassion, and mercy of a loving God, who calls us to be co-creators of a more just and peaceful world.

¹⁰ See McGreevy, J. T. (2016). *Parish boundaries: The Catholic encounter with race in the twentieth-century urban north*. University of Chicago Press, for a helpful guide to exploring this complex issue and attendant controversies; it connects religious history with the histories of urban America and twentieth-century race relations. Of particular interest is civil rights and Vatican II (p.155–73).

US Responses to *Laudato si'*: Personal, Ecclesial, National

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In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis challenges the entire human family to care for God's creation as a moral imperative, a religious obligation, and a global call to action. He particularly challenges the US Catholic community to "ecological conversion" (*LS*, 217). With its economic power and global influence, the United States has unique responsibilities to hear and respond to "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*LS*, 49). Five years after *Laudato si'*, the US response is both impressive and incomplete, gaining momentum and not fully integrated in the Church. It is making a difference, but is still falling short in responding to this "complex crisis which is both social and environmental" (*LS*, 139).

Personal Responses: Different Generations, Differing Perspectives

We share a commitment to Catholic social teaching and the message of Pope Francis but represent different generations and perspectives on *Laudato si'*.

John Carr: I was a sceptic and am a convert to care for creation as a central element of Catholic social teaching. Early in my work at the US bishops' conference, I saw environmental concerns as a diversion and secondary theme in Catholic social thought. I saw the environmental movement as a positive force for change and as an affluent, elite and powerful set of interests.

I feared greater Catholic focus on the environment could dilute and divert limited Catholic resources and impact from more 'central' priorities of protecting human life and dignity and pursuing justice and peace. I accepted stewardship of creation as a biblical value but did not see environmental issues as integral to Catholic social doctrine. I believed Catholic social ministry should focus on poverty, peace, and racial and economic injustice as core commitments that were often ignored by the environmental movement.

I was wrong. I was wrong because Scripture and our Catholic faith clearly call us to care for God's creation. I was wrong because the lives and dignity of the poor and vulnerable are most threatened by environmental damage and neglect. I was wrong because Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and now Pope Francis have made clear that care for creation is a fundamental moral issue and an essential Christian obligation. With wise leaders and good partners, I helped launch the USCCB's Environmental Justice Programme¹, the Catholic Climate Covenant² and an interfaith National Religious Partnership on the Environment³ to educate and advocate on environmental justice and climate change. In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis clearly brings together care for the earth and the "least of these" (Matthew 25) destroying my false dichotomy between social and environmental justice and calling us to reject a "throwaway culture" which threatens both (*LS*, 22).

Anna Misleh: Unlike John, I have always seen care for creation as an integral part of my Catholic faith. My parents made clear the connection between caring for our natural environment and caring for the poor. I often felt closest to God in nature. I first read *Laudato si'* in June 2015 on a flight home from Or-

¹ <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/environmental-justice-program>

² <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

³ <http://www.nrpe.org/>

egon after a visit with my grandparents and a pilgrimage along the Columbia River⁴ with its waterfalls and deep green forests. I remember taking a deep breath as I finished the final section. For me – a young, American, millennial, Catholic woman – *Laudato si'* was an affirming, challenging, hopeful call to action.

Younger generations of Americans are ready to address climate change, and *Laudato si'* makes clear that Pope Francis and the Catholic Church offer us leadership and hope. Many young people see the connection between human-made climate change and other injustices like racism, health equity, poverty, homelessness, migration and the refugee crisis. Pope Francis links these injustices and insists on “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and ... protecting nature” (*LS*, 139).

Caring for our natural environment is an essential part of my personal Catholic faith, just as much as other principles of Catholic social teaching. As I finished *Laudato si'*, I felt as though Pope Francis was affirming something that was already a core part of my Catholic faith: the conviction that caring for our common home is essential to both living out the Catholic faith and addressing the throwaway culture and culture of exclusion that plagues our global society.

Ecclesial Responses: Impressive, But Not Integrated

Many Catholic leaders, especially women religious and their communities as well as insightful lay leaders, were proclaiming and living out the messages of *Laudato si'* long before it was written. After 2015, these efforts took on a sense of new urgency and visibility, and other organizations made care for creation a more visible priority:

⁴ <https://www.wacatholics.org/stay-informed/the-columbia-river-water-shed-caring-for-creation-and-the-common-good>

- The *US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)*, encouraged by the teachings of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, adopted two groundbreaking statements: *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*⁵ (1991) and *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*⁶ (2001). The USCCB also integrated “Care for God’s Creation” into the widely used *Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching*⁷ and its *Faithful Citizenship*⁸ statements outlining Catholic priorities in public life. The Conference joined with interfaith partners in education and advocacy environmental, economic, and climate justice, and helped launch the Catholic Climate Covenant. The 2015 release of *Laudato si’* led to national press conferences, briefings with Congress and the White House, and 110 statements from US bishops. The Conference continues to offer helpful resources and tools, but over time the Conference’s advocacy on climate change seems to have been less visible compared to other priorities.

In addition, the USCCB’s *Catholic Campaign for Human Development* has invested almost \$6 million USD over ten years in community organizations protecting the lives, dignity, land, and neighbourhoods of those who are poor, vulnerable, and experience environmental racism and injustice.

- Many US dioceses have undertaken new initiatives in response to *Laudato si’*. These are just a few examples:

⁵ <https://www.usccb.org/resources/renewing-earth>

⁶ <https://www.usccb.org/resources/global-climate-change-plea-dialogue-prudence-and-common-good>

⁷ <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>

⁸ <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-title>

- o The Archdiocese of Atlanta developed a comprehensive *Laudato Si'* Action Plan⁹ with activities for individuals, families, and parishes.
- o The Diocese of Richmond¹⁰ is seeking to become the greenest US diocese, pledging that 70% of its buildings will have solar energy by 2024.
- o The Diocese of Stockton has an impressive Environmental Justice Project¹¹, focusing on environmental health for farm workers and others in California's Central Valley.
- o The Archdiocese of Chicago hosts an annual *Laudato Si'* Week¹² as part of its Care for Creation Ministry that advocates and educates on climate change and *Laudato si'*.
- *The Catholic Climate Covenant*¹³ was created in 2006 by a dozen Catholic organizations, including the USCCB, to bring new urgency to Catholic teaching on the environment and action on global climate change at national, parish, and individual levels. 12,000 parishes and other organizations have signed the St Francis/*Laudato si'* Pledge, committing to prayer, education, and action; 500 Creation Care Teams have been formed in parishes; and each year, more than 1,500 parishes, schools, and other groups use the feast of St Francis and Earth Day to share *Laudato si'* and the moral dimensions of climate change. A growing Catholic Energies programme helps Catholic institutions plan, finance, and carry out solar and energy efficiency projects.
- *The Catholic Health Association* is making care for creation and sustainable healthcare part of their common

⁹ <https://archatl.com/catholic-life/refreshatl/>

¹⁰ <https://richmonddiocese.org/>

¹¹ <https://ejstockton.org/>

¹² <https://pvm.archchicago.org/human-dignity-solidarity/care-for-creation-ministry/laudato-si-week>

¹³ <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

work, offering resources, training, and programmes linking health care ministry to *Laudato si'* and environmental leadership.

- *Catholic Relief Services* integrates the message of *Laudato si'* into its development, relief, education, and advocacy efforts in the United States and around the world, including sustainable agriculture, development, and water projects; it also provides educational resources on *Laudato si'*.
- *Catholic Rural Life* has been a leader on care for creation, offering education, resources, and advocacy on sustainable agriculture, land, farmers and farm workers.
- *The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities* (ACCU) and a leading partner, Loyola University Chicago, created a plan for US Catholic colleges and universities to reach 7-year sustainability goals and undertake other academic, research, advocacy, and action initiatives which brought together their Catholic mission and the themes of *Laudato si'*. Our own Georgetown University has voted to divest from fossil fuel companies and committed to becoming carbon neutral and water positive by 2030 with “100% renewable power” by 2035. Georgetown created a new *Laudato si'* Professor of Biology and Environment and a *Laudato si'* Fund to support research, education, and action.

The USCCB has developed a summary¹⁴ of many other efforts related to *Laudato si'*. However, the message of *Laudato si'* is still not central, integral, or a priority in much of US Catholic life. Some of this is understandable as parishes, schools, and other structures struggle with the everyday demands of ministry including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and pastoral and institutional costs of clergy sex

¹⁴ <https://www.usccb.org/resources/summary-activities-laudato-si.pdf>

abuse. However, many are simply unaware of Catholic teaching or see these matters as peripheral, political, or beyond the claims of our Catholic faith.

US Catholic Attitudes: Positive, but Partisan, Polarized

Limited research on Catholic attitudes towards these issues suggests a paradox. Overall, US Catholics welcome Pope Francis' leadership and support efforts to address climate change. In a September 2015 poll¹⁵, 73% of Catholics approved of Pope Francis' comments on the Church's role in protecting the environment. A poll¹⁶ of US Catholics conducted after *Laudato si'* suggested both support and lack of awareness, reporting that more American Catholics agree with Pope Francis on climate change than disagreed (47% vs. 24%). However, 20% of Catholics were simply unfamiliar with his environmental efforts.

It is not surprising, but it is disappointing that US Catholic attitudes on environmental issues often reflect ideology and politics more than the message of *Laudato si'*. This message is too often ignored, neglected, or resisted because of divisions within the Church and resistance to Pope Francis' leadership and priorities among key leaders, institutions, and interests. Polarization in American political life too often undermines the mission and unity of the Church. Some influential elements of the US Catholic community, reflecting their ecclesial, partisan, and ideological preferences, insist that Catholic teaching on care for creation and even the leadership of Pope Francis are optional, or even harmful.

¹⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2015/09/22/us/pope-francis-poll>

¹⁶ <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/06/16/catholics-divided-over-global-warming/>

US Policy Shifts: Past Action, Recent Denial, and New Opportunities

United States policies on environmental protection and global climate change reflect and are exacerbated by political, partisan, and ideological swings in American life. In a dozen years, US policy has moved from accepting the science of climate change and taking steps to reduce it under President Obama to denying the human causes and impacts of climate change under President Trump. However, President Biden has recently declared¹⁷, “Pope Francis is right in *Laudato si’*” and said, “My faith teaches me that we should be a nation that not only accepts the truth of the climate crisis but leads the world in addressing it.” While there are substantial areas of agreement and serious disagreement, President Biden and Pope Francis could be partners in encouraging the world to deal with “this global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political...” (LS, 25).

Directions for Integration and Action

In light of these encouraging, disappointing, and sometimes contradictory responses to *Laudato si’*, the work of sharing its message and acting on its challenges needs to become stronger, broader, and deeper:

- We need to *integrate, not isolate* care for God’s creation as an essential dimension of Catholic faith and life. Most Catholic communities of faith will not focus on environmental justice as a centrepiece of their ministry, but almost all can integrate it into how they pray and worship, preach and teach, steward their resources, and serve the

¹⁷ <https://religionnews.com/2019/12/29/faith-to-restore-the-soul-of-our-nation>

common good. It is vital to begin with our faith, not policy, politics, or ideology.

- *Laudato si'* and Catholic teaching on God's creation need to be included more clearly in the curricula of *Catholic education, formation, religious education, and seminary preparation*. Believers cannot share and act on principles they do not know or have not been taught.
- In integrating *Laudato si'*, it is critical to *make connections* to other dimensions of our faith: scripture, saints, and traditional Catholic moral teaching and practice. In polarized times, it is vital to connect the message of Pope Francis to the powerful teaching of Popes John Paul II¹⁸ and Benedict XVI¹⁹ on care for creation as a moral imperative and Catholic obligation. Resisting a 'throw-away culture' can bring together protection of life and the earth, welcome for immigrants fleeing violence and climate change, and respect for the young, the old, and future generations.
- It is vital that bishops, pastors, theologians, and other Catholic leaders *learn from and listen to* "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*LS*, 49). Catholic efforts should be anchored in and formed by the experience, hurts, and hopes of those most affected by environmental injustice, those who are poor and live on the margins of society, and workers.
- Catholic education and advocacy should be *distinctive*. We are not the Catholic caucus of the environmental movement. We are a community of faith that sees care for the earth as a scriptural mandate, moral obligation, and work of faith. We should place a priority for the poor

¹⁸ http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

¹⁹ http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

and vulnerable, the defence of life, rights of workers, and pursuit of the common good at the centre of our efforts, challenging others to do the same.

- The Catholic community at every level must *practice what we preach and teach* about care for our common home. This requires action on how we use resources and property, and how we consume, invest, and participate in economic and public life. We need to be principled, persistent, and consistent examples of environmental commitment in action.
- We need to make a religious, moral, and political case for *restraint and sacrifice for the common good*. In the US, we sometimes seem to have lost the capacity to sacrifice for others or important goals. Our leaders rarely ask for sacrifice, especially from those of us who pursue more and more in economic life and advantage and power in public life.

US Catholics can rediscover the “Joy of the Gospel” and “protect our Common Home” by listening and learning, by making connections and resisting a throwaway culture. We need to take faithful action to care for God’s creation, protect the poor, and pursue the common good. In a divided nation, a world at risk, and a Church under challenge, living out the call of *Laudato si’* is a defining opportunity and essential obligation for the Catholic community in the United States.

Receiving *Laudato si'* in the United States: What We Have Done, What We Have Yet To Do

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The purpose of this article is to indicate some of the initiatives that have been undertaken by the American Catholic academic community, the hierarchy and movements within the American church in receiving *Laudato si'*.

Academic Community

For most American Catholic academics, the Jesuit periodical *Theological Studies* stands as the most prestigious of Catholic theological journals. It is most notable that within a year of its promulgation of *Laudato si'*, *Theological Studies*¹ devoted an entire issue to the encyclical. The articles ranged from “Everything is connected” by Reinhard Cardinal Marx, to “A Pauline Complement to *Laudato si'*” by Brendan Byrne S.J., to “Ecological Conversion: What Does That Mean?” by Neil Omerod and Cristina Vanin, to “Integral Theology as a Liberationist Concept” by Daniel P. Castillo, to “‘Sublime Communion’: The Theology of the Natural World: An Assessment of Possibilities and Limits,” by Celia Deane-Drummond to “Hydrology, Theology and *Laudato si'*” by Christiana Z. Peppard. Some of these same scholars have written monographs of their own about these related to issues raised in the encyclical.² In the “Editor’s Desk” editorial, Paul

¹ *Theological Studies* 77 (June 2016) 293-465.

² Among others, see Daniel P. Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2019) published in the

Crowley quotes one of the authors who stated that *Laudato si'* is "the most important encyclical ever written in the history of the Catholic Church."³

Among Catholic colleges and universities which have sponsored and continue to sponsor conferences on *Laudato si'*, St Thomas in Minneapolis was the first to welcome the encyclical with a conference co-sponsored by the USCCB and the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace (now part of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development)⁴. The Mission Statement of St Thomas University contains a paragraph about "Catholic Identity" from *Laudato si'* itself (*LS*, 210) subtitled "with the earth."⁵

Among several other important academic initiatives, I judge that a special note should be made of Creighton University (Jesuit sponsored) for their 2019 *Laudato Si and the US Catholic Church: A Conference Series on Our Common Home*.⁶ The opening address was delivered by Robert McElroy of the diocese of San Diego. Other speakers included Erie Lothes Biviano (College of St Elizabeth), Kenneth Himes (Boston College), Sacoby Wilson (University of Maryland), Fr Joshstrom Isaac Kureethadam (Vatican Dicastery for Integral Human Development) and Sr Patricia Siemen (Adrian Dominican Sisters).

In 2017, the Catholic Theological Society of America devoted its annual convention to *Ecology: Theological Investigations*.⁷ The plenary addresses were delivered by Christina Zenner Peppard on "An Ethic of Aridity: Theology, Ecology and Planetary Change," by Denis Edwards on "Ecological Theology: Trinitari-

"Ecology and Theology" series called "An Orbis Series on Integral Ecology," and the book that preceded the encyclical by Christina Peppard, *Just Water. Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2014).

³ *Theological Studies* 77 (June 2016) 293.

⁴ <https://news.stthomas.edu/human-natural-ecology-seminar-exploring-pope-francis-encyclical-environment/>

⁵ <https://www.stu.edu/about-stu/catholic-identity/>

⁶ <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/laudato-si-and-us-catholic-church-conference-series-our-common-home>

an Perspectives,” by Anne Clifford “Pope Francis; “*Laudato si’*” On Care for Our Common Home,” by David Hollenbach “The Glory of God and the Global Common Good: Solidarity in a Turbulent World.”⁷ Almost all of the “Topic Sessions” held at the convention concerned topics from or related to *Laudato si’*.

Several Catholic colleges and universities also sponsor regular seminars on a variety of current topics, eg The Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University. Since June 2015, over sixty of these seminars have concerned themes from the encyclical. The more recent ones have concerned interreligious dialogue and relating *Laudato si’* with *Fratelli tutti*.⁸ Also located in Washington D.C. is The Catholic University of America which houses *The Institute for Human Ecology*, whose phrase “human ecology” comes from Saint John Paul II despite the fact that the Institute was founded after the issuance of *Laudato si’*. None of the seminars offered by this Institute to date have ever dealt with *Laudato si’*.⁹ The Institute did hold a conference in 2018 on assessing the “Papacy of Francis at Five Years”¹⁰ and one conference in 2020 on *Fratelli tutti*.¹¹

United States Bishops

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has issued a number of well-timed and enormously useful tools for understanding and implementing *Laudato si’*. On the date of its issuance (June 18, 2015) the President of the USCCB, Archbishop Joseph Kurz, offered a public statement to the press

⁷ <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/issue/view/977>

⁸ <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/search?page=6&q=Laudato+Si>

⁹ <https://ihe.catholic.edu>

¹⁰ <https://ihe.catholic.edu/events/francis-at-five-examining-the-pontificate-of-pope-francis/>

¹¹ <https://ihe.catholic.edu/events/fratelli-tutti-engaging-pope-franciss-new-encyclical-on-social-friendship/>

about the encyclical followed by a full press conference with Cardinal Wuerl assisting.¹² Five years after this press conference the USCCB summarized the activities undertaken by the USCCB, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life, the Catholic Health Association, the Society of St Vincent de Paul and Catholic Climate Covenant (which will be addressed below) in an enormously impressive twenty-one page report. The initiatives (in English and Spanish) range from co-sponsoring academic conferences to discussion guides, tutorials for families at home, to postcards lobbying government representatives to favour ecological initiatives¹³. At the same time a review of the USCCB webpage for the Pro-Life Committee does not speak about ecology as one of their concerns. The major source for this impressive list of Pro-Life initiatives is Saint John Paul II, in particular his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1975).¹⁴

At the present time there is a debate among the US bishops about what emphasis should be given to abortion as “the pre-eminent” pro-life issue.¹⁵ Underlying this debate is a rhetoric of distinction and separation (“either...or”) rather than a rhetoric of inclusion (“both...and”). Certainly, many American Catholics find the argument about a consistent ethic of life, initiated by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin in 1983,¹⁶ to be reflected in the writ-

¹² <https://www.usccb.org/news/2015/archbishop-kurtz-welcomes-pope-francis-encyclical-laudato-si> and the film clip of the press conference itself: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZxwoloMe5s>

¹³ <https://www.usccb.org/resources/summary-activities-laudato-si.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.usccb.org/prolife/pastoral-plan-pro-life-activities>

¹⁵ <https://www.ncregister.com/news/why-us-bishops-place-preeminent-priority-on-stopping-abortion>

¹⁶ Shortly after delivering his lecture on the consistent ethic of life at Fordham University Bernardin was challenged and severely criticized by some of his fellow American Cardinals including James Hickey (Washington), John O'Connor (New York) and Bernard Law (Boston). It has been widely reported that the theological consultor for Cardinal Bernardin was Rev. Louis Cameli of the archdiocese of Chicago and the consultant to his critics was Rev. Romanus Cessario, O.P. (Ave Maria University).

ings of Pope Francis, including *Laudato si'*, which itself addresses abortion and invites us to a new synthesis (*LS*, 120).

At the same time the recently published (2021) document *Ecumenical and Interreligious Guidebook: Care for Our Common Home*¹⁷ is simply a stunning example of the kind of ecumenical work that can be done on the highest level of church authorities and leaders. A listing of its chapters can only indicate its breadth. It is a 'must read' for anyone of any faith tradition about the enduring importance of *Laudato si'*.¹⁸

In addition, some American bishops have taken notable leadership in their own (arch)dioceses on furthering the "dialogue" to which Pope Francis calls us in *Laudato si'* (no fewer than twenty-five times beginning in its opening paragraphs, specifically 3). A major and notable example is the initiative which (then) Archbishop Wilton Gregory took in the archdiocese of Atlanta and which is being implemented by his successor Archbishop William Hartmayer.¹⁹

Unfortunately, I judge that the extreme polarization in American government and in American public life as well as extreme (hyper) nationalism have a direct influence on the ideas, values and practices of American Catholics. The presidency of Donald Trump was unique in American history for a number of reasons. Catholic principles such as the "common good" and the "universal destination of goods" as reflected so deeply and thoroughly in *Laudato si'* have ceded to the emphasis on the "self," "private ownership" and the tyranny of an unchecked "free market." It is also no surprise that the Catholic Church imitates the polariza-

¹⁷ <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/resource/ecumenical-and-interreligious-guidebook-care-our-common-home>

¹⁸ The chapters are: Our Faith Tradition, Environmental Issues and Major Themes of Catholic Social Teaching, Some Practical Considerations, Hands-On Projects: A Few Examples, Models of Dialogue for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue on Creation and Earth Care, Homily Helps, Suggestions for Prayer and Meditation, Dates for Ecological Observances and Conversation and Resources.

¹⁹ *Care for Creation* | Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta | Atlanta, GA

tion reflected in ideologically framed ‘think tanks’ and media outlets. Clearly the better funded ‘lobbies’ are on the right of the political perspective. Further, it is hard to comprehend the mind of the US bishops when influential hierarchs supported the Trump presidency in obvious and callous ways (eg Cardinal Dolan from the pulpit of St Patrick’s Cathedral, New York City). The ‘trickle down’ effect of such confusion in episcopal leadership means that priests, religious and the faithful are left wondering who to trust, not to say who to believe, or who to follow? For some it is as scandalous as, do I follow the Pope or not?

Catholic Climate Covenant

The very first paragraph of their website states:

“In 2006 to address growing ecological awareness and the need to implement Catholic social teaching on ecology within the US Church, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) helped form Catholic Climate Covenant. Inspired by the USCCB’s 2001 statement on climate change, and supported by 19 national partners (which include the USCCB, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, the Catholic Health Association, congregations of religious men and women, and other national organizations), Catholic Climate Covenant helps US Catholics respond to the Church’s call to care for creation and care for the poor.²⁰

The inspiration for this very important initiative continues today with the highest quality programmes, timely resources (eg for Earth Day) engagement with the academic community (eg Creighton University) and an exemplary engagement with Christian and church teachings on ecology (not ‘just’ climate change) makes this nothing less than a stellar example of what lay people can do on the environment. It is affiliated with but not under the auspices of the USCCB.

²⁰ <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org>

For example under the section of the website entitled “Teachings” they include “Modern Voices,” “Pope Francis,” “The Popes,” “US Bishops,” “Global Bishops,” “The Church Fathers and Mothers,” “Jesus,” “Scripture,” “Climate and Population” and “Creation Care is Pro Life.”

Each of the other sections of the website is similarly comprehensive of their “Programmes,” “Resources” and “Newsroom.” Again an example from their website under “Programmes” contains information and suggestions about “Advocacy,” “Catholic Climate Ambassadors,” “Catholic Climate Declaration,” “Catholic Energies,” “US Catholic Climate Project,” “Creation Care Teams,” “Earth Day,” “Feast of St Francis,” “Hope for Creation,” “St Francis Pledge” and “Youth and Young Adult Mobilization.”

To Do

Allow me to complete this modest overview with four suggestions about where we might go from here.

- *Integral Ecology*. If there were one signature phrase that I judge encapsulates the teaching of *Laudato si'* it could be “integral ecology” (and all of chapter four of the document). Theologians such as the Australian Redemptorist, Anthony Kelly,²¹ and Dr Vincent Miller²² from the University of Dayton offers several ways of exploring what the Pope says and means by this phrase. The Synod of Bishops on the Amazon and its final document *Queridia*

²¹ See *Laudato Si': An Integral Ecology and the Catholic Vision*. (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2016) and *Integral Ecology and Fullness of Life*. Theological and Philosophical Perspectives. (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2018). It is curious that the contents of a particularly impressive chapter on the Eucharist (with the argument in the first book that Eucharist and eucharistic theology must be integral to “integral ecology”) (see Chapter 5: “A Eucharistic Ecology,” pp. 111-138) is totally neglected in the second book.

²² Miller, V. J. (2017). *The theological and ecological vision of Laudato Si': everything is connected*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Amazonia employed this phrase fully and thoroughly.²³ At the same time I still wonder if there is not more to mine from this phrase in terms of what it really entails and what can be expected from a conversion of mind and heart based on “integral ecology.” From my own specialization of liturgy and sacraments I have been disappointed that what Pope Francis teaches in paragraphs 233-37 about “Sacramental Signs and the Celebration of Rest” has found little (if any) resonance in subsequent magisterial and other teaching documents on ecology. If the liturgy is the ‘summit and source’ of the church’s life, I judge it should be part and parcel of what “integral ecology” means.²⁴

- *Theological Curricula.* Chapter Six of *Laudato si’* is entitled “Ecological Education and Spirituality.” That many Catholic colleges and universities are offering courses in ecology in increasing numbers is highly laudable and to be encouraged. But I judge that there is a parallel here with the way “ecumenism” was addressed after Vatican II. Some theological curricula began to offer courses on “Ecumenism.” However, others have evolved to the laudable position of ensuring that there are ecumenical and (to the extent possible) interreligious components to the existing theology and religious studies courses. The same should be done regarding the environment. In my own writing many have regarded the first chapter in my book *Models of the Eucharist* entitled “Cosmic Mass” to be just such a contribution.²⁵
- *Franciscans and Other Orders.* Saint John Paul II named St Francis the patron of ecology in 1979. Certainly, Pope

²³ “Querida Amazonia”: Post-Synodal Exhortation to the People of God and to All Persons of Good Will (2 February 2020) | Francis

²⁴ See my forthcoming book tentatively entitled *Ecology, Liturgy, Sacraments*.

²⁵ Irwin, K. (2020) *Models of the Eucharist*. Second Edition. (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2020) 23-48.

Francis has catapulted the *Poverello* and his followers to front-row status in implementing his ecological agenda. I would hope that the many branches of Franciscans would take up this opportunity and challenge in a sustained way. In addition, the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* deserves no less attention and care among Franciscans. At the same time there are other orders and religious communities in the church whose rules and charisms include ecology, for example the Benedictines. I would hope that salient points of the *Rule of St Benedict* would be raised up, synthesized and elaborated on as part and parcel of the Benedictine *labora* today. That some monastic communities are even now self-sustaining would be a powerful witness of the value of the monastic life for the whole church.

- *Post Covid Ecumenical Initiatives.* In my opinion there will likely be serious financial “belt tightening” in the budgets of the Catholic Church in the USA once the pandemic is no longer a daily threat to life itself. In anticipation of shrinking resources, it is not inconceivable that Catholic parishes may continue to consolidate and reduce pastoral services. One possibility regarding the Catholic Church’s teaching on ecology would be that local religious leaders sponsor seminars and events based, for example, on the document noted above: *Ecumenical and Interreligious Guidebook: Care for Our Common Home*. Both Saint John XXIII and the World Council of Churches many years ago said that churches ought not to do separately what they can do together. Attention to the environment would be a perfect example of adopting this premise. This might be the basis for a wholesale restructuring of social justice initiatives and some elements of Christian formation that churches can (and should) do in common.

Conclusion

As I conclude, one major lingering question for me is how well the teachings of *Laudato si'* have been welcomed by the American lay faithful. More specifically, I wonder to what extent mainline Catholic principles (again, for example, common good and universal destination of goods) now joined with concern for all “fellow creatures” who share “our common home” are raised up as examples in homilies as applications of the good news?

In my estimation there may well be a parallel with the Church’s teaching on the death penalty. As far back as The Holy Year 2000, Saint John Paul asked that the lights on and around the Coliseum in Rome be left burning when a planned execution was halted. This was cause for real celebration. A life was not lost. At the time, however, the majority of American Catholics opposed the Church’s position (most recently and forcefully affirmed in *Fratelli tutti* paragraphs 263-70). Since then there has been a steady reaffirmation of the Church’s position in papal statements and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and statements from bishops’ conferences which seem to have had an impact on American Catholics. Now the majority do not favour the death penalty. On March 24, 2021 the legislature of the state of Virginia voted to outlaw the death penalty.

Conversion of mind and heart takes time for us all, in this case those who preach from pulpits and those who preach by their daily lives in light of what they have heard in church. I would hope and pray that the superlative initiative taken on the official levels of Church life might truly ‘trickle down’ to formation programmes, parishes and homes. Things take time. But for the planet there is a moral urgency and imperative that causes some scientists to say that we are too late in “saving the planet.” My own sense is that this urgency is felt by far too few American Catholics. My hopeful sense suggests “at least not yet.”

Laudato si' – Concern for Our Global Commons

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With his groundbreaking encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis addresses key ethical challenges of the 21st century: climate change, poverty and inequality. This important document is much more than an 'environmental' or 'climate' encyclical as it points out the necessity to protect global commons such as the atmosphere, forests, global water cycle and oceans for the well-being of all people.

The timing of the encyclical's release – June 2015 – was a political statement and reminded the world community of its responsibility. It was published after the G7 Summit had concluded their meeting on decarbonizing of the global economy, and prior to two upcoming United Nations summits, where the Sustainable Development Goals and a new international climate agreement were to be adopted. According to *Laudato si'*, the older generations are running the risk of being remembered as the most irresponsible generation in the history of mankind. Yet, if it chooses to, it could also be the younger generation which courageously lived up to its responsibilities (LS, 165). Here Pope Francis is building on the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* from 1963, in which John XXIII made an appeal for peace to "all people of good will" at a time when the world was at the brink of nuclear war. Pope Francis raises climate change, global poverty and the deepening inequality to a planetary challenge of similar scope.

As such, he addresses his encyclical as an invitation to “every person living on this planet” to engage in dialogue (*LS*, 3).

Laudato si’ triggered a worldwide debate. The weeks after its release were marked by predictable reactions: approval from the environmental movement, rejection from parts of the conservative mainstream media and a deafening silence from the so-called climate skeptics.

Far more interesting were the reactions from the scientific community. Never before had Catholic social teaching received favorable editorials by renowned scientific journals such as *Nature* and *Science* in reaction to the release of an encyclical.¹ These journals commended in particular the Pope’s seeking dialogue with the scientific community, as was done, for example, with a conference organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in the spring of 2014.² Climate scientists confirmed that *Laudato si’* displays an accurate summary of the state of knowledge on the climate problem as assessed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), whose reports reflect the current scientific research status.

Climate change and the Catholic Church

The clarity and decisiveness with which *Laudato si’* is acknowledging the ethical challenges of climate change, poverty

¹ See editorials in: *Nature* 522 (391), “Hope from the Pope” (June 23, 2015); *Science* 345 (6203), “The Pope tackles sustainability” (Sep. 19, 2014); and *Science* 349 (6243), “The beyond-two-degree inferno” (July 3, 2015). In the latter editorial, the editor of *Science* Marcia McNutt writes: “I applaud the forthright climate statement of Pope Francis [in *Laudato Si’*], currently our most visible champion for mitigating climate change.”

² See the following conference report published by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: *Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility*. Vatican City (2015). Available at:

www.casinapioiv.va/content/accademia/en/publications/extraseries/sustainable.html

and inequality can only be appreciated when considering the previous hesitation of the Vatican to address anthropogenic warming. Until the publication of *Laudato si'*, climate change was only dealt with in a reluctant manner.

Three reasons may explain the Vatican's reticence to participate in the discussion on climate change in the past:³ First, it may not have wanted to express an opinion about the cause of global warming if there was no consensus in the scientific community to avoid a possible risk of damaging its moral authority. Secondly, the Vatican feared that the difficult issue of population policy, largely unresolved in the Church's social teaching, could resurface as population growth is, alongside economic growth, a driver of climate change. The third reason for the Vatican's hesitant approach to climate change may have been the actual power dynamics at play. Pope Francis is questioning the current global economic system which he holds complicit for climate change, global poverty and inequality – all of them threatening the foundation of the '*common home*'.

In the past, the Vatican has acknowledged 'natural' climate change and sought to counter it with greater emphasis on international development and support for the poor. Yet, it appears that in many poorer countries the limits of adaptation to global warming have been reached. Moreover, it threatens to undo the progress that has been made in overcoming poverty. The question of who should be tasked, and to what extent, with the mitigation of climate change was a question the Catholic Church had to respond to.

The reply was given with *Laudato si'*. In unconventionally direct terms, Pope Francis attacks the denial of climate change as an expression of veiled power interests. "*Veiled*" because such endeavors are not a quest for scientific truth but efforts to protect

³ These positions were clearly manifested in discussions which Ottmar Edenhofer had in 2008 with the then representatives of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

private interests where they are conflicting with the common good (*LS* 54, 135, 188).⁴ Francis emphasizes that the analysis and response to the climate problem should not be determined by the interests of the powerful but rather by the demand for global justice.

In principle, the encyclical is structured according to the three steps of *seeing – judging – acting*. The global environmental problems identified by science are recapitulated in Chapter I, interpreted in light of the biblical message (Chapter II) and explained in the broader context of the papal understanding of globalization and modernization (Chapter III). In Chapter IV, *Laudato si'* discusses ethical orientations, while chapters V and VI focus on the motives and approaches to action.

Climate change, poverty and inequality

The starting point of the encyclical is the scientific knowledge, as summarized in the reports of the IPCC, that climate change is caused by mankind through the burning of coal, oil and gas, through deforestation and through the emissions of other greenhouse gases. The encyclical emphasizes above all the consequences of climate change for the poor. As such, it points out that they are the first to be affected by global warming and hit the hardest, namely because they depend more than other segments of the population on agriculture and other ecosystem services (e.g., fisheries) for their livelihood. Also, they are not in the position to protect themselves effectively against increasing extreme weather events and water scarcity (*LS*, 25). Moreover, the lack of access to clean water, the loss of biodiversity and

⁴ On the position of the so-called climate skeptics, see also Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt. How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, New York (2012).

increasing air pollution, and their adverse effects on health are concerns for the Pope. He fears that the negative effects of global environmental change and resource use could lead to migration movements or even wars in the future (LS, 57).

Today, the carrying capacity of the planet is already being exceeded without the problem of poverty having been solved. Yet, it is important to highlight that the Pope does not see population growth as the main culprit. In his opinion, the inequitable use of existing natural resources is the root of the dilemma. The rich countries consume too much, without adequately sharing with the poor. To tackle this injustice, the Pope regards the mitigation of climate change as a prerequisite for an effective fight against poverty. The encyclical proposes no specific targets for climate protection. The international community, however, has already set the goal of limiting global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This target has far-reaching consequences as it limits the amount of CO₂ that may still be deposited in the atmosphere. And as a limited carbon sink, the atmosphere is still, and primarily, used by the rich countries.

The struggle over the global commons

The Pope declares the climate and the atmosphere to be a common good “*belonging to all and meant for all*” (LS, 23). The oceans and other natural resources should likewise be considered as global commons and protected by an appropriate system of governance (LS, 174). Thus, for the first time in the history of the Social Doctrine of the Church, the principle of the universal destination of the goods of creation is also applied to the global carbon sinks of the atmosphere, oceans and forests. In order to protect the poorest and to avoid dangerous climate change, these sinks must be prevented from overuse.

As shown in the IPCC's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C⁵ from 2018, limiting the increase of global mean temperature to well below 2°C requires that the remaining cumulative CO₂ emissions stay below 500 and 1,000 gigatons (Gt). An estimated 15,000 Gt of CO₂ are still stored in the ground in the form of fossil fuels. To avoid additional CO₂ deposits accelerating global warming, the majority of these underground resources must remain untouched. So compared to business-as-usual-scenarios, that is, a scenario without climate policy, staying below 2°C requires at least that some 80% of the world's coal and 40% each of gas and oil be left in the ground. If no effective methods to capture CO₂ during combustion and geological storage are introduced, the use of fossil resources must be restricted even more rigorously.⁶ However, if the larger part of the world's fossil fuel reserves must remain in the ground, the assets of the owners of fossil fuel resources are devalued or worthless (i.e. stranded assets).

This raises the question of whether a climate policy that intervenes with the property rights of owners of coal, oil and gas can be justified.⁷ If it is an overarching understanding that

⁵ Rogelj, J., D. Shindell, K. Jiang, S. Fifita, P. Forster, V. Ginzburg, C. Handa, H. Kheshgi, S. Kobayashi, E. Kriegler, L. Mundaca, R. Séférián, and M.V. Vilariño (2018): *Mitigation Pathways Compatible with 1.5°C in the Context of Sustainable Development*. In: *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)].

⁶ Ottmar Edenhofer, Christian Flachsland, Michael Jakob and Jérôme Hilaire, "Den Klimawandel stoppen. Es gibt nicht zu wenig, sondern zu viel fossile Ressourcen – sie müssen in der Erde bleiben," *Le Monde diplomatique: Atlas der Globalisierung: Weniger wird mehr* (2015).

⁷ See: Ottmar Edenhofer, Christian Flachsland, Kai Lessmann and Michael Jakob, "The Atmosphere as a Global Commons – Challenges for International Cooperation and Governance," in Willi Semmler and Lucas Bernard (eds.),

the climate is a global commons worth protecting, then private property rights to coal, oil and gas must be designed so that they meet the demands of serving the common good. With this clear positioning, *Laudato si'* is contributing to the development of the notion of property within Catholic social teaching.

In Catholic social teaching, the principle of the “*universal destination of the world’s goods*” has precedence over the right to private property (LS, 93).⁸ *Laudato si'* refines this principle by recognizing the overexploitation of global CO₂ sinks as an example in which the right to private property may be justifiably restricted (LS 23, 93–95). In this way, the current use of the atmosphere according to the “*might makes right*” principle is delegitimized.

The recognition of the atmosphere and the climate as global common goods could possibly have international legal consequences. In consequence, serious threats to the climate could lead to a legitimate demand for its protection. Some parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) appear to fear exactly that, given that they were reluctant to designate climate change as a global commons problem in the Fifth Assessment Report of the IPCC. In fact, in a footnote on the topic, the report states that the term “*global commons*” as part of the climate problem, has no implications for an international agreement or for criteria of international effort-sharing to climate protection.⁹ With *Laudato si'*, however, the Pope had the

The Handbook on the Macroeconomics of Climate Change. Oxford (2015) 260-296.

⁸ The position of the Catholic social teaching to these questions is articulated in: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Compendium on the Social Doctrine of the Church. Chapters 4-III and 10. Available on the Internet:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

⁹ The exact wording of the footnote is: “In the social sciences this [the climate problem] is referred to as a ‘global commons problem.’ As this expression is used in the social sciences, it has no specific implications for legal arrangements or for particular criteria regarding effort sharing.” See IPCC, “Summary for Policymakers,” *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change*.

courage to raise the status of the atmosphere as a global commons into the collective consciousness of humanity.

Climate protection and poverty reduction – are they mutually exclusive?

The encyclical does not propose an institutional design of restricting access to the atmosphere, and thus the protection of the poorest against climate change. From an economic point of view, the pricing of CO₂ emissions, through taxes or emission trading systems, is the most effective means to achieve this objective. The encyclical rightly points to the economic principle that market prices should adequately reflect all social costs (LS, 195). Yet today, considering the shortage of storage capacity in the atmosphere, the market prices fail to do this. By introducing CO₂ taxes or emission trading systems, these shortages as well as the cost of overusing the atmosphere are signaled to the markets. This, in turn, induces a shift in investment and purchasing practices at both the public and private levels. Essentially, these measures translate the scarcity of the common good atmosphere into the ‘hard’ language of the profit-oriented markets and thereby impose the required ethical framework.

A limitation of the amount of carbon that is stored in the atmosphere by means of CO₂ pricing will not only protect the climate, and thus the poorest affected by climate change, but it will also provide a new source of income by creating tax revenues or auctioned emissions permits. By flagging the atmosphere as a common good, these revenues in principle belong to all people and should accordingly be distributed in compliance with the principles of justice.

Contribution of Working Group III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Ottmar Edenhofer et al.]. Cambridge (2014) 5.

The revenues from CO₂ pricing could be used to provide the poorest with access to basic goods. A CO₂ tax reform could be carried out by national governments by means of international coordination.¹⁰ To give an example: were the government of India to charge ten dollars for every ton of CO₂ emitted, it could provide electricity, clean water, sanitation and telecommunications for more than 60 million people every year. The same applies to China or Mexico. CO₂ pricing is a potent means to be used in combating poverty.¹¹ A first step in this direction would be to abolish subsidies for fossil fuels—that alone would free up at least 550 billion dollars for investments to help the poor.

Indeed, these measures would meet one of the key demands of the Pope, namely to fight climate change and poverty at the same time. Yet, he does not consider all forms of CO₂ pricing as equally well-suited instruments. He expresses serious concerns about the use of emissions trading as he fears an ensuing speculation on the carbon markets could undermine the effectiveness of this instrument (LS, 171). Like almost all other documents from Catholic social teaching, *Laudato si'* engages in the discussion of specific reform proposals, though without claiming doctrinal authority in resolving scientific disputes. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Pope Francis reflects explicitly on this specific instrument of environmental policy in such detail. This should be understood as an invitation to experts to engage in a dialogue and to take the Pope's concerns about the effectiveness of this instrument seriously.

The encyclical is also critical regarding economic growth. LS, 193 reads: *"That is why the time has come to accept decreased*

¹⁰ On the challenges and opportunities of a global CO₂ pricing scheme, see Ottmar Edenhofer, Michael Jakob, Felix Creutzig, Christian Flachsland, Sabine Fuss, Martin Kowarsch, Kai Lessmann, Linus Mattauch, Jan Siegmeier and Jan Christoph Steckel, "Closing the emission price gap," *Global Environmental Change* 31 (2015) 132-143.

¹¹ Michael Jakob, Claudine Chen, Sabine Fuss, Annika Marxen, Narasimha D., Ottmar Edenhofer, "Carbon Pricing Revenues Could Close Infrastructure Access Gaps," *World Development*, Elsevier (2016), vol. 84(C), pages 254-265.

growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.” However, the 2014 IPCC report clearly showed that economic growth and emissions growth can be decoupled through technological progress as well as how this can be done. “Degrowth,” as a strategy in climate policy, is a very costly option under which the poor would likely suffer the most. Other measures, such as increasing energy efficiency, renewable energies and a structural shift towards less resource-intensive lifestyles, are less costly and allow for growth that is environmentally and socially compatible.^{12, 13}

Politically, the encyclical sees the solution to the global crisis in the interplay of international cooperation, national politics, municipal engagement and the power of an emerging diverse civil society. The Pope is not advocating a “world political authority” with *Laudato si’* (LS, 175) but the need for international cooperation and coordination among nation states in order to manage and channel the dynamics of globalization. The encyclical draws on ideas similar to those developed by Elinor Ostrom,¹⁴ who proposed that a polycentric governance of global public goods could, among other benefits, allow civil society actors to play an important role alongside government institutions¹⁵. The encyclical regards civil society movements as a means with which to put pressure on national-level policy-making. For the

¹² See also Michael Jakob and Ottmar Edenhofer, “Green Growth, Degrowth, and the Commons,” *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 30 (2015) 447–468.

¹³ For the latest overview of the growth debate see M. Jakob, W. F. Lamb, J. C. Steckel, C. Flachsland, O. Edenhofer, “Understanding different perspectives on economic growth and climate policy”, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* (2020), Vol. 11, Issue 6, e677.

¹⁴ Elinor Ostrom, “Nested externalities and polycentric institutions: must we wait for global solutions to climate change before taking actions at other scales?”, *Economic Theory* 49 (2012) 353–369.

¹⁵ A proposal for a world-wide carbon pricing scheme in a polycentric governance structure is made by: N. Bauer, C. Bertram, A. Schultes *et al.*, “Quantification of an efficiency–sovereignty trade-off in climate policy”, *Nature* 588 (2020), 261–266.

Pope, such movements are not limited to political protest but include empowered consumers and investors who could and should exert pressure on markets through boycotts and opposition (LS, 206). Virtue ethics and social reform are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually dependent. Man's increased empowerment in modernity, achieved through technology, requires heightened awareness of individuals and new forms of institutional responsibility.

Technology and the “end of the modern world”

According to Pope Francis, the roots of the ecological crisis lie in the ambivalence of modernity. With repeated references, in Chapter III, to *The End of Modern World* by Romano Guardini,¹⁶ the encyclical holds that modernity is creating, through technology, new possibilities to control nature. *Laudato si'* essentially sees technology and its possibilities as positive (LS, 102). Yet, from the perspective of Guardini, the problem of modernity is that mankind is in denial of these expanded opportunities for power, whereby it denies its responsibility. This often-tacit refusal means that technology is not consciously created and designed but only executed, in a technocratic fashion and with a sole focus on economic growth and profitability – the result being the generation of organized irresponsibility.¹⁷

By contrast, the encyclical emphasizes that the increased opportunities for control and power allow for more freedom in decision-making; yet this requires ethical judgment. It is against this background that the reflections of the Pope on technology should be understood, such as when he calls for greater energy efficiency and the development of renewable energies (LS, 26)

¹⁶ Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, Wilmington (1998).

¹⁷ See Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Der Ruf nach Verantwortung. Risiko und Ethik in einer unüberschaubaren Welt*. Freiburg (1992).

or when he expresses concerns about nuclear energy (*LS*, 104, 184). *Laudato si'* is not technology-hostile but calls for a responsible approach and an ethical design of the new possibilities offered by technology. Technological progress is not a juggernaut to which people should be sacrificed; instead, it can help to solve the problems of climate change, poverty and inequality.

In his analysis of modernity, the Pope points to the great biblical stories of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. When applied to today's world, these stories teach us that a disfigured earth is not just an expression of a disturbed relationship between God and mankind, but also an expression of violence among people (*LS*, 70). The biblical stories should remind people that humanity awaits accomplishment by God and that it is not doomed to tragic failure. However, averting tragedy will require mankind to face reality and to change its course. In this sense, the encyclical argues not only from a philosophical or natural law perspective but offers a new theological view of the planetary crisis. *Laudato si'* is thereby challenging politics but above all the Christian churches. This creates opportunities for action by the churches in the following areas.

Challenge to the churches

1. *Giving a voice to the poor*: Several church aid agencies are making outstanding contributions to combating climate change, poverty and inequality. A continuation of the dialogue with the poor and stakeholders on climate and development policy would be highly desirable. Thanks to the support of the Pope, such initiatives have been raised to a level of far more importance. The voice of the Vatican in the international climate negotiations of the United Nations may become more audible in the aftermath of the encyclical. The Holy See could strive to become the voice within the circle of the powerful advocating

the requirements of the common good, without which the pursuit of national interests is at risk of degenerating to mere power politics.

2. *A global initiative in religious educational institutions*: The problems of climate change, poverty and inequality call for a well-rounded education encompassing the natural, social and economic sciences, together forming the basis for engaging in an ethical and theological reflection. The Catholic Church has a global education system that includes, in addition to universities, nearly all types of schools. To carry out such an educational initiative would be an important task and opportunity for religious institutions (LS, 209–215).

3. *Further development of the social teaching of the Catholic Church*: *Laudato si'* carefully avoids the issue of population policy without touching on controversial subjects like family planning. The implications of a growing, declining or stationary population require ethical reflection. In addition, how to ensure a fair globalization is one of the key questions raised by the encyclical. Unfortunately, the argumentation in this regard is often too simplistic. For example, it proposes that we depart from capitalism, yet does not reflect on the socio-political and economic measures required to realize such an endeavor. The Church could be more productive if it were to examine which social and economic reforms might help to gradually overcome the most pressing injustices. It could also make concrete proposals for action, as it has successfully done in the past (e.g. for the construction of the German welfare state).¹⁸

4. *Revision of ecclesiastical economic activity*: In most national governments, the ministers of the environment are responsible for the climate problem, and these usually have less power than the ministers of finance and the economy. Yet, especially the latter ministers need to put the climate issue on the top of their agenda. After all, if not they, who is to introduce

¹⁸ See Oswald v. Nell-Breuning, *Soziale Sicherheit*, Freiburg (1979).

CO₂ pricing, abolish subsidies for fossil fuels and make public investments in infrastructure to reduce emissions and improve the plight of the poor? The Church is in a similar situation: The environmental officers in the dioceses have less power and influence than the vicars general and asset managers, who decide over the procurement of goods and services and the investment strategy in the capital markets (LS, 206). Although the churches are already playing an important role in ethical investment, they could be more active and have a stronger media presence when it comes to these matters.

5. *Continue the incipient dialogue between the Church and science* (LS, 199–201). The encyclical shows that the dialogue between religion and science is not only bringing ethical challenges to the fore, but that it can also help identify ways to overcome them. The Pope sees history not as a tragedy but as drama. And in this drama of salvation, mankind is not doomed to failure. Pope Francis reminds his readers that God wants to perfect humanity and that modern reason must engage in a holistic understanding of reality if it wishes to solve its problems. Freedom can only emerge by interweaving science with world interpretation—without this, justice cannot be attained.

A dialogue between unusual partners

Until the publication of the encyclical *Laudato Si* in 2015, the Church and its social teaching appeared to be merely reacting to the challenges of modernity, and to be barely capable of meeting them. By contrast, *Laudato si'* challenged the world. This encyclical has initiated a dialogue with partners who are unusual for the Catholic Church: scientists, affected individuals and states, activists, politicians and diplomats. While the Pope acknowledges the various contributions of these parties, he also propels and encourages them to take further steps. In the weeks

after the release of *Laudato si'*, an impressive number of scientists worldwide, even those who considered themselves to be atheists or agnostics, political conservatives who were sceptical of climate policy and activists who had long since written off the church, were talking about Pope Francis and his encyclical. It has thus prepared the ground for a wide, hopefully constructive exchange to protect our '*common home*'.

The Impact of *Laudato si'* on Public Discourse Over the Climate Crisis

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Three decades ago, the great scientist and science communicator, Carl Sagan, spearheaded a joint declaration by scientists and faith leaders, the *Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment* that implored policymakers in Washington DC to act to avert global environmental catastrophe before it is too late. Quoting from it:

We reaffirm here, in the strongest possible terms, the indivisibility of social justice and the preservation of the environment...We commit ourselves to work together for a United States that will lead the world in the efficient use of fossil fuels, in devising and utilizing renewable sources of energy, in phasing out all significant ozone-depleting chemicals, in halting deforestation and slowing the decline in species diversity, in planting forests and restoring other habitats, and in realizing worldwide social justice. We believe there is a need for concerted efforts to stabilize world population by humane, responsible and voluntary means consistent with our differing values.¹

Sagan was an agnostic – neither an atheist nor a person of faith, but unconvinced of the existence of a God. Yet, he nonetheless recognized the importance of collaborative efforts by the faith and science communities when it comes to addressing the key challenges that we face as a civilization, and he embraced

¹ <https://www.bnl.gov/envsci/schwartz/jointappeal.html>

the opportunity for the two communities to work toward common purpose.

There is no greater challenge today than the climate crisis. Were Sagan alive today, he would, I believe, enthusiastically embrace the efforts of Pope Francis back in May 2015 to bring global awareness to the climate crisis through his encyclical, *Laudato si'*. Though the encyclical is a document that is premised in Christian faith, it is very much informed by the work of the scientific community. In drafting the encyclical, Pope Francis consulted with many of the leading climate scientists around the world, including Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, the founder and head of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. That influence is evident in the clear and accurate summary of the underlying science in the document with regard to both the cause (carbon pollution from burning fossil fuel and other human activities) and impacts (sea level rise, droughts and devastating weather extremes) of climate change.

And though the encyclical is premised on mankind's biblical obligation to serve as stewards of creation, such a goal is shared by agnostics who care about the world we leave behind for our children and grandchildren, and who share a concern about injustices and inequities that will be exacerbated by unchecked planetary warming.

It is my view that the encyclical laid the groundwork for today's global youth climate movement, a movement that has refocused the climate crisis on fundamental issues of ethics and morality. As my friend, science historian Naomi Oreskes has put it, *Laudato si'* "insists we embrace the moral dimensions of problems that have heretofore been viewed primarily as scientific, technological, and economic."¹ I have characterized the youth climate movement very similarly:

For too long, we have allowed this issue to be framed entirely as one of science or economics or policy and politics.

But more than anything else, it's about ethics, our obligation not to destroy this planet for future generations. People of good will are finally demanding action. I think it's because our children have come out and demanded it of the adults of the world.²

Five years ago, *Laudato si'* began the essential process of re-focusing the societal climate discourse where it truly belongs: on our ethical obligation to act now to preserve a hospitable planet. This imperative now resides at the very heart of the global climate movement, in the form of the youth climate movement and the global call for climate justice. There is now a very real sense of cautious optimism that we can rise to the challenge, the greatest challenge we have arguably faced as a civilization. We can, in substantial part, thank *Laudato si'* for that.

² Michael Mann talks with Jeff Goodell about his forthcoming book, "The New Climate War," what he's learned from the pandemic and the future of climate politics.

Laudato si' – A Letter for Our Age

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There has never been, and most likely never will be again, an encyclical that has had quite the same global impact as Pope Francis' *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*. When this encyclical was released to the public in 2015 on my birthday, 18 June^h, I sensed intuitively that this document would impact my own biography in a special way. I had no idea at this stage quite how much. When the Provincial of the Jesuits in Britain, Fr Damian Howard, first approached me in the autumn of 2017, to discuss how the Jesuits could integrate the message of *Laudato si'* into all their various works, including the work of the intellectual apostolate, the seeds of a potential research institute started to be sown. Over time, the Jesuit community as a whole, through a long and careful discernment process that was conducted in accompaniment with their lay partners, decided to take the next step to establish a new research institute. By the summer of 2019, the permanent private hall at the University of Oxford – Campion Hall – had become its home. Meanwhile the four apostolic preferences released by the Fr General of the Jesuits in June 2019 reinforced and reaffirmed the direction in which this initiative was moving, giving special priority to the fourth apostolic preference *on care for our common home*.

Giving birth to a new Institute in an established university setting is not without its challenges. However, over time the message of *Laudato si'* itself, and its summons to a deeper listening to both the cry of the earth and that of the poorest of the poor, permitted new opportunities for collaboration and dialogue within the Jesuit community, the University of Oxford,

and beyond. We gradually built up our research effort from a core group of committed individuals. As we expanded, precisely the right people applied for positions at the right time. Our intention has been and always will be to create a different kind of model for academic research, one that is *trans-disciplinary*. By this we mean a research ethos that is not only responsive to those engaged in eco-social change, but also creates a reflective space for those hard pressed by the demands of activism and the urgency of the concrete. Trans-disciplinarity means working in a radical way across disciplinary boundaries, not just within a discipline, but deliberately moving into engagement with new, including secular, disciplinary partners with different methods and philosophical starting points. In embracing trans-disciplinarity we are not just focusing on a common problem, but actively changing as researchers, so that, as Pope Francis indicated, “no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out” (*LS*, 63). The University of Oxford’s motto is ‘*Dominus illuminatio mea*’. Following *Laudato si’*, the light of faith still has something vitally important to contribute to trans-disciplinary research in a university context such as that of the University of Oxford. The university has shifted from its original foundation in Christian faith to being recognised as one of the leading secular universities on the global stage.

We have had to learn through experiencing those virtues, which are also relevant to ecological practice and the demands of inequity, namely, those of patience and humility. Both of these virtues are also modelled in the life and practice of Pope Francis. Patience, in that what we hoped to achieve could not be achieved according to our own timetable, exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic. The pandemic was and is a constant reminder of our mortal fragility and interconnectedness, as well as the need to find new and creative opportunities even in the midst of such challenges. We also had to learn more about humility. When moving into any area of dialogue between disciplines

or with those from other cultures, there is an acute consciousness of one's own ignorance in the face of alternative areas of knowledge, particularly when those sources of knowledge do not make the same kind of assumptions as Western scientific empiricism. Some of the most powerful experiences we have had as an institute in the first two years since our inauguration relate to the close encounters with those from the Global South, particularly indigenous peoples living in Amazonia.

As we have started to grow as an Institute, new opportunities for networks have emerged that connect with our mission, namely, the launching of the Ecclesial Network Alliance for Integral Ecology (ENA) and the Global Laudato Si' Research Network (GLSRN). The aim of the ENA is to enable eco-social change among churches organized in territorial networks and working in partnership and solidarity with each other. We intend LSRI to be a facilitator for this network, in collaboration with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, taking forward the goals set out by Pope Francis in *Querida Amazonia*, so that it can draw on the insights of intellectual traditions in Oxford for ENA's own specific purposes and needs. The aim of GLSRN is to enable and encourage scholarly research across the globe that can be responsive to the concrete needs of the territorial networks and other activist groups sharing our mission, and so foster eco-social change.

As with any new initiative, the most important facet in developing a new research institute has been and always will be the people who come and join the team. We have been blessed by our team commitment and solidarity towards a common goal – to make *Laudato si'* a living reality in a university setting. We aim to model collaboration and partnership. This affirmation of individual actions is also something Pope Francis recognised. "All it takes is one good person to restore hope" (*LS*, 71). All team members have, in diverse ways, been impacted by the message of *Laudato si'* and are committed to seeing the fruits of its vision

worked out in the practice of an academic research institution. We aim to make *Laudato si'* concrete in specific ways, both practically and intellectually. This entails not necessarily taking up every message in this rich encyclical or every opportunity presented to us. We focus on those facets that seem most timely within the context of a clearly worked out strategic plan that aims to enlarge new research knowledge and understanding, and yet do so in a way that is also relevant for current eco-social concerns.

As we begin to develop new research projects with specific partners and collaborators, the immensity of the task loomed large. However, we have also deliberately aimed to include contemplation in our practice as an Institute, so that the demands of the tasks upon us do not overwhelm, as they are set in the context of a theocentric vision of what is important and what needs to take priority. This is one of Pope Francis' great gifts. He shows not only how to engage in dialogue and not lose hope, but also how to think theologically, to put in view the need to create a vision of 'sublime communion' held together by unseen bonds of love and respect (*LS*, 89).

To say that *Laudato si'* has made an impact on our work and life is an understatement. Without it we would not exist. And many of the staff who have joined us have let go of what they were doing before, and in some cases made personal sacrifices in order to take on the message of *Laudato si'* and respond to its appeal "for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" (*LS*, 14). As Director, I acknowledge with deep gratitude to God those who have joined this initiative and Pope Francis' message of *Laudato si'* which continues to inspire and inform our work.

Ad Novum Unitatis Universities

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A university is a complex community of communities. Students, teachers, staff, and administrators are groups with their own identities and roles within the whole. And even if, in principle, the whole is linked by the Roman Catholic faith, the parts in their day-to-day experience may not sense how that faith unites them.

Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* unites. It is an encyclical known and respected around the world. *Laudato si'* is a work of faith that *builds faith*. It is the nature of university students to explore new paradigms of self-identity. Students often question faiths carried by long-standing institutions like the Roman Catholic Church. For many such students prone to turn away from the faith, Pope Francis and *Laudato si'* have turned them *toward the faith*.

University professors are sometimes a cynical lot. The job calls for suspended judgment until all analysis is in and a disposition to suspect traps behind every new proposition. Remarkably, the message often heard from university teachers in religious and secular institutions is that *Laudato si'* is not a trap but *liberation* into clear-minded action for social and environmental justice.

More than anyone at a university, the caretaking and administrative staff know the buildings, grounds, and people that constitute the educational community. Pope Francis speaks from reason and faith on problems such as waste and pollution, habitat fragmentation and species extinction, catastrophic weather events, and CO₂ emissions. University staff know of what he

speaks, not just in their minds but in their fingernails. In a remarkable way, they, like students and teachers, have found their work newly meaningful through the faith given in *Laudato si'*.

Upper administrators in a university are frequently called on to communicate the institution's vaunted mission statement. Over time, the air can get thin at such elevations. Since *Laudato si'*, care for our common home has entered the highest aspirational statements of Roman Catholic universities. The thin air has come down to earth, and people are listening.

In short, more and more students, teachers, staff, and administrators at Roman Catholic universities have become newly reunited, each in their unique way, around faith in a God who calls them to works of social and environmental justice. *Laudato si'* has generated this renewal. It has presented faith and justice in a new key. It is a 21st century *Lied von der Erde* [song of the earth]; a praise of faith uniting us all in care for each other and all of God's creation.

I live and work on the land of the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi people and acknowledge that the Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Miami, Peoria, and Sac and Fox Tribal Nations also call this area home.

Unstoppable Waves

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What sparked my interest in caring for the environment was a lesson about the book *The Limits to Growth* during my years at university in the early nineties. Even though the book focused on population growth, it opened my mind to the planet's limits and finite nature. Today, when I teach a class titled, *Energy and Environment*, as a physicist, I am surrounded by students and a scientific community who care for the environment; most of them actively fighting for the 'green' causes. But, until recently, we were a circle of people with particular interests.

Silently but consistently, something started to change. Young people asked for action. People began to embrace the challenge of learning and putting in motion a real change. However, aside from a few people, most of the Catholics were very detached from concern for the planet or, if they recognized the problem, it was something disconnected from our faith. Protecting the environment was limited to a list of good practices, far from implemented and consistent praxis.

Laudato si' marked a new beginning. It closed the gap between believers and non-believers, adults and young people, scientists and laypeople because we share a concern: caring for our planet. The openness and interest increased. Friends, family, and people we know from our involvement in Catholic movements wanted to change their behaviours and have a more sustainable lifestyle. Multiple initiatives of individuals, families, communities, movements, schools, and groups started coming to light. For the first time, I experienced a genuine interest in those around me in being challenged by the earth's cry.

But *Laudato si'* does not provide answers. It raises inconvenient questions and concentrates solutions in combined action from politicians to economists, companies to workers, researchers to activists and leaders to citizens. Everyone can be a protagonist, but engaging *Laudato si'* implies deciding to set ourselves on a spiritual journey and interlace it with a sustainable lifestyle. Christians should “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith” (LS, 64).

Laudato si' supports those like me who work on environmental technology and energy decarbonization, asking for the double pledge of ‘tilling and keeping’. It is not easy to evaluate the goodness of human creativity, a delicate balance between attending to every person’s needs, especially the poor, “while caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving” (LS, 67) all the creation. A culture of care has vast boundaries starting with human beings and living creatures but extending to landscape, art, historic buildings, and ancient cultures. It stresses that innovation and creativity also require being in and learning from nature and traditional arts and crafts.

Nevertheless, *Laudato si'* has something more to say about ecology. It shed particular light on the true meaning of our actions. The notion of integral ecology is more than doing something good for the environment – that Pope Francis designates as a “false or superficial ecology” (LS, 59). It requires a continuous reflection on how we care for our relationship with nature, others, and God. It is a constant call for integrity, coherence, harmony, simplicity, sobriety, and mostly a significant change that starts in our hearts. *Laudato si'* is much more than changing behaviours, being ‘green’ activists, or fighting climate change. It asks for a “renewal of humanity itself” (LS, 118). But we need to translate awareness into “new habits” (LS, 209), “little daily actions” (LS, 211) – emphasizes the Pope – and we should avoid being trapped, as individuals

or enterprises, into “a series of marketing and image-enhancing measures” (LS, 194).

Laudato si' is a call for action. It motivates us to create and spread the culture of care, embracing the most vulnerable, neighbours and those living in other latitudes, as well as present and future generations. The “community conversion” (LS, 219), to which the Pope aspires, generates multiple, unstoppable waves. One of the waves is the ‘DareToCare initiative’, in which I’m directly involved that is promoted by young people in the Focolare Movement. It started during the United World Week of 2020 to promote active citizenship among people of all ages engaged in small and large actions to embrace the cries of humanity: poverty, loneliness, sickness, conflict, exclusion, environmental and future sustainability challenges. The recently launched pathway for 2021-22 focuses on the challenges of integral ecology.

During all these years, it seems to me that the seed was lying underground. What we are seeing is the germination of a small plant. *Laudato si'* is the water that is making the plant grow. It is the sunlight empowering and encouraging us. *Laudato si'* is a call to continue, as individuals and together, meditating, discussing, and promoting it, like an irrigation system renewing our relationship with creation and the Creator.

A Historian's Perspective of *Laudato si'*

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Given the environmental and humanitarian challenges and tasks facing the human race, the encyclical *Laudato si'* stands to accompany the Catholic Church for many years as it traverses the difficult terrain ahead for the whole world.¹ The encyclical is a roadmap that Pope Francis chose to direct to everyone, both those who belong to the Church and those who do not. It is a message for the entire human race *about* the human race and its home, the earth. At the same time, Catholics and their leaders perhaps are the ones who most needed to receive it, since this papal letter no longer leaves open the option to separate Catholics and their Christian faith from their ethical and religious responsibility to care for their physical environment. For this reason, the text represents a pivotal moment in the Catholic Church's history, bringing together human and environmental affairs into the same frame.

This is not new, as the encyclical clearly states. A range of inspired scriptural references reminds us of the deep connection of the Judeo-Christian tradition with the land, one that sees the care for the earth as central to human and earthly peace and sustenance. The tradition provides rich examples for what happens, as well as a compass for what can be done when, as the encyclical laments (quoting the 2001 *Catechesis*), "humanity has disappointed God's expectations" (*LS*, 61).

In response to this cry, *Laudato si'* marks something of a renaissance. It counsels attention to the ancient sources, draw-

¹ Loyola, I. O., Ignatius, S., Divakar, P., & Palmer, M. E. (1991). *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*. Paulist Press. [cited as *SE*]

ing on their wisdom – as well as their warnings – to search for creative answers to the urgent problems we now face that are social, political, historical, economic, religious and, most of all, unprecedented in scale and seriousness. The significance of this encyclical is that – as Renaissance writers drew on the Ancients, not to imitate, but to animate, interpret and guide – it presents no mere harking back to the past to tie our moral responses to perennial sins of exploitation of land and people. Instead, the work enlists the past *together* with current science, spiritual insight, and many human disciplines of knowledge to evaluate, develop and propose paths of caring and being that can be applied in our current circumstances and help in planning for our future ones.

The aim, thus, is to change the present and, through the legacy of which this encyclical hopes to stand testimony, propel the Church into the future as a co-steward of the natural environment and human justice. It seeks to position the Church as working in collaboration with fellow stewards, whether they are in the natural sciences, theology, other faith traditions, politics, economics, or culture. As the encyclical states, no one sphere can solve our current predicaments; for this reason, disciplinary diversity is embedded in its vision, while its extended analysis, reflections, and proposals reflect what we might call the document's courage of complexity.

Another of the many historical 'underground rivers' running through the work is the almost 500-year-old Ignatian tradition to which the encyclical's author, Pope Francis, belongs. While itself embedded in the authority of the Scriptures and Church tradition – including the Franciscan one after which this letter is named – and animated by the Renaissance culture in which it was forged, the early Society of Jesus, through the writings of Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) and the first companions, also brought distinct accents to that generation's search for individual and Church reform. These accents were forged through experi-

ence and over time, materially transmitted through the Society's foundational documents and subsequent documentary and historical records, which came down to the modern era through a series of historical processes marked by shifts, breaks, and, crucially, continuities with Jesuit origins in the sixteenth century.

Laudato si' reflects this historical and at the same time living Ignatian tradition in a number of ways, for example, through its emphasis on the boundless human potential for good, and the focus on both collective connectivity and individual responsibility and inspiration. The earliest Jesuit text, the *Spiritual Exercises*¹ (begun 1521; first published 1548) – the guide for spiritual meditation and discernment devised by Ignatius – intended to help each individual find his or her specific and unique path “for the greater service of God” (*SE*, 8). This service extended to the entire created world. In the *Constitutions*² (completed 1552; printed 1558–59), Jesuits were encouraged “to seek God our Lord in all things ... in order to turn their love upon the Creator of them, by loving Him in all creatures and all of them in Him” (*Const.*, 288).

The idea was not just one of service, however, but was also spiritual. Here, Ignatius's well-known admiration for Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) displays how the Ignatian tradition became a conduit for many elements of the Franciscan one. The *Spiritual Exercises* directed retreatants to meditate on the God-given world and everything in it: “I will consider how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence; and finally, how in this way he also dwells in myself” (*SE*, 235). God, according to this view, is in the physical world and can be met in creation. Creation, in turn, requires care, because it is an expression of God.

² *Societas Jesu, & Ignacio (de Loyola). (1970). The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus: Translated, with an Introduction and a Commentary. Inst. of Jesuit Sources. [cited as Const]*

The foundational documents, moreover, carried codes within them that would come to be apprehended as a kind of ‘spirituality in action’. At the beginning of the fourth and final week in the *Spiritual Exercises*, the following direction is given: “Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than words” (SE, 230). While a Jesuit was to be grounded in prayer, to be sure, action nevertheless was required, and to work in the world, where “God dwells”. This worldview anchored the Jesuit vocation in the physical world, and its echoes can be seen in *Laudato si’*, through its insistence on the human race’s potential to solve the problems before it.

The Ignatian tradition’s wide lens view of the world was conveyed in concrete form through two key apostolates – education and mission. In their intellectual life, Jesuits applied themselves to studying subjects that they went on to teach, several becoming leaders in their fields through research and publications^{3,4}. Similarly, in order to bring Christianity to people for the first time, Jesuits had to begin by trying to understand them. In both apostolates, the environment and sensitivity to human affairs and living conditions became part of the Jesuit method – to open one’s mind to the physical world on the one hand, and on the other hand to enter it and meet its different peoples on their own terms.

In education, tasked with preparing young people for life in the world, Jesuits encountered all manner of subjects. In addition to the usual theology, Latin, Greek and Hebrew, the *Constitutions* set out that in the universities of the Society, “there may be teachers of Chaldaic, Arabic, and Indian, where these are necessary or useful ... with attention given to the diversities of place and reasons which may move us to teach them” (*Const.*

³ de Castelnau-l’Estoile, C. (2019). Jesuit Anthropology: Studying ‘Living Books’, In *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, 811-830.

⁴ O’Malley, J. W., & O’Brien, T. W. (2020). The Twentieth-Century Construction of Ignatian Spirituality: A Sketch. *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 52(3), 1-40.

447). “Logic, rhetoric, physics, metaphysics, and moral philosophy, and also mathematics”, were to be taught as well (*Const.* 451).

How to approach the single person was outlined in the *Spiritual Exercises* and used to inform missionary strategies the world over: they stipulated that the Exercises were to be adapted to the “disposition of the persons who desire to make them, that is, to their age, education and ability” (*SE*, 18). The idea was that the retreat was an exchange, not a lesson: “both the giver and receiver of the *Spiritual Exercises* may be of greater help and benefit to each other”. Also, the goodwill of the retreatant was to be assumed at all times: “it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbour’s statement than to condemn it ... one should correct the person with love” (*SE*, 22).

In the missions, this became known as the method of cultural accommodation. The origins of this attitude lie in the Jesuit view that separated culture – which could be adapted – from religious truth – which could not. For example, the *Constitutions* advised that Jesuits did not need to wear any special attire to identify themselves as Jesuits: they were advised to dress like priests of the area. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in China and Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) in India famously took this as licence to dress like the nearest thing to priests where they were (respectively as Confucian scholar and Brahmin sage).

The characteristics of both the Jesuit educational and evangelical enterprises were such that they became vital channels for knowledge about the human race itself and the world that it inhabited: flora, fauna, the elements, geography, maps, the stars and planets. This in turn over the centuries has given Jesuits tools to engage with the world – its people and environment – in direct ways and grounded in a spiritual understanding of the physical realm’s purpose within creation. It is little wonder that the Pope, a Jesuit, chose to tackle the subject of the environment

and human justice, drawing on every relevant discipline to do so – and that he chose to address his subject to the whole world.

Like many of his Jesuit predecessors before him, Pope Francis may become known for this encyclical as much outside the Church as inside it. It would not be the first time that a member of the Society of Jesus attains high visibility in fields beyond the religious one. The roots for this, as we have seen, lie in Jesuits' spiritual view of their mission in the physical world. In the case of *Laudato si'*, it is possible that the work will be the Pope's most important written legacy beyond the ecclesiastical sphere. It is thus a bridge between the Church and the wider world. The vision is holistic, presented in a "Trinitarian key" (*LS*, 239), that is, "the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships" (*LS*, 240). Using this key, the encyclical entreats all fellow humans to see their environment and each other, in their manifold variety, as deeply relational – indeed one. It is also a key for the people and leaders of the Church, given to help them witness to and safeguard the encyclical's messages, as well as try to apply them, and have them heard, for the sake of the wellbeing of all the earth's people and its natural environment.

Laudato si'-Inspired Decarbonisation Project

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Laudato si' has kept me very busy for six years, as I'm sure it has for every person writing in this volume. However, I know from my work that the involvement of the church in the topic of our ecological crisis is not new in England and Wales. In fact, campaigns recognising the impact of climate change on the planet and its link to human development go back at least three decades here. What *is* new is that this is no longer a topic on the sidelines. Pope Francis has successfully brought integral ecology into the mainstream as a matter of serious concern to us as a faith community. He managed to unify a whole range of troubles under one banner with an understanding of the interconnectedness of the social and environmental issues we face, which has been transformational.

The issues of climate change and related social injustices have brought together communities working tirelessly to raise awareness of the damage we are doing, and I know from colleagues who have been working on these issues far longer than me that it has been difficult yet rewarding work. *Laudato si'* was in many ways a stamp of approval, a message of encouragement and a deepening of our collective understanding. It meant that there was a new confidence to speak out boldly about our responsibilities, and resources began to be directed at finding solutions. Different parts of the body of the church have begun to understand how the issues outlined in *Laudato si'* are relevant to them, and to discern how they might respond.

I am currently part of a team researching a decarbonisation strategy for dioceses in England and Wales. Clearly, the

issue of carbon emissions is only part of a much larger problem, but that is where this particular piece of work starts. What has been interesting for me is how important regional context is. The initial study focused on the Diocese of Salford, but the bishops have begun to appoint lead persons for the environment in their dioceses, to encourage progress and collaboration. These leads have been involved in our work, in order to learn from their experiences and help them develop strategy. The variety of work we have discussed from different dioceses has shown how being united by a global problem can still produce a diversity of responses rooted in local areas. We aim, at the end of this project, to have a set of frameworks to act against, but with the understanding that they will require regional interpretation and implementation.

At the other end of the scale, *Laudato si'* has highlighted the importance of the church as a global family. Currently, the UK is being affected by climate change in ways much less dramatic than elsewhere, so it can be difficult to convey an understanding of the urgency of the situation. Stories from our international family can bring reality home to us and remind us that, in today's highly interconnected world, our neighbour is not just the person next door. *Laudato si'* has spurred on a huge amount of international cooperation and information-sharing. There is much to be learned and inspiration to be found in global responses, which can then help inform a local response.

We still have a very long way to go, but *Laudato si'* has encouraged us that we are headed in the right direction. I am sure *Laudato si'* will keep me very busy for quite a while yet.

The Holy Water in Jesus: A Basic Element of Earth, who Constitutes, Empowers and Challenges Us

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In Genesis is reported that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth:

Water flowed out of the earth.

Adam, the first man, was made by God from Adamah, earth.²

Jesus, you are earth. You are the second Adam.

We are earth.

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis wrote: "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... This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she groans in travail. We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters" (*LS*, 2).

Water was and still is essential for the formation of the earth. Water is in the ground, on the surface, in the air, in organisms and as well as in our bodies. Water lets plants grow but can also

¹ Consciously, I use the relative pronoun "who" instead of "which", because non-human beings are also alive subjects and have rights to existence in dignity. See for example the constitution of Ecuador from 2008 and Bolivia from 2009. I'm grateful to Father Joshtrom Kureethadam for the invitation to contribute to this reader and to Robert Bryce B.A. for the proofreading of this reflection.

² See Genesis 2, 4-24.

destroy them. The human body even consists of 70% water. And nearly 50% of our blood is water.³

Earth, water, fire, air, plants and animals existed before religions were founded because of supreme revelations experienced by human beings (*LS*, 67). Water does not stop flowing at religious boundaries. For billions of human beings in the world water has a religious connotation.⁴

Living is dying, living is dying. One way of handling this reality, involving a lifetime commitment of acceptance, is to be a guest. In a Catholic funeral hymn, we sing: “We are only guests on earth.”⁵

Therefore, together with you, Pope Francis, we have to ask ourselves as guests: “What need does the earth have of us?” (*LS*, 160). To be a guest on earth implies to give and to take in a balanced way *only* in order to have a good and healthy life.⁶ Our spirituality teaches us to feel what we really need, and to set limits regarding (mis)using of (non)human beings and (im)material goods.

³ See Hartmut Bick, *Grundzüge der Ökologie*, Heidelberg, Berlin 1999; Köhnke, K. (2011). Der Wasserhaushalt und die ernährungsphysiologische Bedeutung von Wasser und Getränken. *Ernährungs-Umschau*, 2, 88-95.

⁴ Chamberlain, G. (2007). *Troubled waters: religion, ethics, and the global water crisis*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

⁵ This line is taken from a song written by Georg Thumair (1909-1984) a German poet, journalist and author of many Christian songs. Composed first of all as a song of travel in 1935, it also was a declaration of resistance to National Socialism. Together with Carlos María Pagano, a Catholic philosopher, María Isabel Pagano, his wife, and his family, I organized an interreligious conference on *Laudato si'* in Salta, Argentina, in 2017. This conference was staged by the Pontifical International Mission Society, Missio Aachen e.V., in Germany. The title of this conference was: “We are only guests on earth. In memory of Berta Cáceres (1971-2016)”. Berta Cáceres was a Maya- Lenka leader – a woman from Honduras who fought against a dam project in the river Gualcarque. Because of her resistance she was murdered on 2 March 2016 in her home. Her family cot only continues to fight for the protection of this holy river and the living space of the peoples threatened by the government and transnational companies, they also demand the conviction of one of those responsible, David Castillo.

⁶ Indigenous colleagues in Abia Yala – Latin America taught me this lifestyle.

“Spirituality derives from the Latin verb *spirare*. Respiration is vital for the production of energy for all living beings. Respiration is a permanent process of balancing. Through respiration the inside of the body is in permanent coexistence with other bodies. Our bodies are inner homes of our common home, the divine creation.”⁷

Jesus, during Your painful crucifixion water and blood flowed out of Your wound. We are connected with You through this water. It is essential *in* Creation, especially for and *in* those bodies, who suffer and/or fight for a just and beautiful kingdom of God in a respectful relationship with believers of other religions and belief systems. We, like other beings, cannot exist without water. And so, when one body does not have water, all the other (non) human bodies also (un)consciously suffer with this body.⁸

At Easter we confess to this telluric process of living and dying. Jesus, You lived and died and live *in* all beings. Because “... unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest”.⁹

We celebrate your rebirth, Jesus, *in* all beings as a rich harvest. You are *in* us through the holy water that flows in the earth, in Your and our bodies. This most important Eucharist of the year, three days after Your death, Jesus, is therefore a holistic expression of grace and joy. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we celebrate the beauties and powers of God’s Creation.

Through the holy water of Your body, Jesus, we experience ourselves as parts of other earth’s beings. Because the holy bread, baked of water and grain, is Your body, Jesus. And the holy wine, made of grapes, is Your blood, Jesus.

After encountering You, Jesus, *in* water, grain and grapes, we are empowered. As guests on earth we then can try again to

⁷ Steffens, E. (2019). Spirituality and Theology of Creation, *Asian Horizons. Dharmaram Journal of Theology*, 13(3), 469.

⁸ See Corinthians 12,26.

⁹ John 12,24.

live less at the expense of (non)humans, fight for the realization of their rights, share powers in a just way, balance by planting trees, help sick (human) beings, find paths of reconciliation and, through each breath, be consciously rooted *in* the richness and sufferings of God's creation.

This is the need the earth has of us, Pope Francis.

Laudato si' Comes to Canada

NORMAN LÉVESQUE

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"This is like my birthday!" I exclaimed at a press conference following the 2015 publication of Pope Francis' encyclical urging us to adopt a new mindset and practices that protect and care for the earth, our common home. "I no longer feel like a heretic," I said.

After ten years of talking about Christian ecology and seeing my words too often fall on deaf ears, now there was a papal document demonstrating the connection between faith and the environment. For me, the Pope's gesture signalled an endorsement of my original decision to pursue the largely untried path of promoting creation care as a Christian responsibility.

I remembered the dark cave in Subiaco, the *Sacro Speco*, where St Benedict had come as a teenager to pray to God to show him his way in life. Not yet twenty-five years old, I made a pilgrimage there in 2004, alone with my backpack, at a crossroads in my life. Diplomas in meteorology and the natural sciences, plus a BA in Education were the fruits of my studies so far. For the previous seven years, I had worked in youth ministry in a cluster of parishes. Now, I had to decide which direction to take. Should I dedicate my life to science or to faith? I presented that deep existential question to God, in that cave.

All of a sudden, I felt my body become warm inside. I had a vision of walking on a path that split in two, right in front of me. Where do I go now, Lord? I could feel the warmth inside me grow as, unexpectedly, I saw the two roads move closer and closer until they merged together. Then, I felt a gentle, fatherly

touch on my back and heard one strong word: "Continue". I opened my eyes in the dark cave with a tear falling on my cheek. I didn't know what was going to happen in the years to come, but I knew God would be beside me as I walked a path of science and faith.

Just a few weeks after returning home to Quebec, I began giving talks on Christian ecology in the Montreal area, trying to show Christians that caring for the environment is part of what God calls us to do.

Pope Francis' prophetic call for an 'ecological conversion' in paragraph 217 of the encyclical constitutes a real breakthrough! It has been instrumental in moving doubters to take action "whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in the world around them" (*LS*, 217). The Pope's recognition, in the same paragraph, that "some committed and prayerful Christians ... tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment" and that others prefer to remain passive so as not to change their habits, mirrored the hesitancy I met with before *Laudato si'*.

When I proposed to my bishop in 2005 that the diocese should be offering a Creation Care Ministry and that I would be happy to serve under such a mandate, he laughed and did not take me seriously. He encouraged me to continue my environmental studies, but he thought the Church had nothing to do with environmentalism.

One day, I rode my bike for 45 minutes to the other end of town to meet with a biblical scholar. I asked him to refer me to some Bible passages describing our relationship with nature. He said there was no such thing. Then he turned around, laughing at my idealism, and shut the door of his office.

Others called me a heretic for trying to pin environmental activism onto Christian values but it was the other way around. I was searching for Christian answers *confronted by* an environmental crisis. Each year, I repeated the same request for an

environmental ministry to my bishop until, in 2011, I became the first Canadian Catholic to be granted a diocesan mandate for Creation Care Ministry.

The United Church of Canada also sought my collaboration on the Green Church Project so, with little funding and largely by word of mouth, we began to build up a network of environmentally sensitive churches throughout Quebec. I gave hundreds of talks across the province to demonstrate the connection between faith and the environment. A grant enabled us to build a website and create practical tools for the 50 churches registered in the network as of 2015. Among the resources offered are the books: *Les pages vertes de la Bible* [the Bible's green pages], written in French with co-author Rev. David Fines of the United Church of Canada and *Greening Your Church* – a pastoral guide I wrote in French and English.

In 2015, the Green Churches Network was ready to become an official national charity. The mission was great, but the challenges were greater. More and more Catholic churches were turning to us with questions, Anglicans and Mennonites wanted to know more about *Laudato si'*. I gave 100 presentations across Canada in 2016-2017. Our tiny organization was having a hard time keeping up with the demand, yet there seemed to be no funds available for this mission. The state would not fund religious initiatives and the idea of caring for the environment was still too new for the churches to engage their financial aid. Their priorities remained the same: help for the poor and religious education. Our hopes for funding from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in the wake of *Laudato si'* were not rewarded. Although more active engagement in Creation Care does not seem to be a priority, the bishops' conference did ask me to contribute to a 2017 document: *Laudato si': A Commentary and Practical Resource for Canadian Catholics*.

In my home province of Quebec, most bishops have responded positively to environmental initiatives in their parishes

and some dioceses had created Creation care ministries even before *Laudato si'*. During their 2017 *Ad Limina* visit to Rome, the Quebec bishops were happy to report that the Green Churches Network was enabling churches to integrate Creation care into their programmes and activities. I can only imagine how much bigger the movement could be with sufficient funding to enable us to create outlines for liturgies and activities, organize regional events and create practical tools to help pastors reduce the carbon footprint of their churches. I still hope we can do more because I know there are young people just waiting to jump into these projects.

The *Creation Care School*, which I started in 2020, aims to help priests, deacons, pastoral workers and volunteers learn more about Christian ecology. It offers courses on Creation Care Ministry, Green Pages of the Bible and Creation Spirituality. *Laudato si'* is featured in one of the free mini-courses. The new *Creation Care School* website is designed to provide ongoing education to Catholics around the world¹. Offers of collaborative interaction with faculties of theology, seminaries and pastoral institutes have already started coming in.

Nationally, there is collaboration on environmental issues between organizations such as Kairos, Citizens for Public Justice, Greening Sacred Spaces and For the Love of Creation. But, in the pews, people are torn between 'traditional' values of dominion over the earth and 'progressive' values of caring for the earth. This clash makes the hierarchy uneasy and, therefore, hesitant to introduce changes.

The Federal Ministry of the Environment invited me to Ottawa, the nation's capital, to talk about the implications of *Laudato si'* and, with the Minister of the Environment, I participated in a panel discussion on environmental challenges.

In their 2018 report on climate change, *The Hope Within Us*, the members of the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue in

¹ <https://creationcare.teachable.com/>

Canada wrote: "Our conversations were profoundly shaped by Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato sí: On Care for Our Common Home* and the United Church of Canada's statement, *A Song of Faith*."

The Canadian Council of Churches, on its website, remarks of *Laudato sí*: "While most encyclicals assume a Catholic audience, this document calls on all people of the world to unite for a positive change in human relations towards creation and each other. In a Canadian Religious Conference 2020 publication, Br Bernard Hudon, SJ, biologist and Jesuit, writes: "The encyclical gave a new impetus to the ecological commitment of religious communities. The environmental crisis is a fundamental one, and we need a mass movement to generate change ... The encyclical has an ecumenical vocation and it engages the whole world. With the concept of integral ecology, Pope Francis has placed ecology at the heart of the common good."

I thank God for inspiring Pope Francis in the publication of the first encyclical on integral ecology. I thank God for all those who have answered the call, in their churches and neighbourhoods, to care for Creation. I ask God to open the hearts of those in the Church hierarchy who are not yet convinced by *Laudato sí* and to inspire generous benefactors to fund environmental church programmes.

Praise be to you, Lord, with all your creatures!

Laudato si' has Gathered Us In

DR PETER A VICTOR & DR MARÍA PÁEZ VICTOR

*Professor, Environmental Studies at York University; Sociologist,
University of Toronto, Canada*

It is not every day that a hand reaches out and does away all at once with the silos of our lives, those mental barriers, those intellectual constructions that are, in fact, deceptive dead ends not paths to something better. It seems that modern life is a series of silos, separate boxes where useful things, important things, are kept at a distance from each other, like in a bank vault or museum, not to be contaminated, kept pure in their respective boxes, untouchables. There is a long list of these silos which divide us: natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, theology; Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists; believers, non-believers; capitalists, socialists, communists; North, South; rich, poor; humans, nature etc.

In this polarized world, where separations and inequalities run rampant in a way that is obvious to any thinking person, along comes the hand of Pope Francis, who tells us that the emperor – our socio-economic system – not only has no clothes but is threatening the very existence of life on Earth. But more than that, the manner and wisdom of his message is such that he breaks down barriers between academic disciplines, religion, backgrounds, and circumstance so that we can see the precarious state of our planet, indeed of our very humanity.

In the encyclical, *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis addresses all of us in our common home and urges us to see and feel it and inspires us to heal it. It is his letter to the entire world, not simply Catholics, by which he shows the truth of the situation in which we are living and the deep values we share that can unite us to follow the path to something better, fruitful, and lasting. Such

is his message to the world, a message that calls out for us to respond in our own lives, in our own way.

Our story is just one of countless examples of lived experiences of people from diverse backgrounds that illustrates that this is possible. Next year we will celebrate 50 years of marriage. We met at university in England. No one was placing bets on the longevity of our union because the groom came from a white, middle class Jewish family, an economist, an environmentalist, an empiricist, an agnostic, and English, while the bride was a Catholic, a humanist sociologist, a believer, a non-white Latin American from the upper echelons of Venezuelan society. Since the chaplain of our college was a dear mutual friend, we were married in an Anglican Church, so even that was not usual. What were the chances of this coming together of two people with such different backgrounds and what prospects were there for a happy outcome in a world preoccupied with and antagonistic towards such differences?

We hardly knew. We were so very young and had not really thought things out other than knowing of our strong attraction to each other, as unlikely as it seemed to others. Along the way as we lived our lives together in Canada, a country neither of us was born in, studied, worked, travelled, and had our precious children and grandchildren, we realized our bedrock – beyond differences – were our values, our shared desire for a better world than this in which Nature was respected and loved, and people – all people regardless of class, religion, or ethnicity – would be able to “live well”. Along the way, our lives were particularly affected by the experience of living in Latin America and Africa where we witnessed first-hand how Western-defined “economic development” further increased the plight of the poor and devastated the lands in the global South. Then along came *Laudato si’* – so emblematic of our own personal circumstances of different people coming together, but more importantly, a plea to the entire world to understand and come to terms collectively to resolve the inequities

of the very different circumstances in which people and nations find themselves. More than that, it is a plea to change our ways of thinking and living so that life, all life, can thrive on the only planet on which we know for certain life exists.

We both read *Laudato si'* when it was released and had drawn upon it in our writings and in Maria's frequent radio broadcasts. In 2021 we received an unexpected invitation to assist the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development on the subject of ecological economics. This was a real honour and an opportunity to help disseminate the urgent message of *Laudato si'* and the insights from a more enlightened economics viewpoint. We are fortunate to be able to count on the very active local parish in Toronto, St Joan of Arc, which, like so many others, is trying to respond to the pleas of Pope Francis in many of its initiatives.

Laudato si' is a remarkable document for many reasons. One that stands out is its trenchant criticism of economic growth. Pope Francis urges us to "finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress" (LS, 78). "Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress ... development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress. Frequently, in fact, people's quality of life actually diminishes – by the deterioration of the environment, the low quality of food or the depletion of resources – in the midst of economic growth" (LS, 194). This is a line of argument that is very familiar to ecological economists who have explored in many ways the interplay between economics and ecology. We have attempted to find common ground between Catholic values and ecological economics, and this has impacted our lives in the most positive way. It has shown us that the very different paths we have taken to understanding the world and acting in it are indeed complementary.

Pope Francis quotes Pope Paul VI who, in 1971, warned "about the potential for an 'ecological catastrophe under the

effective explosion of industrial civilization' and stressed 'the urgent need for a radical change in the conduct of humanity'" (LS, 4). Fifty years on, the same fifty years for which we have been married, it is already upon us. It is up to all of us to do something now about the message of *Laudato si'*. It will take all our strength of heart and intellect, from wherever derived, to change the course of history, as change it must.

In *Laudato si'* Pope Francis urges us towards "a new and universal solidarity" (LS, 14) to hear both "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS, 49). This is a message that is being expressed by more and more people but young people especially. They see a very different future to the one foreseen by their parents when they were young. That it should be stated so clearly by Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* is especially significant. It is reaching not only Catholic parishes around the world, but also social circles, ours for example, which includes scientists, humanists, politicians, environmental and social activists, Christians, non-Christians, academics, students, neighbours, and family in the North and South.

It is just possible that at last, Pope Francis has opened a breach among the silos and has gathered us in around the seminal problem of our times, the protection of our common home.

Part IV – Politics & Economy

Laudato si' – Celebration and Duty

PATRICIA ESPINOSA

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Climate Change (UNFCCC)*

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* is an exaltation of nature as a whole – something he and many millions more would call *creation* – both as a source of joy and wonder and as the home shared by all of humanity. It is a celebration of the unique privilege that we enjoy as witnesses and beneficiaries of the intricate workings of the natural world. It is, above all, a reminder of our collective duty to protect this irreplaceable legacy.

This two-fold approach – the joyful celebration and the heartfelt call to action – accounts for its extraordinary impact around the world. *Laudato si'* offers a lucid reflection on the state of our environment, highlighting the harmful, sometimes irreversible effects of human interference with nature. The Pope's assessment is stern and poignant, but his message is at its strongest when he focuses on the immeasurable value of nature and on our resultant duty to care for it.

Pope Francis' words resonate strongly among those committed to global efforts against climate change. His vision conveys hope and encouragement and it has promoted awareness and engagement all over the world. This call to action is vital and timely; indeed, it is no exaggeration to state that climate change is the most serious long-term threat facing humanity as a whole today.

Laudato si' is a vigorous call to protect "our shared home, the Earth". While the Pope's message is aimed at all people of good will, his encyclical is primarily a personal letter to well over a billion Catholics in every continent, summoning them to take urgent action against the human injustice entailed by

climate change. Pope Francis' encyclical is, in this regard, one of the most powerful, far-reaching and direct appeals to people's conscience. Millions of Catholics have responded to the Pope's message, holding frequent prayer meetings that express a deep faith in the possibility of change, inspiring and connecting people around the world in the common goal of promoting climate action and justice.

In addition to its deeper meaning for believers, prayer focuses the attention and the will of those who pray, deepening awareness and reinforcing a sense of responsibility. It is a call for help, but also a call to action that fosters commitment and support. The growing role of civil society organizations in worldwide climate action, including the Global Catholic Climate Movement, among many other religious institutions and groups, is testament to the significance of Pope Francis' exhortation.

Climate change affects many aspects of our lives. It threatens the fundamental physical conditions that allow nature to evolve and thrive. It compromises the lives of countless living species. It disrupts economic, political and social balances that provide stability to communities and countries. The challenge is formidable. Addressing this growing threat is one of the most vital and difficult tasks facing the world. Ultimately, what we need to change is ourselves: the way we toil, trade or travel, the habits we have built and the expectations we continue to hold. *Laudato si'* calls on us to embrace this change to build a better, more resilient, truly sustainable future. Only by changing our lifestyles – our individual as well as our collective conduct – will we be able to overcome previous mistakes and to preserve the richness and diversity of the natural world.

There is yet another equally powerful teaching in Pope Francis' vision. As in the case of other fundamental questions affecting our lives, responding to climate change demands that we assume an ethical stance. Whatever position we may take in the face of a deteriorating climate and a declining environment,

it will ultimately be a moral response. Ignoring – or pretending to ignore – the current environmental crisis as it unfolds before our eyes, is a moral stance. Admitting the risks but failing to take commensurate action to prevent their realization is a moral stance. Acknowledging the available evidence and acting in accordance with scientific recommendations is a moral stance. Whether we choose to act or to remain passive, our conduct is an expression of our deepest ethical convictions.

Pope Francis' message speaks to all of humanity, calling on us to end the moral and spiritual affront of the current global environmental crisis. We must respond to that call and own up to the result of many decades of a collective failure to acknowledge and address the destructive influence of human action on the environment. As in the case of that other major threat to our world – the proliferation of nuclear weapons – climate change is distinctive in that this is a man-made crisis: the unforeseen, but unavoidable outcome of our own careless, even reckless behaviour. In both cases, it is within our power to overcome the dangers we have created.

The Pope's message rightly focuses on the celebration of the beauty and wealth that the natural world represents, but it is also a moving appeal to protect it, to ensure that it continues to flourish. That is why *Laudato si'*, inspired by the remarkably prescient vision of Saint Francis of Assisi, is so important for us today. It not only exalts nature and calls on Catholics and on all people to assume their responsibility to the environment, it also reminds us all about our shared duty towards the Earth, our common and only home, a legacy that has been entrusted to us and which we must, in turn, pass on to future generations.

The Pursuit of Authentic Human Development in the Anthropocene

ACHIM STEINER

United Nations Development Programme Administrator

The Inseparable Bond

Laudato si' is one of the richest contemporary directives on the inseparable fate of people and the planet. In 2015, when it was first preached in homilies across the world, I was the head of the United Nations Environment Programme. I reflected on the letter – on the universality and inclusiveness of its teachings on nature, on the momentum it could bring to the pursuit of 'authentic' human development – and I believed that 2015 would be a good year. It was.

At the time, the United Nations was in the final stages of shepherding a resonant, universal agenda for humanity, guided by the vision of a sustainable, fair world. It was the 2030 Agenda, and in September 2015, 193 world leaders came together and promised to deliver on its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Then in December of the same year, the Paris Agreement was adopted, with nearly every country in the world agreeing to voluntarily cut the carbon emissions that triggered the climate crisis. For years, my commitment to sustainability and the environment meant swimming against the current. In 2015 – finally – the current was changing direction.

From that moment until now, accelerating the systemic, transformational change laid out in 2015 has been a priority of the international development community, including of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which I now lead. And in 2020, we reached a tipping point. A tiny virus humbled the human race and put society's fractures on full display. For the

first time in 30 years, human development fell backwards. Eight out of ten people who will be poor as a result of the pandemic by the end of this decade will live in countries with low or medium human development, according to UNDP research.

Laudato si's conviction of the “intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet”, and that “everything in the world is connected” is all the clearer now. Humanity must succeed together, or it will fail, because, as the Persian poet Sa’adi wrote, *all the people on the planet are like different parts of the same body*; different, but united, as if limbs of each other.

This moment of crisis and humility should not be wasted, and we must be optimistic in our well-founded ability to change the future.

Authentic Human Development

For me, as for many, one important step forward is to change how we measure human progress. Pope Francis calls for courage when he writes that balancing the protection of nature with financial gain is not enough, and that ‘half-measures will only delay disaster’. The drive to measure progress differently, as set out in *Laudato si*,⁷ articulates that for too long, our world has valued what it measures, instead of measuring what it values. This is something that we at UNDP are working to change. Instead of putting Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the centre of progress, we rank all the countries in the world by ‘human development’: a combination of education, health, and income that, when taken together, indicate whether a person in that country has the freedom and opportunity they need to live a life they value.

Each year, we release an index – the Human Development Index or HDI – of how countries fare compared to each other. But the list, for the past 30 years, has hugged the contours of economic wealth. Countries with more money can invest more

in health and education. The source of a country's growth – and its potential collision course with nature – was not factored in.

In 2020, therefore – the first year in history to see a global *decline* in human development as a result of the pandemic – we decided to try something new. We added two experimental metrics to the HDI – national carbon dioxide emissions and material consumption – and called the index the Planetary Pressures Adjusted Human Development Index – or the PPHDI. Though the acronym is not yet memorable enough to rival 'GDP', the profound result may be based on our measure of progress, *not one country in the world is on the right path* yet. The PPHDI powerfully illustrates that there are countries leaving a minimal imprint on the planet, and there are countries with prosperous populations. But not one nation sits in both camps – only a few, like Costa Rica, come close.

For me, this now empty space – where people and the planet would not just survive but thrive together, and where life would not just be 'sustained' or 'sustainable' but where it would flourish – represents our future; if we so choose. I think of Chernobyl, an area known for the deadliest nuclear accident in history, which, in the absence of humans, is being reclaimed by nature. I think of what happened when the world hit 'pause' during the pandemic: prides of lions napping on the paved roads of Kruger National Park in South Africa; goats roaming the streets of Llandudno in Wales; snow-capped mountains visible for the first time in years in Nairobi because smog cleared as humans stayed home. Life expanded as our species retreated. That is not an epitaph to be proud of. Like Charles Dickens' protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge, we have seen what happens on the path we are on, and now we have a chance to do better.

By changing the definition of progress – by measuring what we value – we move closer to the idea of "authentic human development" with true "moral character", as called for by Pope Francis, who speaks about a universal challenge that transcends religion, faith, and background.

The economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, a founder of the concept of human development, may agree. Professor Sen spent his early years in a school established by the renowned Bengali poet and Nobel prize winner Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore advocated for inclusivity, as Professor Sen recounted in a conversation with me to mark the 30th Anniversary of the UNDP's Human Development Report. When Tagore was asked about his background, he said: "Well, I really have more than one background... A bit of Hindu background, a little bit of Muslim background, and a little bit of Western influence, and all of these are mine. That sense of inclusivity is what I brought to my work from the beginning."

Later, when Sen sat down with his long-time friend and collaborator Mahbub ul Haq at Cambridge University to make the first Human Development Index (HDI), he remarked that they were going back to where the Buddha was in 600 BC, "because the fundamental concerns of a good life, which is what the Buddha sought to understand, are what go into the HDI".

The First Generation of the Anthropocene

The fundamental concerns of a good life for people and the planet are intricately interwoven. And yet, the pressures we exert on the planet today have become so great that scientists are considering whether the Earth has entered an entirely new geological epoch: the Anthropocene, or the Age of Humans. It means that we are the first people to live in an age defined by human choice, where the dominant risk to our own survival is ourselves.

It also means, however, that we are the explorers and innovators who get to decide what this – the first generation of the Anthropocene – will be remembered for. There are no problems beyond hope. There is no space for scepticism, dulled

consciousness, or silent witness. It is time to pursue our common agenda. As Pope Francis wrote last year in his uplifting and practical way, “We must not let the current clarifying moment pass us by”.

Laudato si' and the Paris Climate Agreement

LAURENT FABIUS

President, Constitutional Council; Former Prime Minister, France

In 2015, the publication of *Laudato si'* by His Holiness Pope Francis was an important contribution to the success of COP 21, which I had the honour to chair. This first encyclical in the history of the Catholic Church devoted to the environment helped to strengthen not only the mobilisation of the Christian community but all citizens of the world who were sensitive to the Pope's messages.

The adoption of the Paris Agreement in December 2015 raised immense hopes. It was a historic turning point in the goal of reducing global warming. Its 29 articles and 140 paragraphs establish clear objectives: no more than a 2°C increase in average temperature, or preferably 1.5°C, in 2100 compared to 1890-1900, carbon neutrality by mid-century, quantified commitments by each State, a minimum of 100 billion dollars of public and private funds in 2020 for the climate from rich countries to poor countries each year, fair transition etc.

However, today, the overall climate situation is critical. The warnings of Pope Francis in 2015 are more valid than ever, "our common home is falling into serious disrepair". Unless we continue to implement this Agreement fully, we risk reaching a warming of 3-4°C by the end of the century, if not more. The storms, floods, droughts and fires of recent months will then be a sad foretaste of what may lie ahead of us. The priority is therefore to fully implement the Paris commitments. We must act powerfully and quickly. In this regard, *Laudato si'* provides important guidelines.

The encyclical presents multiple types of action that are needed to tackle climate change. Individuals can act by adopt-

ing daily actions such as “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 car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices” (LS, 211). This call has contributed to promoting the awareness of everyone’s responsibility. Today, people are becoming more and more aware of the need to change their daily behaviours.

However, progress does not only involve ‘small gestures’, but also ‘big decisions’, often discussed by decision-makers in the context of international negotiations. The Pope’s warning is important: “International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good”. The Pope calls for dialogue and transparency in decision-making. This was precisely the key to the success of the Paris Agreement. In that regard, 2015 was not only a victory for our climate, but also for multilateralism as a whole.

This year, COP 26 in Glasgow will be crucial. In particular, it will register the new nationally-determined contributions (NDCs) of States, ie their commitments, which are expected to increase. Its priorities are the mobilisation of at least 100 billion dollars by developed countries to finance the ecological transition of developing countries, discussions and decisions on carbon market mechanisms and countries’ adaptation plans to the effects of climate change. It will need to be concerned with adaptation and not just mitigation. The Glasgow COP will show whether the post-Covid-19 economic recovery is actually moving us, which is an absolute necessity, towards a low-carbon society.

The discussion in Glasgow must be guided by at least two important messages delivered in *Laudato si’*.

First, social justice must be a core element of climate negotiations. The encyclical contributed to connecting the ecological issue or struggle with protection of the poor. People living in

poverty have contributed the least to climate change but are disproportionately affected by it. Climate justice concerns a wide range of problems that have been detailed in the encyclical: the displacement of indigenous communities, the shortage of housing, the effect of pollution on health etc. The social dimension of the fight against global warming is essential. The transition must not only be ecological, it must also be fair. We saw this in particular at the end of 2018 when the ‘yellow vests’ movement broke out in France. We have seen it elsewhere too. People are not equal in the face of the climate emergency. For a long time, this reality has been neglected. Today, to achieve its objectives, ecological transition must be fair and felt as such. This is why responses must be adapted to local realities.

Second, the rights of future generations must be protected. In *Laudato si’* a fundamental question is raised: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (LS, 160). In this respect, the current mobilisation of youth is a powerful source of hope. By definition, young people have a longer life expectancy than their elders, and they are rightly concerned about what will happen in ten, twenty, fifty years. They are the first ‘future generation’. Their mobilisation deserves more than annoyed comments. They bear witness to fundamental questioning and concern. The commitment of young people calls for answers, actions and courage on the part of our countries and their leaders. It is essential that we involve young people in the debate on global warming because they will live in this world.

What makes *Laudato si’* such a powerful document is the great ability to address not only the Christian community, but to provide a strong, clear message to every human being. We all live together on a fragile planet and need to take responsibility for it, regardless of our faith, nationality or profession. In this decisive year, it reminds us that a key to tackling climate change is our collective action.

Reflections on *Laudato si'* and Ecological Economics

HERMAN DALY

*Emeritus Professor, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland,
USA*

First a personal reflection, and then some reflections from the perspective of ecological economics.

As a Christian of Protestant persuasion, I first considered Pope Francis as perhaps a breath of fresh air in the stuffy Vatican. After reading *Laudato si'* (*LS*), I dare to hope that what I considered merely 'fresh air' is more like the wind of Pentecost filling the Church anew with the Holy Spirit. What a welcome teaching and encouragement for our time!

From the viewpoint of ecological economics (EE) the dual focus of *LS* on creation care and justice is a big ethical and intellectual support. EE views the human economy as a subsystem of the natural ecosphere (creation) – wholly contained within it, and totally dependent upon it for the maintenance, enjoyment, and continuance of life. We are concerned with how well (or badly) the human economy fits within the larger biophysical economy of nature, how to make it fit better, and how to keep the growth of the economy from continuing to overshoot the carrying capacity of our finite and non-growing terrestrial home. We think that more lives are better than fewer, but not if we all crowd the earth at the same time, over-consuming and elbowing each other, and God's other creatures, off the planet. Sustainability requires not only less per capita consumption, more justly distributed, but also fewer people alive at the same time. EE sees population limits via voluntary family planning as necessary for both creation care and justice. *LS* is largely silent on that connection, as is the neo-Marxist segment of the 'degrowth'

movement, otherwise an ally of EE. Further dialogue and reasoning together are needed.

Living sustainably within planetary boundaries results, over time, in more lives lived more abundantly than does short term growth beyond earth's carrying capacity, which requires borrowing from our very capacity to produce in the future. Ecological economics takes John Ruskin's aphorism seriously, "There is no wealth but life." Using resources at a rate that maximizes lives ever to be lived over time at a sufficient level of consumption for a good (not luxurious) life, also maximizes true wealth. Those who gather much should not have too much, and those who gather little should not go short, to paraphrase St Paul. EE would include future generations among those who should not go short – or inherit ecological disaster.

Ecological economists are encouraged by the extensive overall agreement of our vision with that of *LS*. We hope that our work in developing the theory and policy of EE will be seen by the Vatican as a way to help put the 'integral ecology' of *LS* into practice. We believe that the grow-focused policies of neoclassical economics (NCE) have not, and will not, serve the vision of *LS*.

To support this belief, I only have space here to briefly offer two examples of principles of EE, and how they differ from NCE, and better serve *LS*.

1. Economics deals with scarcity. As growth has pushed us from a world relatively empty of us to one full of us and our belongings, the pattern of scarcity has changed. In the empty world, labour and capital were the limiting factors of production. Now in the full world, that is reversed. Natural resources are limited, and labour and capital are relatively abundant. The fish catch is limited by populations of fish, not by fishing boats; cut timber is limited by forests, not by lumberjacks and chain saws; pumped crude oil is limited by remaining petroleum deposits and the capacity of the atmosphere to absorb the CO₂

when the oil is burned, not by the number of drilling rigs and pumps; and so on. Economic logic and common sense tell us to economize on the use of the limiting factor. Economic logic has not changed, but the limiting factor has. Yet NCE textbooks continue to exclude natural resources from the production function and include only labour and capital, just as they did in the empty world. Furthermore, national income (GDP) accounting continues to value natural resources only at their labour and capital cost of extraction, considering their *in-situ* value to be zero. NCE justifies its neglect of natural resources and services by claiming that man-made capital is a good substitute for natural capital and the services and materials that flow from it. EE recognizes that man-made capital and natural resources are not substitutes, but complements, with natural resources being the limiting factor.

2. Turning from the physical stage on which the economic drama is played, let us now consider the actors. The role of *homo economicus* in NCE is that of an atomistic, self-centred individual related to others only externally. EE casts *homo economicus* in the role of person-in-community, defined in large part by internal relations to others. The very identity of this *homo economicus* is constituted by these internal relations in the community. Who am I? I am a child of, brother of, friend of, husband of, father of, member of, student of, citizen of, etc. My welfare depends much more on the quality of all these relationships, by which my very identity is constituted, than it does on the quantity of goods I consume, above some acceptable subsistence level. It is no surprise that self-reported happiness has no relation to absolute income beyond a basic threshold. What is surprising is that economic growth continues to be the number one goal of rich nations in which most citizens have far exceeded the threshold. For NCE, only the individual is real – community is considered an abstraction, nothing but an aggregate of isolated individuals. Policies in the interest of community are considered

‘allocative distortions’ from the point of view of the model of atomistic *homo economicus*. For example, the notion that international trade should be regulated in the community interest of domestic full employment, a balanced industrial structure, limited international indebtedness, an equitable distribution of income, protection of efficient national policies of cost internalization, and so on, is incomprehensible to the NCE’s free-trading individualism, which registers only quantity and price of goods consumed.

The list of differences could be extended. For example, in NCE, the economy is considered to be unconstrained by the laws of thermodynamics, whereas EE starts with the entropic throughput of matter and energy, beginning with depletion and ending with pollution, both counted as costs. EE has one foot in the biophysical world of possibility, and the other foot in the ethical world of desirability and purpose. NCE keeps both feet in the abstract realms of discounted utility and GDP. Many of us in EE started out in NCE, and still find some of its concepts and tools useful. But we were drawn to the vision and concepts of EE as we witnessed the negative consequences (described in *LS*) of applying the NCE growth theories we were taught. We hope that others from NCE will join us in this effort.

How the Encyclical has Impacted Nordic Business Leaders

HENRIK EHNRROOTH

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In the introduction of *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis states under the heading 'My appeal': "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change".

A Common Awakening

The Climate Leadership Coalition (CLC), a Nordic business-led NGO, was founded in 2014, one year before the publication of *Laudato si'*. The timing may have been a coincidence or a reflection of a common simultaneous awakening to the planetary threat and the need for a holistic view and a systemic solution to climate change.

The founders of CLC acknowledged "the need to protect our common home" and bring the business community together to seek practical solutions for "a sustainable and integral development". CLC appealed for "a systemic solution" rather than a piecemeal construct of non-integrated legislation or technical solutions. Our activity evolved to include cities, communities and ultimately individuals who, through their consumption and choices, finally decide the direction and speed of the transition towards sustainability.

Sustainability and Economic Growth

At the time (2015) of the publication of *Laudato si'* and the founding of CLC, the public debate revolved around the question of how much the world economy or GDP growth would suffer due to the costly transition to more sustainable production and consumption. There was a common public perception that a loss of material welfare was the price of reducing emissions and pollution.

Due to the belief that climate action puts a large cost on companies, many believed that business leaders in general resist and slow down the sustainable transition of industrial production and consumption.

Why did the founders of CLC, Nordic business leaders, not fit into this category? Why did they have a different view of the economics of sustainability than many of their colleagues? Perhaps the explanation lies in the historic background of the Nordic economies. Early Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian industrialization was based on heavy and energy-intensive industries such as forestry. These industries were also often polluting. The pollution was local, unpopular, and led to strict environmental legislation. Thus, in the Nordics, the transition towards closed, circular, and less energy intensive and green processes had started already back in the 1970s.

The transition to sustainable industry meant costly initial investments but through new innovative engineering solutions the end result was an economic success. The transition towards sustainable industries is simply sound business!

Nordic business leaders were facing new demands from a highly educated workforce. Their organizations and customers demanded clear answers and solutions: what can we do to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change? An ecologically sustainable society needs new forms of production and services. The companies that react early can benefit from the transition whereas polluters pay the price of inaction.

The Message of Pope Francis

Pope Francis stated, "In this encyclical I would like to enter into a dialogue with all people about our common home." He continues, "I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation that includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concerns us all."

Chapter One – What is happening to our common home?

"But a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and greyer, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something we have created ourselves" (*LS*, 17).

Chapter Three – The human roots of the ecological crisis

"It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis. A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us. Should we not pause and consider this? At this stage, I propose that we should focus on the dominant technocratic paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the working society" (*LS*, 101).

The message of *Laudato si'* is eloquent and clear, CLC and its members have taken up the challenge of Pope Francis; "We need a conversation that includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concerns us all."

Need to Act Now

I was invited to the "Conference on the 3rd anniversary of *Laudato si'*" in the Vatican on 5-6 July 2018 representing CLC

as its chairman. When talking to participants, who were from many walks of life, many were surprised to find “an industrialist” who shared the same concerns as members of NGOs, scientists, religious and indigenous communities. The fact that I represented a large group of Nordic industry leaders caused even more wonder, especially when I spoke warmly about the need for a systemic and radical green transformation.

The conference programme, speakers and the headings of the presentations carried a clear message:

“Urgency to save our one and only common home” by Lord Deben, “Last call for the planet” by Professor Schellnhuber, “The economic reason to act and to act immediately” by Lord Stern, “Building a massive movement to protect our common home” by Bill McKibben, “Time for a Marshall plan for our common home” by Minister Emilewicz (Polish Minister for Technology & Enterprise in charge of COP 24). All speakers were adamant; we need to act *now*!

Transition to a Sustainable World is Economically Beneficial and Financeable

In 2013 several business leaders started discussions and planning on what Finnish industry could do to curb climate change. As a result, the Climate Leadership Coalition (CLC) was founded in 2014 by seven founding members – Caverion, Fortum, Kone, Neste, Outotec, Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund and ST1.

CLC believes that a profound transition to a sustainable world can be economically beneficial, viable and financeable. The members strive to be among the leaders of their respective fields in terms of climate change mitigation ambition. Together with its members, CLC aims to make a significant, positive climate impact through business solutions. CLC helps its members become even stronger climate leaders by identifying and intro-

ducing the best global company practices, policy approaches and strategies and actively participating in climate policy development on a Nordic, EU and Global level.

Today, the Climate Leadership Coalition is the largest non-profit climate business network in Europe by membership. CLC has 87 organizational members: 58 companies, 9 universities, 7 trade organizations, 6 cities, 5 research institutions, 1 foundation and 1 trade union confederation. CLC has also accepted 45 personal members. The members employ globally 520 000 people and represent around 70% of the market cap of the OMX Nasdaq Helsinki stock exchange.

CLC has 15 theme groups and organizes regular meetings for its members. The theme groups are working on a wide range of topics: communications, HR, forestry, agriculture and food, climate policy, energy, ICT, finance, retail and civic engagement, construction, transportation, circular economy and carbon footprint and handprint. Two of the newest theme groups are climate and health and cities for green growth. The theme groups work as platforms for members.

Holistic View, Systemic Solution

The main goal of CLC is to promote systemic solutions to mitigate the threat of climate change and environmental degradation. To quote the words of Pope Francis; “we should focus on the dominant technocratic paradigm which shapes the lives of individuals and the working society” (*LS*, 101). This paradigm is based on a linear, throw-away consumption culture, and wasteful, vulnerable production and supply chains. Moreover, many emissions are free of charge. In the language of neoclassical economics: externalities are not accounted for.

In 2020, CLC proposed a coalition for global carbon pricing and in 2021, CLC with two other Nordic climate business

networks, Haga Initiative and Skift Business Climate Leaders, launched a global *Call on Carbon* initiative to ramp up climate-friendly investments via effective carbon pricing. During the first six weeks, the initiative had already got 87 signatories and was gaining momentum.

CLC believes that putting a cap and cost on emissions would drive the market economy rapidly in the right direction. A relevant, socially and environmentally justified price on carbon emissions would drive investments towards cleaner and probably also more economical solutions.

Revenues generated from any carbon pricing applied would ideally be invested in sustainable transition efforts, the green economy, green technology development and natural capital, as well as supporting a just transition for affected workers and farmers, families and communities. They could also be weighted for supporting low-income communities and countries during the transformation.

Nature and Humanity – Integral Ecology

Laudato si' puts significant emphasis on the question of the relationship between human beings and nature. In Chapter 4 (Integral Ecology), Pope Francis states, “Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (LS, 137).

Bioeconomy: an Essential Part in the EU Green Deal

The term “bioeconomy” could be described as the use of natural products from land and nature in a biologically sustain-

able manner. Their sustainable use includes a notion of natural net sequestration of CO₂ after harvesting crops derived from plants and trees. The economics of bioeconomy is circular. It is based on growth of the raw material through photosynthesis, capturing CO₂ from the atmosphere and involves cycles of water and nutrients. The natural resource never depletes provided the ecologic cycle is not disrupted.

To quote *Laudato si'*; "When we speak of the 'environment', what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavioural patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (LS, 139).

The EU Green Deal defines bioeconomy in one of its publications; "Bioeconomy the European way – sustainable & circular" as covering all sectors and systems that rely on biological resources, their functions and principles. It includes all agricultural and forest-based products and industries. The bioeconomy sector within the EU employs 17.5 million (9% of the workforce) and represents 5% of EU GDP.

CLC has set out to contribute to the EU Green Deal by helping to formulate a *positive bioeconomy vision*, one that is measurable, science-based and ecologically sustainable. Such a vision

should be based on the latest research on the sustainable use of land. The environmental consequences of the use of agricultural and forest land should be better understood and recorded using the latest monitoring methods.

The Holy Bible, in Genesis 2:15, says, “The Lord took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work and keep it.”

Man has worked the Garden towards larger monocultures, use of fertilizers, pesticides and heavy machinery. As a result, our Garden no longer stores carbon and the land is becoming arid and poor. Agricultural and forestry practices need to change and become more sustainable. Science provides us with many promising new results which could be put into practice with great speed. *Laudato si'* provides us with a good description of what a “positive bioeconomy vision” could entail.

Our “Garden” provides us with natural products produced by life itself. These products, food, materials and other chemical compounds are a rich source of new innovative ways to use the fruits of our Garden. Within the EU, almost a third of the biomass is considered as waste, in some cases recycled or composted but in general a hugely under-utilized resource.

A promising list of innovations could raise bioeconomy to a whole new level of importance. Innovations regarding new types of food could both reduce the environmental footprint of agriculture and enrich our diets. New materials based on biomass provide us with strong, light, recyclable alternatives to cement, steel and plastics. Better land-use practices, “carbon farming” can decrease the emissions from bioeconomy while new bio-based products form a man-made carbon sink. Substitution of energy-intensive products and materials with biomaterials has a significant effect on the overall “footprint” and “handprint” of the bioeconomy.

The ‘technocratic paradigm’ highlighted by Pope Francis needs to change and it is already reshaping itself simultaneously on many fronts. The digital revolution, started by intellectual

giants such as John von Neumann, a convert to Catholicism, found itself preceded early on by the whole universe centred around coded information, eg in DNA. Studying and adapting mechanisms created by the 'Engineer' of nature brings forth solution after solution that is awe-inspiring in its genius – biomimetics produces the best of nature's innovation. Everything around what is known as circular, ie non-linear, cyclical economy, is only imitating what already exists in nature. In our pride, we find ourselves admiring our brilliance in copying something that has existed around us for the whole of our existence.

In summary, CLC and its members believe that a positive bioeconomy vision can bring forth a whole new potential to mitigate climate change. We can create a new kind of (bio)economics built on redundancy and resilience, avoiding the vulnerabilities of linear systems with the motto 'less is more'. We need circular industries which combine recycling and reuse based on renewable bio-based materials. Carefully studying nature's own engineering, biomimetic solutions and carbon-based polymers, we can create wholly new building blocks to construct our common home while working and keeping our Garden.

The Message and the Moment: On How and Why *Laudato si'* Became the Most Quoted Encyclical in History

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In the early 2010s, the world experienced a growing realization that the clock was running out on the possibility of saving planet earth from massive destruction by global warming. In the moment of worry, pessimism, urgency and a desperate search for constructive action and compelling narrative to drive action, a unique message emerged: Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*.

This essay will reflect on the achievements and consequences of one of the most powerful documents of our lifetime from a personal perspective. I was lucky enough to be personally involved in several chapters of the *Laudato si'* story and saw first-hand how it changed hearts and minds. First, a reflection on the contribution the encyclical made at the International Expo on "Future Energy" in Kazakhstan in 2017. Second, on the Amazon Synod, a journey that formally started in Madre de Dios, Peru in 2018. Third, the large and profound changes that *Laudato si'* has catalyzed in the world of asset management, stretching from reactive divesting to proactive, faith-aligned or *Laudato si'*-consistent investing of both physical and financial assets.

Sign of the Times

To understand the full impact or significance of the encyclical, it's important to go back to the years preceding the promulgation of *Laudato si'*. I remember watching the icy and unsuccess-

ful deliberations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen back in December 2009 on a television screen from deep inside the Amazon rainforest of Suriname. I was working there on issues related to human trafficking, illegal gold mining and deforestation in the Guyana basin.

While I could witness first-hand, the issues of nature degradation, human exploitation and climate change interacting destructively, I was watching the negotiations in Denmark collapse. An impasse had emerged on global climate talks and even a visionary like President Obama was unable to break the deadlock. Rich countries preached technological solutions for carbon dioxide removal; developing countries defended their right to grow their economies. There was no authentic, widely-respected voice that could bring parties together, build bridges, speak to people's hearts and minds, transcend short-termism and help build a shared context for common action. It turned out that only the authentic voice of the first Pope to be a member of the Society of Jesus, the first from the Americas and the first from the Southern Hemisphere could break the impasse.

The Path to the Encyclical

Critical input to what eventually became the encyclical was given at conferences organized by the prestigious Pontifical Academy of Sciences throughout 2014. Three events particularly deserve to be highlighted as they helped lay the groundwork for the encyclical.

The workshop '*Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature: Our Responsibility*' took place in May 2014, focusing on the following questions. Are humanity's dealings with nature sustainable? How should we perceive nature and what is a good relationship between humanity and nature? Experts including

Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Partha Dasgupta, Jeffrey Sachs, Achim Steiner and Joseph Stiglitz were asked to work together and elaborate pathways towards integral human development.¹

A second influential workshop on *'Evolving Concepts of Nature'* was held in October 2014. It started from the critical assumption that nature is not static but dynamic and undergoes changes. Voices at that meeting warned about the dangers of technology: "In order to prevent conjectural risks of such mostly technological applications, it is advisable to take care that any envisaged application does not violate the relevant laws of nature."²

A third crucial workshop was the first World Meeting of Popular Movements that took place inside the Vatican also in October 2014. In his address, Pope Francis emphasized the following: "You are not satisfied with empty promises, with alibis or excuses. Nor do you wait with arms crossed for NGOs to help, for welfare schemes or paternalistic solutions that never arrive; or if they do, then it is with a tendency to anaesthetize or to domesticate ... and this is rather perilous."³ The Pope eloquently stated that inequality is the root cause of social ills.

The Promulgation of the Encyclical

On the eve of the promulgation of the encyclical, the world was desperately in need of an authentic, uplifting message. The eight Millennium Development Goals, signed at the United Nations in September 2000, were supposed to be achieved by September 2015. They ranged from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal pri-

¹ <http://www.pas.va/content/accademia/en/events/2014/sustainable.html>

² <http://www.pas.va/content/accademia/en/events/2014/nature.html>

³ *To participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements (28 October 2014) | Francis*

mary education. Progress towards the goals was uneven; some countries achieved many goals, while many others didn't realize any of them. Critics of the MDGs complained about the lack of progress and complexity of measurements. There was not even a consensus on the need to launch Sustainable Development Goals, let alone what they should be about. In addition, climate negotiations seemed stuck. Following the disastrous outcome in Copenhagen, expectations were focused on the forthcoming COP 21 in Paris.

By early 2015, it had become clear that an encyclical was being prepared, and all eyes were on Pope Francis who had already earned a reputation for authentic and visionary leadership. UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, said to the Pope, "I very much look forward to the forthcoming encyclical," emphasizing that "it will convey to the world that protecting our environment is an urgent moral imperative and a sacred duty for all people of faith and people of conscience. It is critically important that people and their leaders hear your strong moral voice in the coming months." He urged the Pope to come to the United Nations Special Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2015 and become the first Pope ever to address the General Assembly. Ban Ki-moon stressed: "Your influence is enormous. You speak to the heart of humanity's deepest hopes and needs. You can remind us all that we do not exist apart from nature, but are part of a wider creation. Nature does not wait for us. We cannot negotiate with nature. Let this be clear. We have to adapt to changing nature. Together, the major faith groups have established, run, or contribute to over half of all schools world-wide. You are also the third largest category of investors in the world."⁴

The promulgation of the encyclical received enormous media attention. For the first time ever, not only theologians but also journalists of the Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times

⁴ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sgsm16710.doc.html>

and The Economist were present. The Financial Times praised the encyclical: "Its timing is significant, given that the world is preparing for this December's climate conference in Paris, widely seen as the last chance to secure a deal on global emissions."⁵

Unsurprisingly, there was criticism from expected corners. Some vested interests had been mobilizing against Pope Francis' encyclical before it was even promulgated. In opinions voiced in the Financial Times, for example, arguments were made that "Pope Francis falls somewhat short of infallibility in his reportedly critical attitude to technology".⁶ Neoconservative commentators in the Wall Street Journal also made dismissive remarks: "The encyclical unwisely concedes too much to the secular environmental agenda, for example, by denigrating fossil fuels. But it also voices moral statements dismissing popular, ill-conceived positions."⁷

What all the comments, both favourable and critical, revealed was that at last a statement had been made that was broad and powerful enough to serve as the framework for a serious discussion of where the human adventure on the only planet we will ever have was taking us.

The promulgation of the encyclical, and the huge media attention and comments it generated advanced both the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in September, 2015 and the adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement in December, 2015. An indispensable contribution of the encyclical is that it filled what had been a vacuum in global political leadership with a broad, humble, insightful and accessible message to a world that was discouraged and tired of the subject.

⁵ Financial Times (2015). *Pope Francis, the climate and the world's poor*, Financial Times, 17 June.

⁶ Martin Sandbu (2015). *Free Lunch: There is profit in saving the planet*. Financial Times, 17 June.

⁷ Robert Sirico (2015). *The Pope's Green Theology*. Wall Street Journal, 18 June.

International Expo in Kazakhstan

Whereas the encyclical got a warm reception and widespread attention in the West, it made fewer headlines in the East, especially in Central Asia. This changed during the Expo 2017 that was held in Astana, today Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan.

The expo's theme was 'Future Energy', and aimed to create a global debate involving countries, non-governmental organizations, companies and the general public on the crucial question: "how do we ensure safe and sustainable access to energy for all while reducing CO₂ emissions?" A total of 115 countries and 22 international organizations showcased solutions for tackling humankind's greatest challenge. The vast majority of the pavilions were technology-centred and energy-supply driven, from Russia's pavilion focusing on nuclear-powered ice-breakers to open up the Arctic, China's pavilion focusing on its artificial mini-sun nuclear fusion technology, to the United States' pavilion highlighting America's ingenuity and the role of work by individual entrepreneurs in their garages in technological breakthroughs.

Among the few pavilions that brought forward the *human* aspects of energy was the Vatican Pavilion. Inspired by *Laudato si'*, the pavilion of the Holy See highlighted that energy inclusion is a precondition to integral human development. The Holy See's Theme Statement made the point that "future energy is energy that serves the wellbeing of all humanity and of its world, our common home."⁸

The Vatican pavilion offered visitors an experiential, intellectual and spiritual itinerary on four distinct steps, providing a deeply human, ethical framework. The first step focused on energy at the origins of man: the cosmic display of energy and light at the origins of humans and their world was also the beginning

⁸ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2017). *Holy See Theme Statement: Energy for the Common Good: Caring for Our Common Home*, Vatican City.

of God's creation out of love. The second step was on energy in the life and hands of man: energy meant for all, has been harnessed, distributed and employed in ambiguous ways in history and today, for good and bad, wasted in wars and injustice by humans. The third step was on making energy and its use human: in support of integral human development, and caring for our common home, energy can be produced and put to ethical, sustainable use – and there are good examples. The fourth and final step focused on energy within us, tapped in awe, prayer, meditation by people of faith for virtuous and holy living. The Vatican Pavilion partnered with the Bangalore-based SELCO Foundation, showcasing different interventions that enable energy inclusion of the poorest.

The distinguishing mark of the Vatican's pavilion was setting energy matters within a universal ethical framework. This message was reiterated at a conference hosted by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development at the Nazarbayev University, entitled 'Energy access for our common home'. Visitors received the Russian translation of *Laudato si'*. The conference recalled that energy resources were not created by humans: no one may claim any merit or pride for their existence; no grabbing behaviours were acceptable. These resources have been entrusted by God, the Creator, to us for the wellbeing of the entire human family, for all generations.

Amazon Synod

Another critical process catalyzed by *Laudato si'* was the Amazon Synod, whose three weeks of deliberations inside the Vatican in October 2019 unleashed a broader and more powerful chain of events that continues to this day. The journey for a 'Church with an Amazonian Face' was kicked off by Pope Francis during his visit to the province of Madre de Dios in Peru

in January 2018. Dozens of assemblies captured “the voice of the territory,” from denouncing experiences of deforestation, discrimination, inequality, gender-based violence, exploitation, loss of cultural identity and ancestral lands, to highlighting the importance of respect, recognition and dialogue with natives.

The opening ceremony of the Amazon Synod was preceded by a tree planting ceremony in the Vatican Gardens. In the presence of indigenous communities, Pope Francis argued that “planting is much deeper, it magnifies the world, it is a prayer to nature.”

The Amazon Synod was an exercise in evangelical imagination. The message of *Laudato si'* became concrete, leapt into action, got off the page, highlighting that everything is connected: social and natural environment, cultures, from sacramental lives to inculturated liturgies. The invaluable process of careful listening resulted in capturing the voice of the spirit in the vast polyphony of the Church.

Call to Action for Business and Investors

One of the most remarkable outcomes of the *Laudato si'* has been the call to action for business leaders and investors. One of the most compelling insights of the encyclical that reverberated in corporate boardrooms is the Pope’s articulation that a narcissistic drive for consumption, prestige, accumulation and material wealth not only collides with a finite world but is also an affront to the marginalized, excluded and poorest among us.

Many religious orders and congregations started asking whether their assets were managed in a way that was consistent with the moral imperatives of *Laudato si'*. The added value of the encyclical was the reasoning or realization that doing less of the bad was not sufficient: it was also about doing more of the good. Financial and physical assets ought to be managed not

only to avoid harm or benefit stakeholders, but also to contribute to the solutions. This calls for investment criteria such as health promotion, human dignity, the common good, employee empowerment, protection of the environment and reducing carbon footprints.

Building on the momentum around *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis also gathered leaders of the world's largest oil companies, including the chairman of ExxonMobil and the chief executive of BP, for a remarkable two-day conference to deliver a message about the urgency of acting on climate change. The Pope called for an acceleration of the global clean energy transition and asked for fossil fuels to be kept in the ground. The transition to clean energy "is a duty that we owe toward millions of our brothers and sisters around the world, poorer countries, and generations yet to come."

Towards *Laudato si'* – Consistent Investing

The potential impact of faith-consistent investing cannot be overestimated. More than 7% of Earth's land surface is owned by religious institutions and a further 8% has sacred links.⁹ In sub-Saharan Africa, faith-based institutions either run, manage or founded around 64% of all schools. The Catholic Church is not only the largest non-governmental and charitable organization in both healthcare and education, it is also a significant investor in capital markets.

The need to establish *Laudato si'*– compliant investing strategies and a robust pipeline for investable projects took centre stage at a conference in Switzerland, in October 2017. Hosted by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation at the Jesuit Lassalle-Haus in Zug, participants from 30 different faith tradi-

⁹ Bhagwat, S., & Palmer, M. (2009). Conservation: the world's religions can help. *Nature*, 461(7260), 37-37.

tions from eight religions, representing over 500 faith investment groups and trillions of dollars, called for the creation of an alliance to enable faith groups to share information, experience, knowledge, research and resources to ensure they put their investments and assets into initiatives to help create a better world for all. Inspired by a keynote speech by Cardinal Turkson focusing on “the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth”, the Faith in Finance meeting launched the Zug Guidelines to Faith-Consistent Investing.

The Zug Summit eventually led to the establishment of Faith-Invest, which aims to build critical bridges between faith organizations and traditions, and between faiths and the wider investment community in order to grow the scale and impact of faith-consistent investment. It also led to the launch of a massive green entrepreneurship open online course, inspired by *Laudato si'* and orchestrated by the United Nations Development Program, a first ever United Nations course with a faith lens! The next frontier of faith-consistent investing is the establishment of science-based targets for faith.

Beyond Environmentalism

The key to understanding the impact of *Laudato si'* is to see it in terms of integral ecology or ecological conversion, which goes far deeper than a merely ‘green’ encyclical would have done. No other authoritative entity, including the United Nations, has elaborated on the subject with such depth and eloquence.

Only such an integral and holistic approach, which requires a profound interior conversion, is capable of reversing a trend highlighted by Pope Francis in paragraph 217 of *Laudato si'*: “the external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.” To get there, we all have to embark on a *Laudato si' Jubilee*, a true *kairos*.

Collective Reflections from the Laudato si' Challenge

ERIC HARR

Co-Founder & CEO, Laudato Si' Challenge, USA

Five years ago, I was leading a technology company in Silicon Valley. I thought, "This is it. I have a good family, a nice home and an 'important' company. I have arrived!"

Then, one day, my eight-year-old daughter Vivienne, started a lemonade stand to shine a light on the darkness of child slavery. She "made her stand" every day for one year, and her story lifted hearts across the world...including mine. I learned then that I had been measuring my success superficially. This child's example of compassion and service opened my eyes – and my heart.

It was divine choreography that Vivienne was invited to speak at the Vatican in 2016. There and then, I was introduced to *Laudato si'*. At the time, I was embarrassed to say that I did not know what an encyclical was! So, I sneaked away from the conference for a couple hours and read a portion of *Laudato si'*, enjoying the turtles and admiring the gardens at The Pontifical Academy of Sciences. I felt a new breath of life entered my body and soul.

Laudato si' reignited the Holy Spirit in me.

I have had time to reflect and pray on how *Laudato si'* has changed my life. First, I have come to embrace that we are one global human family and that we must care for our common home- all people of all faiths, standing in solidarity.

Next, I have come to learn by putting my own interests aside and serving others, by helping them achieve their goals, the blessings rain down in ways I never imagined. When I move from the transactional to the relational, the Holy Spirit is unleashed in me and those around me. When we help one another,

the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. All boats can rise together!

Third, I have come to love “building bridges between unlikely allies,” as Pope Francis says. I have seen first-hand what can happen when good people of good intention come together to co-create solutions to humanity’s greatest challenges. We need the public sector, the religious sector, and the private sector to bring their respective talents and resources in boldly serving *Laudato si’*.

Finally, this notion of “being wrong together as the bridge to love” has been the most sacred and transformative lesson for me. It is one that has bound me closer to my family, closer to my colleagues – and closer to God.

To imagine my journey to *Laudato si’* started with a child! Well, I can say: I am proud to follow in the footsteps...of my daughter!

So, for Vivienne, for Turner – and for all of the children of the world – I commit my life to putting the principles of *Laudato si’* into action; to caring for our common home; to empowering vulnerable people to “be the protagonist in their own solution” and to supporting the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals of “being a human dignity narrative that leaves no one behind”.

– Mr. Eric Harr, Co-Founder & CEO, Laudato Si’ Challenge¹

Authority is typically understood to mean “the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience,” and therefore people in positions of authority are thought of as those who hold such power or rights. But the word itself suggests another meaning: that of authorship, or the ability to direct narratives in a powerful and influential way.

In Charlie Chaplin’s 1940 film, *The Great Dictator*, he authored a story to show what might happen if an office of great

¹ <http://lsc21.org>

power was used to promote a story of unity and goodwill. In that film, a powerful dictator is mistaken for a Jewish barber and abducted just before giving a great speech. The barber himself is then told to go to the platform and deliver the speech. He does so, seizing the opportunity to lead, inspire, and point the collective imagination towards a brighter, more harmonious future.

"I don't want to rule or conquer anyone," he says. "I should like to help everyone – if possible – Jew, Gentile – black man – white. We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other's happiness – not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. And the good earth is rich and can be provided for everyone... You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure."

That great speech was a work of fiction, but Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* encyclical is a real-life demonstration of the same principle: of using a position of tremendous authority to author an uplifting, unifying, and empowering story for the Earth and all her inhabitants, both human and otherwise. Through the example of *Laudato si'* we are invited to understand the true meaning of divine authority, not as an exclusive power to control the lives of others but rather as a recognition of humankind's profound creative ability to use our powers of perception, imagination, and communication to write the script for a better tomorrow.

All humans were made in the image of God, in that we have the power to use our words for the re-creation of the world into a life that is free and beautiful. This ability is given equally to all, but the audience is larger for some. And so, to those of us whose words have the greatest reach: let us use the power of our authority in its most enlightened sense, to write the story of our greatest dreams for the world. The possibility is no less than this – that through us, these words of fiction might become reality: "The soul of man has been given wings, and at last he is begin-

ning to fly. He is flying into the rainbow, into the light of hope, into the future – the glorious future that belongs to you, to me, and to all of us.”

– Mr. Adam Rockefeller Growald, Co-Founder, TeraTree

“May we be sustained by the conviction that education is a seed of hope, the hope of peace, justice and fraternity.”- Pope Francis.

I have always believed in the power of education. The daughter of a Palestinian forced to flee his ancestral homeland of 700 years because of conflict, I was raised with the mantra, “while you can lose your land, possessions and even your country, no one can take away your education or values”.

Our Pope’s call for action only confirmed my determination to find solutions to serve the most invisible victims of war and violence: women and children. 250 million children not attending school, tens of millions due to war, creates a global humanitarian crisis. The pandemic has only exacerbated the disparity in access to education. The 1 Million Children Initiative will invest in innovative local education programmes through partnerships to reach children in conflict areas and put them back into learning. We are building on best practice and experience gained from my work over the past 15 years with the Middle East Children’s Institute that has given schooling and healing programmes to 25,000+ refugees in poverty-stricken and conflict areas while continuing to deliver our education programmes to children in 54 schools in the Middle East during Covid-19.

– Mrs. Lola Nashashibi Grace, Founder, Middle East Children’s Institute

1982 was the 800th anniversary of the birth of St Francis of Assisi, during which I wrote the following reflection. It is my *Lau-*

dato si', an ode to the Earth, expressing concern for a world of growing inequalities and the dawning realisation that we were losing intimacy with the natural world.

Jewel of the Universe

How I love you Mother Earth

JEWEL OF THE UNIVERSE.

Perfectly positioned

You encourage all life and sustain it.

Upon you, humankind rushes to and fro

Seldom stopping to acknowledge

Your beauty or dignity.

We take the mystery of day and night

and year to year

for granted.

We seldom marvel at the speed with which you spin

and the vast solar orbit you travel

resulting in the rich splendour of your seasons.

More and more

As our knowledge expands

We learn that you alone

Are the only known life giver.

Our nearest neighbours

Venus and Mars

are either too hot or too cold.

Teach us Mother to love and respect you

as an infant reveres its own.

As a child is nurtured by its mother,

So too, all Earth's children are nurtured by you.

You provide for our every need...
Physically you build us
Mentally you enrich us
Emotionally you heal us
And spiritually you are part of our essence.

As your children
Teach us to share in the greatness of your generosity.
It was never your intention to care for some
while neglecting others.

You provide enough for everyone's need
But not for everyone's greed.
This is your most basic law of nature.
As members of your family,
Teach us to love one another
As you love us,
By sharing your resources
fairly and with justice.
Your surface and your seas
are the breadbasket of all creation.

Teach us O Mother Earth
That hunger and oppression
Insult your selfless generosity.
And teach us O Mother
That no man or nation has the right
to possess your destruction.

In loving you,
May present and future generations acknowledge –
We do not inherit you from our parents...

We borrow you,
from our children.
– Mr. Don Mullan. Dedicated to His Holiness, Pope Francis,
and the Laudato Si'
Challenge Community

I take my inspiration on how to bring up my family and lead our company from the words of Francis of Assisi, our patron saint of animals and ecology. He restored the original state of creation by living in full harmony with Mother Nature considering even the smallest species, brothers, and sisters. While biology unveils its beauty in a slow evolution, the present times are much too fast and complex for almost all of mankind. Globalization, digitalization and lifestyle hinder us from pausing to think of our own situation. However, everything is connected in nature.

Even small events can serve as catalysts affecting starting conditions, and nature is very sensitive to these conditions. This seemingly stable ecosystem is exposed to a variety of influences small and large and can transform from order into disorder or even chaos. Although governed by deterministic phenomena, we are nonetheless unable to predict how our nature will behave over time if we go on like this.

And there is feedback as well, so that what an ecosystem does affects her own behaviour.

Therefore, I pause, and let my daughter learn about the wonder of nature and bring her up as a future opinion leader for the concerns of *Laudato si'*.

– Dr. Sven Jansen, Executive Board NOVENTI Health SE

Reading *Laudato si'* closed a circuit of spiritual energy in my life. Until that time, my spiritual life and my work had felt adjacent but separate. Pope Francis' words brought them together

in his vision for climate justice, and now I strive every day to bring this unity to everything we do in my organization, American Forests.

My life's passion has been to unite care for our common home with the quest for equity and justice. For me, this starts with bringing the healing power of trees to the parts of our cities where our most vulnerable people suffer enormous burdens of pollution, heat, and visual blight. The healing and joyful power of trees is denied to those among us who most need it, a need that grows more urgent every day with the impact of climate change.

I was therefore stunned and moved by the spiritual call in *Laudato si'* for action at this intersection of healing our urban environment and the people in it. I prayerfully attended Pope Francis' event in Washington, DC, where he reiterated this call while standing before the US Capitol, a place where I have worked in spiritual service ever since to advance Tree Equity that will bring climate justice for our lower-income communities and people of colour.

Laudato si' is alive in me, and in the work, I do, every day.

– Mr. Jad Daley, President & CEO, American Forests

When you read the *Laudato si'* encyclical, one gets a sense that this is more than a letter, it is a collection of words that breathes life into love and compassion felt far and wide from the pages. In a way that is what the *Laudato si'* is: it is a call-to-action. Beyond our words, action is needed; beyond the excellence of our minds, the cultivation of our heart is required; beyond our cures, our care and compassion is essential. *Laudato si'* calls for us to “care for our common home”. It challenges us to acknowledge this important connection, these interdependencies, with all of God's creations. We are but links in a chain, a bond of connection between one another, and some of the answers to

our biggest global, economic, and environmental questions can be found in building community; by people meeting each other where they are, feeling their pain, and providing cures with care. *Laudato si'* has called us to create enterprises, invest our capital and design our economic systems in a way that connects us all through God's love. *Laudato si'* has called us to do something bold: to let our pursuits and creations be directed by His guiding hand simply by opening our hearts.

– Mr. Kyle Ballara, Founder & CEO, Falkon Ventures

The impact of His Holiness Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*, on my life and ministry.

Growing up in Nova Scotia and surrounded by natural beauty, it was effortless to contemplate the hand of God at work. From the Cape Breton Highlands to the strapping embrace of the Atlantic Ocean, it was clear – God was everywhere! Yet, other non-life-giving forces were at work. With pesticide spraying, the Bald Eagle no longer soared in the skies. Drilling for coal continued and deforestation was all around us.

It was the early 1970s and an environmental war was already raging insidiously – and globally. *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, together, bring light to the world and to me, personally, by providing a method that is loving, careful and rooted in scripture that promotes life and engages me to look forward creatively with hope and act with positive impact.

I hope one day to assemble a team at Salt and Light Media that is organized by the principles of *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*. These encyclicals, and others as far back as *Rerum Novarum*, have changed me. Pope Francis' himself has inspired me to walk ever more closely with Jesus and those whose lives can be better by having their stories made known.

– Fr Alan Fogarty, SJ, Chief Executive Officer, Salt + Light Catholic Media Foundation

Now and again you cross paths with people, and ideas that change your life forever. These intersections are often innocuous to begin with. They may seem like random collisions of fate or even just interesting but unimportant chance meetings. Often, you're unaware when you first encounter this person, when you are first exposed to this thought, or when you first casually reach to read this piece, that this will be the moment when everything changes. Such it was for me when I first encountered the Holy Father Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*, of on Care for our Common Home. I say I encountered it because it wasn't only the reading of the text that changed me. It was meeting those who had begun to dedicate themselves to bringing that text to life. And knowing, at once, that their quest was in fact, the path I have been on for most of my adult life. In 2006 I embarked on a personal journey to play a small role in helping society re-imagine the practice of capitalism. Influenced by great thinkers like Raj Sisodia, one of the co-founders of the Conscious Capitalism movement and Ed Freeman, the University of Virginia professor who is the father of stakeholder capitalism, I'd begun to think deeply about how I could help entrepreneurs transform the purpose of business in society. The ideas of the encyclical have given me a deeper level of understanding of my own purpose. More important than the content however, has been a light it has shown on a bridge to a new community of fierce, loyal, humble and selfless warriors who are determined to leave our common home better than they found it. To create a more equal, just, joyous and sustainable society. *Fratelli tutti* in the truest sense.

– Mr. Jeff Cherry, Executive Director, Conscious Venture Lab

Upon reading the encyclical, *Laudato si'*, I was forever moved. Pope Francis' beautiful letter was a reminder of the love we should have for each other, that it is our duty to love our neighbour as ourselves and look continuously for ways to serve

each other rather than ourselves. We are truly one body and should ensure all our actions show Christ in us and through us. His powerful message and vision about climate and racial justice was a well-needed reminder that we have a common home and it is our responsibility to be better stewards of our planet and all who inhabit it.

My life's passion is to elevate humanity. I strongly believe we need to come together to solve some of the world's most pressing and toughest challenges. SOCAP Global is the intersection of money and meaning. SOCAP has provided the thought leadership platform for accelerating movement toward a more just, equitable, and sustainable economy. Our mission is to unlock the power of markets to make an impact. We spur on conversation and inspire investment in positive change. SOCAP strives to promote a new inclusive economy where everyone can collectively thrive and deploy capital with purpose, rigor and real impact. We must drive for greater structural changes in our companies to overcome an economy of exclusion and aim to reduce the gap separating the majority of people from the prosperity enjoyed by the few. To state it directly, there is a pressing need to create a new model of inclusive capitalism that sees no one left behind.

"When we build a model that benefits everyone, we build a world that includes everyone."

More than any other time in history we are in a fragmented world that is in rapid decline on various levels. Rather than contribute to overwhelmingly costly and perhaps irreparable breakdowns and divisions that are universal in scope and global in impact, we are called not only to live but to thrive. We are called to build bridges with positive intentions and productive actions that engage all peoples from a fundamental position of mutual respect, understanding and love that comes from God. As we flourish toward peace in our efforts to care for all, we have an exponentially better chance at healing the fragmentation, humanity and our common home.

We have one planet and one family only, so it makes sense to have one conversation. The fragility of all of our systems: financial, social, political, spiritual, health and education has been made glaringly apparent as we as a world face many foes that range from climate change to intolerance and violence, racism and the current pandemic. Covid-19 has shown us how undeniably interconnected we are no matter where we are from. Because of the nature of these comprehensive concerns, humanity has arrived at a defining moment. By acting together, the world has a chance to realize a vision it has long dreamed of but has so far failed to achieve – solving the world’s largest problems – as one unified body. Through *Laudato si’*, we are called to flourish and integrate truth and life so that we begin to treat all other human beings with the proper respect and love by virtue of our being made in His image and likeness.

Thank you, Holy Father, for reminding us to act better and be a living sacrifice, for His glory.

– Mr. Robert J. Caruso, Founder & Chairman, SOCAP Global

Laudato si' at Six

NICHOLAS STERN

*IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government, Chairman of the
Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, UK*

CLAUDE HENRY

*Professor in Sustainable Development, Sciences Po Paris, France,
and Columbia University, USA*

Le moine cistercien habite le monde comme un hôte. L'hôte se sait de passage. Il veille à traiter avec égard et respect ce qui lui est simplement confié.

[Cistercian monks live in the world as guests. Guests know they are only passing. They are careful to treat with regard and respect what has only been lent to them.]

(Engraved on a wall at Cîteaux Abbey, mother house of the Cistercian order)

Laudato si' is an appeal from Pope Francis to a "Humanity [that] still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage, and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share" (LS, 13).

In the collective book, *Standing up for a sustainable world: Voices of change*, the 64 authors give accounts of their respective and diverse efforts to protect our common home and its inhabitants, in particular those who most need protection. In doing so, they indeed felt inspired and encouraged by the *Laudato si'* message, to which they paid tribute. Some are fighting in extreme conditions, like Maria do Socorro Costa Silva, against multinationals busy destroying the Amazonian rainforest, or Bobby Chan and his team who, on a voluntary basis, inspired by their Catholic faith, enforce conservation laws that usually

go ignored by local police and coastguards, in islands of the Philippines archipelago. The younger authors in the book have something special to say. Ridhima Pandey, the youngest (she is 12), who challenged the climate inaction of the Indian Federal Government before the Supreme Court, writes: "What I like most about the Pope's letter is its hopeful tone. Even though he acknowledges that the world is in a crisis, he does not indulge in doomsday predictions".

Young people highly appreciate the alignment of hope and lucidity that characterizes *Laudato si'*: "Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems. Still we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point" (*LS*, 61). Hilda Nakabuye, is known for starting the Fridays For Future movement in Uganda. She was a lonely presence on the banks of Lake Victoria before convincing fellow students by the thousands to join. She writes: "We are the first generation to know what is happening to our Earth and this puts us in a position to find solutions to stop it. Africa in particular is headed for trouble if countries do not adopt sustainable development."

Young people also appreciate that Pope Francis doesn't shy from making clear where the responsibility lies: "Politics and business have been slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world" (*LS*, 165). At many places in the encyclical we are reminded that we ALL have a duty of care for our common home.

This is an assessment that millions of young people, organized in the Fridays For Future and other associations, have powerfully amplified during demonstrations all over the world. As Michael Mann, the climatologist and celebrated advocate for the protection of the climate, writes: "It is my view that the encyclical laid the groundwork for today's global youth climate movement that has re-centred the climate crisis on fundamental issues of ethics and morality."

On this fundamental point, Ridhima Pandey concurs: “Neither does he restrict his views to law and policy alone. His vision is all encompassing, and it has room for everyone, including children.” Or in Genevieve Guenther’s words (she is the founder of End Climate Silence): “*Laudato si’* raised justice and love to the forehead of the climate movement, so that decarbonization could no longer be seen merely as a technical problem, but as a social, cultural, and even spiritual calling.”

Pippo Ranci, former President of the Italian Regulatory Authority for Electricity and Gas and professor at the Università Cattolica in Milan, measures the importance of the spirit of brotherhood that gives dynamism to the fight demonstrated by the coming together of communities to invent and create new things. He points out that *Fratelli tutti*, the encyclical that followed *Laudato si’*, goes in the same direction of breaking prevalent egoisms: “It has been remarked that *Fratelli tutti* is inextricably linked to *Laudato si’*: our common home is inhabited by our fraternity, and only social friendship can resume it by acting together.”

While politics and business have in general been slow to react, some positive trends are emerging. The divest-invest movement on financial markets is a case in point. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund has been one of the pioneering institutions of the movement. Its President, Stephen Heintz, explains why: “Business leaders and investors have an essential role to play in advancing the vision of ecological healing that the Pope powerfully articulates. If we are to sustain our planet, businesses and investors must divest from fossil fuels, invest in the clean economy of the future, and use their voice to advocate for a transformed economic paradigm. The progress we have made so far – \$14 trillion in combined investment assets committed to divestment as of today – is encouraging, but profoundly inadequate relative to the scope of the crisis.” Bill McKibben, author of “The End of Nature” (1988) and founder of 350.org, now a network ex-

tending on five continents, has, from the beginning of the movement, worked at convincing investors to divest and then invest; he takes a step further here: "I think it's key to continue to push for the divestment of the Vatican Bank from fossil fuel companies. Pope Francis has more or less endorsed the idea, but I don't think it's happened yet."

Susan Clayton, chair of the Psychology department at the College of Wooster, emphasizes another foundation of *Laudato si'*: "*Laudato si'* reminded people of the fundamental reality that we are all interconnected: we can't close our eyes to the ways in which environmental damage is harming other species and people, because harm to part of the system will inevitably affect the whole". The concept of interconnection is indeed fundamental in the letter and it extends beyond interconnection between people. In the same spirit are considered interconnection between faith and science, and interconnection between branches of science, that scientific activity rarely promotes.

Alessia Lefebure, Vice-Dean of the French School for Public Health and member of the Board of the Red Cross Foundation, observes that "the conviction that everything in the world is connected" (*LS*, 16) is increasingly shared by students she meets in the universities (focused on health and food issues) where she is working or is in regular contact. Philippe Cury, President of the Scientific Council of the Monaco Oceanographic Institute, signals the same trend in the world of oceanography and ocean resources management.

Laudato si' must be seen as an ongoing effort. A pause jeopardizes previous successes, as it appears from surveys led by Edward Maibach, Director of the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University. "Our research team conducted a survey of American adults in 2015 immediately before *Laudato si'* was released, and again approximately 5 months later (immediately after Pope Francis visited the USA), and twice yearly thereafter. We learned that the encyclical had several im-

portant impacts on the beliefs and behaviours of Americans over the short term, although its influence waned over the next year or two. This is consistent with most research on the influence of communication campaigns: campaigns can influence public beliefs and behaviours, but unless the campaign activity is sustained, the effects tend to wane fairly quickly. I encourage Pope Francis to do everything possible to continue bringing attention to the climate especially as the nations of the world are considering the commitments they will make at COP26 in Scotland later this year.”

What is true in regard to public opinion is also observed at the highest levels of power. Just days after *Laudato si'* was published, President Obama declared: “I deeply admire the Pope’s decision to make the case – clearly, powerfully, and with the full moral authority of his position – for action on global climate change”. Moreover, as Alice Hill, former special adviser to President Obama on climate policy, reports: “For White House leaders, the message acted as powerful confirmation of the need to address the climate threat and, importantly, also as a spur to greater action”.

The spur however did not survive President Obama’s departure from the White House, now, with President Biden’s election, that thread is taken up. Pope Francis, speaking at the major emitters’ summit called by President Biden on 22 April, 2021, urged action now, and presented a vision of a *just, equitable and environmentally safe planet*. It is a message of hope. And as the authors in our book argue and demonstrate, human ingenuity and commitment – inspired by the recognition both of the immense dangers of inaction and of the deep attractions of the new paths to sustainability – are showing how that hope can be realized.

In Celebration of *Laudato si'* *Leaders of the Council for Inclusive Capitalism*

His Holiness Pope Francis published his encyclical, *Laudato si'*, *On Care for our Common Home* in 2015 and inspired us to reflect upon our responsibility as stewards of the planet and of each other.

The Council for Inclusive Capitalism¹ was formed in response to the Holy Father's appeal "for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" (*LS*, 14), "to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress" (*LS*, 16), and to help create "a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles" (*LS*, 189). His Holiness first shared directly with us in 2019 the need to create: "An inclusive capitalism that leaves no one behind, that discards none of our brothers or sisters, is a noble aspiration, worthy of our best efforts".

The Council is committed to this call to action. We are leaders of large and small organizations who seek real, lasting change for the common good. Though our members each take a different approach, all are dedicated to taking concrete action that will promote sustainable, inclusive, strong, and trusted economies around the world. Our vision is a future with:

- *Equality of opportunity* for all people to pursue prosperity and quality of life;
- *Equitable outcomes* for those who have the same opportunities and seize them in the same way;
- *Fairness across generations* so that one generation does not overburden the planet or realize near-term benefits that incur long-term costs, at the expense of future generations; and

¹ <http://www.inclusivecapitalism.com>

- *Fairness to those in society* whose circumstances prevent them from full participation in the economy.

“Laudato si’ represents a vital integration of the environment and humanity,” adds Council founder and managing partner of Inclusive Capital Partners, Lynn Forester de Rothschild. “I am reminded of its teachings in all of our work. The events of recent years have forced us to hear the ‘cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’ in very profound ways and force us to step forward to take concrete action.”

Since we began this journey, 72 organizations representing more than 200 million workers in 163 countries and territories have joined the Council as Stewards of inclusive capitalism and forged more than 300 commitments to address the threats facing people and the planet. Whether a local grocer or a global conglomerate, we work to build more inclusive, sustainable economies and societies. In the coming years, the Council plans to enrol upwards of 1,000 organizations to advance this work, and we encourage others to join us.

We are leaders of organizations representing diverse religions, ethnicities, industries, and geographies, and Pope Francis’ “dialogue with all people about our common home” is an invitation to each of us (*LS*, 3). His Holiness notes, “the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” (*LS*, 23). But, he adds, “the notion of the common good also extends to future generations” (*LS*, 159).

“One of the principles of the Council is fairness across generations,” says United Nations special envoy for climate action and finance, Mark Carney. “We are trying to break the tragedy of the horizon – the fact that we don’t put enough weight on how our actions of today affect the planet of tomorrow.”

These are urgent challenges. We, too, believe that “everything is interconnected” and that we need to take “a broader vision of reality” to address them (*LS*, 138). With this broader

vision as our guide, we embrace the call for a more holistic market approach that creates long-term value for all stakeholders – businesses, investors, employees, customers, governments, communities, and the planet.

Ron O’Hanley, President and CEO of State Street notes, “*Laudato si’* challenges us not only to make things better, particularly as related to the environment, but also to do so equitably. As we transition to better, we are required to ensure that those disadvantaged are looked after and treated justly during the transition.”

“His Holiness has challenged us to remember that at the centre of every person’s life ought to be dignity, and that dignity is a preamble for justice,” says Ford Foundation president, Darren Walker. “He reminds us of our moral obligations as a society, that we must care for each other, that we must show compassion, that we must show grace, and that our economic systems need to be imbued with these values.”

“The profits of the global economy are generated by people who have been largely excluded from sharing in the benefits in a fair way and are living with the resulting environmental devastation,” says Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation. “A new social contract with jobs and just transition is the foundation for ensuring inclusiveness and dignity in work.”

Care of the planet and the environment has become a pillar of the Council’s work, aligned with the message in *Laudato si’* that “humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption” (LS, 23).

Pope Francis inspires each of us to accept our own responsibility and agency to be part of the solution for our planet in crisis and we understand that “we human beings above all ... need to change” (LS, 202). The foundational work of the Council is to determine how business can continue to help with that transition.

“His Holiness reminds us that business is a noble pursuit in the ways that capitalism can help solve the world’s biggest

challenges, including those addressed in *Laudato si'*," says Brian Moynihan, chairman of the board and Chief Executive Officer of Bank of America.

We look forward to the Council's continued dialogue with the Vatican and thank the Council's protector, His Eminence Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for their many contributions to our work. United, we are hopeful of the human race's ability to face our challenges, always remembering that as taught to us by the *Laudato si'*, "our struggles and our concern for this planet [should] never take away the joy of our hope" (LS, 244).

² <http://www.inclusivecapitalism.com/commitments>

The Glory of the Arctic

ÓLAFUR RAGNAR GRÍMSSON

Chairman of the Arctic Circle; President of Iceland 1996-2016

Across the ocean gate of the North Atlantic, Iceland and Greenland mark the entry to the Arctic. For millennia, it was unknown even to Ancient Rome and the tribes gathering in the temples of Jerusalem. Silently glaciers and floating icebergs bore witness to Creation and kept the earth in balance because the melting harmonised with the winter snow.

When all of Europe had for centuries celebrated the gospels of Christ, the majestic white crowns of those distant lands had yet to be discovered as did the crystal-clear ice floating peacefully in fjords and dancing in lakes by the edge of glaciers. The Glory of the Arctic enhanced silently. During summers when days were everlasting, the blueness of this frozen world reflected the sun and in the long months of darkness the moon became even more mysterious.

Finally the Vikings arrived; soon bringing Christianity to those shores, having previously made pilgrimage to the Holy sites described in the Bible. They were the first bearers of important tidings. The Almighty had also created a world of snow and ice; a frozen wilderness with oceans and rivers, fjords and lakes, rich in fish and other resources and sometimes green fields that reached up to the mountains. The settlers felt blessed and eager to share the news. One climbed a mountain, marvelled at the icebergs floating in the distance; proudly pronounced Iceland to be the proper name. Another sailed on and decided to remain close to the gigantic glaciers. He became fascinated by the contrasts found in the green grass and declared that Greenland would be an appropriate trademark and make it attractive for others to join the settlement. The accounts of these endeavours

can be found in the sagas written in Iceland during the early centuries of Christendom.

A strong-willed woman became a pioneer in the evolution of this Christian story. Guðrídur Thorbjarnardóttir was born in Iceland and wed into the family of the Greenlandic chieftain. She decided to seek a promised land which lay even further away; discovered by her husband's brother in the year 1000 AD. She sailed her vessel across the waters west of Greenland, found a New World, settled for a while and bore a son who, at his baptism, was given the name of Snorri; the service conducted by the priest of her household. Guðrídur was the first Christian woman to arrive in what later became America. Her son, Snorri, was the first child to be baptised on that great continent. Upon returning, first to Greenland and then to Iceland, she was determined to bring the discovery of this New World to the awareness of the Holy See. She was the first person in the history of Christianity to have been both in Rome and America.

In our new century, Pope Benedict XVI gracefully received a delegation from Guðrídur's home valley and accepted a statue showing mother and son standing at the bow of the Viking vessel. Two Christians sailing away from America almost 500 years before Christopher Columbus came to those shores. The statue was made by a renowned Icelandic sculptor. Now it enlarges the Vatican's collection, a testament to the unique historical and Christian bond between Iceland, Greenland, America and Rome.

Thus, a millennium ago, ice-covered lands far away from the heart of Europe became landmarks in the evolution of the Christian mission. It is a heritage reflecting their modern role as barometers of how fast the climate is changing. When the cracking glaciers recede or fall into the ocean and the Arctic sea ice withers away, all countries are affected: rising sea levels and extreme weather events threaten cities and civilised life everywhere on our planet. If the glory of the Arctic loses its splendour,

the earth is in danger. The fate of humanity will be determined by the future of the ice.

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis urgently appealed “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.” Before the Holy See had recognised the significant role of the Arctic when the first Assembly of the Arctic Circle came together in 2013, Cardinal Turkson joined the many participants from dozens of countries who gathered in Reykjavík. His Eminence brought the blessings of the Church and signalled the growing concerns of her leaders.

A few months after the publication of *Laudato si'*, I was privileged to read out to the crowded hall in the award-winning Harpa building, at the Arctic Circle Assembly in October 2015, a heartfelt message from Pietro Cardinal Parolin, the Secretary of State of His Holiness.

The opening paragraph brought observations and encouragement on behalf of the new Pope:

“This is an essential response to an urgent situation. In commending you and your distinguished guests on the importance of this venture and its objective, I wish to offer, on behalf of His Holiness, Pope Francis, some observations in the hope that they may encourage the Arctic Circle Assembly by enriching its deliberations, and strengthening its resolve to act now.”

The message from the Secretary of State offered an illustration of “this ecological conversion applied to the core of the common Arctic home”. He conveyed “the solidarity, encouragement and good wishes of His Holiness Pope Francis as you continue your deliberations, as well as his fervent wish that your dedicated work in the coming days may contribute to COP21 in Paris and beyond”.

These words were especially appropriate because at the same Arctic Circle Assembly, the President of France, François Hollande, delivered an inspiring speech on the urgency of cli-

mate action; the only such address the President made prior to the Paris Climate Conference.

Before the speech I flew President Hollande to the edge of Iceland's fast-receding glacier, *Sólheimajökull*. The name, given in the early settlement time, translates in English as 'The Glacier of the World of Sun'. The host of the Paris Climate Conference walked across the black sand and the slippery rocks until he finally arrived at the lake which the melting had created in front of the glacier. We reached for a chunk of floating ice and let the President feel its slippery surface, observing the dripping water. Then we brought him into the glacial caves where he could listen to the cracking sounds made by the glacier as it continued to melt – sounds I have often called 'the music of climate change'. These are the warning voices from the disappearing glacier.

When President Hollande returned to Harpa, the venue Hall of the Arctic Circle Assembly, his heart was transformed, his mind sharply engaged. His speech became like *Laudato si'*; a dramatic call for action, inspiring the Assembly in an unforgettable way.

This largest annual international gathering on the future of the Arctic is held every year in Reykjavík where more than three decades ago Reagan and Gorbachev prepared the ground for the end of the Cold War. Now, each year the capital of my country allows the bells of the growing global climate coalition to hail the glory of the Arctic.

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis had highlighted his partnership with the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with whom he shared the hope of full ecclesial communion. As His Holiness strongly stated:

"Patriarch Bartholomew has spoken in particular of the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet, for "inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage", we are called to acknowledge "our contribution,

smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation". He has repeatedly stated this firmly and persuasively, challenging us to acknowledge our sins against creation."

In accordance with the climate messages of Rome and Constantinople I invited His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I to address the 2017 Arctic Circle Assembly. Hosted by both the Government and the National Church of my country; following the long journey to Iceland, He delivered a profound message:

"Scientists tell us that the Arctic is a vibrant image and vivid mirror of the state of our planet as a whole. For scientists, the Arctic is the barometer of the globe's environmental health. The ecological misdeeds committed in other regions – including chemical contamination and nuclear radiation – are clearly evident in the Arctic environment. Above all, the dramatic rise in global temperatures is having a palpable effect on the Arctic landscape. Nevertheless, so many industrial societies and activities that cause climate change are often blind to the consequences of their behaviour. But here, in the Arctic Circle, it is possible to see all manner of things so much more clearly. When we visit this pristine part of the planet, we cannot hide our eyes, either from the beauty of God's creation or from the changes which human folly has generated. Nor can we avoid pondering the terrible consequences for the remainder – and the future – of the world, if glaciers continue to melt and sea-levels continue to rise."

At the same 2017 Arctic Circle Assembly, inspired by *Laudato si'* and the earlier presence of Cardinal Turkson as well as the cordial support from His Eminence Cardinal Parolin, in cooperation with the World Council of Churches and the Evangelic Lutheran Church of Iceland, it hosted a dialogue between religious

leaders, ministers, mayors and theological experts. The title of this visionary encounter “Just Peace with Earth” carried a core message: texts in the Bible were in accordance with modern environmental duties. The Garden of Eden represented Mother Earth. The Book of Genesis and other Biblical scriptures preserve the seeds of sustainability thinking.

The dialogue “Just Peace with Earth” opened in a splendid modern church and then moved first to Thingvellir, the ancient Parliamentary site where Christianity was adopted in the year 1000, and finally to the main Hall of the Assembly where bishops and professors articulated the new direction. In joining the climate coalition, the Church acknowledged its responsibility, established a connection between the religious foundation of our civilisation and the modern role of science and research, issuing the warning: time is of the essence.

The participants came from Europe as well as America, from places as different as Alaska and Fiji; some representing indigenous communities, the people who were witnessing firsthand the melting of the glaciers and the retreat of the snow.

The speech by His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew had made a profound impression on the Assembly and in accordance with his call for a continuous dialogue between spiritual leaders and ecologists, the Arctic Circle made the Assembly in the coming years a platform for further engagement by bishops and other church leaders from the Arctic countries, spear-headed by the National Churches of Iceland and other Nordic States.

The following year bishops from Sweden, Finland, Norway and the Faroe Islands attended the Assembly. Led by the Bishop of Iceland and a former Minister of Justice and Church Affairs, they made the Arctic Circle once again the venue for the engagement of religious leaders in the climate battle. On the plenary stage their message was clear: the Nordic Churches would be at the forefront, giving the environmental campaign a new

solidarity with Mother Earth: a vision deeply rooted in both the Old and New Testaments.

At the invitation of the bishops and in accordance with the Arctic Circle structure, many distinguished academic experts and environmental activists joined this ground-breaking dialogue. Never before in the history of Nordic Christianity had distinguished Church leaders brought together such diverse participants, enabling thousands at the Assembly from over 60 countries to witness the encounter and learn from this pioneering endeavour.

In relation to the 2019 Arctic Circle Assembly this new partnership was taken to yet another level. “The Faith for Earth Initiative” hosted a dialogue in the historic cathedral of *Skálholt*, where for 500 years the Catholic Bishops of Iceland had resided, a holy place for the nation. Receding glaciers could be viewed from the Cathedral and in the neighbouring region the famous volcano Hekla is a majestic reminder that the Earth is still being created. The forces of nature, frost and fire, formed a background symphony to the dialogue at the historic site of *Skálholt*.

The spirit of past centuries then accompanied the participants to Harpa, the halls of the Arctic Circle Assembly where Canada’s National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop, Mark MacDonald, delivered a keynote on ‘The Role of Religious Stewardship in the Arctic’. With that speech, the message of *stewardship* was emphatically brought to the Assembly, reinforced in discussions by many indigenous leaders from Arctic as well as non-Arctic countries and also by various environmentalists and climate activists. In the notion of *stewardship*, they all saw the essence of their calling and rejoiced to find harmony in religious teachings. We are all stewards of our planet; this was God’s order to the first humans and now the call to action by concerned citizens. It is the heritage of indigenous communities everywhere on our planet. For centuries, even millennia, they have taken care of the fields and the forests, the oceans and the lakes.

The notion of *stewardship* is the common denominator in the growing global coalition of climate action. It is deeply rooted in our civilisation and connects strongly with the modern sense of environmental responsibility, the calling which in recent times has made millions of young people march every Friday for their future.

Stewardship: a simple word with a profound message that links to old religious texts and modern science. It applies to our humanity and our bonds with nature. It is celebrated by indigenous communities. It is a guideline for the gatherings of global leaders. It is the foundation of both *Laudato si'* and the Paris Agreement.

In the opening of the encyclical, the Holy Father reminded us of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi “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”. The notion of a *common home* is akin to the call of *stewardship*. Both embrace the ultimate message and the truth we must follow. In the words of *Laudato si'*:

“Beginning in the middle of the last century and overcoming many difficulties, there has been a growing conviction that our planet is a homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home. An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan. (LS, 164)”

As in previous assemblies, the Arctic Circle will continue to work in accordance with this encyclical message, bringing

together a diverse flock of religious leaders, indigenous representatives and distinguished people of science and governance. It has become a formidable coalition that gathers every year in the splendid halls of Harpa, where the ocean and the mountains playfully reflect in the artistry of its windows.

The glaciers can be found within an easy distance. Their retreat reminds us that time is not in abundance. Without the success of our common climate endeavours they will disappear one by one in the coming decades. Naked rocks will then remind us of our failure.

The Arctic is indeed the testing ground of our efforts. When its majestic icebergs break into the ocean, the splash is yet another sound of warning. Only by preserving the everlasting glory of the Arctic can we truly secure the future of our planet.

From Political Life to Practical Actions

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It seems to me that it was a very long time ago that the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, was developed and revealed. We all know that it was only six years ago. Since then, serious debates have taken place and far-reaching decisions have been made. I am referring to political, business and social spheres. One may list the Paris Agreement, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the widespread corporate practice of non-financial reports, investors' demand for firms to set-up climate goals, developing accounting methods for climate policies in capital markets, changing consumer behaviour, and so on.

For the last few years we have also observed the extreme weather events and natural disasters that have occurred in all continents and were highly damaging and increasingly frequent that have had severe consequences on human lives. Then the global pandemic arrived for the first time in one hundred years. There were achievements to be proud of, new and old challenges to face and defeats to learn from. One has to admit that we now live in a different world.

I do not remember when I first heard that a new ecological encyclical was going to be published. However, the rumours about it in Spring 2015 were encouraging, and as a Minister for the Environment of the Republic of Poland, I wrote a letter to the New York Times (published 6 May, 2015) about that. The letter reads, "Pope Francis' climate change message is a fresh approach. Moreover, it could also have a substantial effect on global-warming policies... The Pope's message is not only about protecting our environment because of an urgent moral imperative. His new approach and highly anticipated environmental

encyclical could play an important role in the coming Paris climate negotiations.”

The first reception of *Laudato si'* in my country was favourable and many people were looking for a Polish text. But it was not easily available until June 2015. I remember that The State Forests turned to me to write a short commentary to the encyclical, as they wanted to publish it in Polish and distribute it widely, which they did a few weeks later. It was a real achievement.

During that time, Paris COP21 was high on the global political agenda, and there were great expectations of its outcome. In July 2015, we, as European ministers for the environment, held the Environment Council meeting to discuss that issue. The chair was Carole Dieschbourg, Luxembourg's Minister for the Environment. During the traditional ministerial roundtable, I referred to *Laudato si'* and its potential impact on the Paris negotiations. My Italian colleague, former Environment Minister, Gian Luca Galletti, offered to ask if Pope Francis could receive us in an audience. After two months, in September 2015, we were all invited to the Vatican and had an opportunity to take part in an audience with Pope Francis. All but the French and German ministers attended. I cannot say if or how this emotional meeting played a role in the political success of the Paris Agreement and future global discussions on climate change, but I am sure that we all were impressed by the simple and straightforward words of Pope Francis on global climate challenges and his kind, personal conversations with each of us.

Since then, I have left my political career and have had the privilege to meet enthusiastic people who share my concerns about climate and environment challenges. And we try to convince others that it is time to act; developing and promoting new solutions in our areas of competence, like finance. We have published and freely distributed manuals on green finance and green bonds, organized a discussion platform on this subject, provided consultancy in Poland and Asian countries, and active-

ly participated in various forums and consultations to influence real-life regulatory solutions. Not all of us act in accordance with the beauty of God's creation. And we have been poor protectors of creation and have failed to meet our obligations to maintain and protect nature, which is crucial for our lives and for lives of coming generations.

However, we do share the view that climate and environmental challenges have to be addressed seriously, in a timely manner, and in a socially just and sustainable way. We believe the human capacity to dream and invent is almost infinite in the world of freedom and entrepreneurship. The link between poverty and the environment is clear. We are not able to break it. Nature is for humanity. But only people armed with talent, patience, freedom, and responsibility for others and the environment can carry the beauty of nature into the future.

One World, One Environment, We Save It Together

SALLY AXWORTHY

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When I presented my credentials to Pope Francis as British Ambassador to the Holy See in 2016, His Holiness gave me a beautifully bound set of his encyclicals and apostolic exhortations, including *Laudato si'*. One weekend I settled down to read *Laudato si'* and was impressed and inspired by Pope Francis' analysis of the situation we find ourselves in, and prescription for action. Little did I know that *Laudato si'* would gradually take over my life.

Three years later, in the autumn of 2019, it was announced that the UK would host COP26, the UN climate change meeting, in partnership with Italy. I wondered how we at the Holy See could contribute to the sea-change that is necessary to check global warming and avert the catastrophe that will follow if temperatures continue to rise at their present rate. Two things had become clear to me while working with the Vatican: the world is a religious place – 84% of the world's population is affiliated to a religion; and Pope Francis has established excellent relationships with the leaders of many of the world's other major faiths. Could these facts help us?

In conversation with the Vatican and my colleague Pietro Sebastiani, the Italian Ambassador to the Holy See, we developed a plan. We would invite 40 leaders of the world's major faiths and 10 climate scientists to a dialogue on how the faiths could contribute to stopping climate change, with a view of launching a faith leaders' appeal for COP26. Covid-19 in the meantime had intervened, and led to the postponement of COP26 until November 2021, which gave us more time to prepare the initiative. Covid-19 also meant that we had all become used to

virtual meetings, so suddenly it became possible to hold virtual dialogues with 50 people from all corners of the globe. We set about doing that.

The meetings have been enlightening. All the faith leaders have spoken about their teachings on the environment. We heard that Guru Nanak taught that the whole universe is the body of God. We heard that the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam* meant fixing what was broken in God's world. Buddhists spoke of everything being interdependent, and humans being inseparable from the environment. We heard of the indigenous belief that we do not own land but are part of it with a duty to care for it for the next generation. We had explained to us the Quran's teaching on the environment. We heard that pollution is haram. The Taoists explained that humans are one with nature – if we destroy nature, we destroy ourselves. Shias told us that believers see nature as the manifestation of God. The Zoroastrians spoke of humankind's erroneous belief in its own invincibility. The Confucians spoke of the need for moderation. It became clear that, as one of the faith leaders said about an Evangelical/Muslim project, 'One world, one environment: we save it together'.

The scientists contributed data and proposals. We heard that the number of people who die from obesity every year is approaching those who die from hunger. A third of greenhouse gases come from food, but a third of food is wasted. The academics proposed rethinking our economic model, to make sure growth was within the limits of what the earth could support. It was suggested that we stop equating value with market price and count common goods in GDP. The discussion of solutions extended to teaching environmental awareness as we teach literacy and numeracy, letting ourselves be taught by the young, planting trees, and building two billion homes out of wood.

Above all, the meetings have brought out how powerful the alliance between faith and science can be. The participants agreed that scientific facts do not always change hearts and

minds, but faith leaders are specialists in human motivation. Together they can contribute enlightened passion.

I hope that the voice of faith will be heard at COP26 in Glasgow and in the months ahead as we respond to the climate crisis. It cannot come too soon. The global temperature has already risen by more than one degree, and we are on course for a rise of 2.4°C, which would be catastrophic for the planet. We need to get close to the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C. The UK, as President of COP26, has set out a plan to achieve this:

- We need every country in the world to commit to reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, and set ambitious targets for the period to 2030. This means phasing out coal, stopping deforestation, speeding up the switch to electric vehicles, and using renewable energy. So far about 70% of the world is covered by net zero targets, but we need to do much more to accelerate reductions. Renewable energy is now cheaper than coal in most countries. The UK, once a major coal-producing nation, now has only 2% of its electricity generated by coal. That figure will be zero by 2024. We are also banning the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.
- We need to protect the communities and natural habitats most vulnerable to climate change. This means protecting and restoring ecosystems, building defences and warning systems, and ensuring infrastructure and agriculture are resilient to climate change, so that homes, livelihoods and even lives will not be lost. The Santiago Network is connecting climate-vulnerable countries with the help they need.
- We need to raise \$100 billion per year in climate finance to support low-income countries as they (and higher-income countries) implement these first two goals.
- We need to finalise the Paris Rulebook, the detailed rules that make the Paris Agreement operational on issues like carbon markets and transparent reporting.

This is the agenda for COP26, which the UK is committed to delivering. But it is not just up to governments. Every part of society must play its part. The UK's Climate Change Committee has said that 62% of emissions reductions in the UK must involve behaviour change. In the global north this will mean actions like eating less meat, insulating our homes and switching to electric vehicles.

Faiths can play a huge role by taking a lead on behaviour change, showing people how it can be done. The Vatican City State is setting an excellent example with its commitment to achieve net zero by 2050, which it is implementing through greening initiatives, including the use of solar energy, recycling, planting trees, improving water and heating systems and moving to a fleet of electric vehicles. The Laudato Si' Action Platform is another inspiring example of how the Vatican is encouraging global action. Churches are taking a lead in the UK. The Catholic Diocese of Salford has a pilot project to transition to zero emissions. The Church of England has committed to reach net zero emissions by 2030. The Church of England and the Environment Agency's Transition Pathway Initiative provides free research for investors into companies' preparedness for the transition to a low-carbon economy.

In our small way, in the British Embassy to the Holy See we have tried to do something similar. We use renewable energy and have an electric flag car. We have phased out single-use plastic, and gone back to traditional cleaning materials like lemon juice and bicarbonate of soda. We are eating less meat and using more locally-produced food.

Addressing climate change feels like a challenge. But we *can* do it. We *can* avert disaster and secure our beautiful planet for our children. We *can* protect the most vulnerable from the effects of climate change. It may be uncomfortable, but we have to make the right decisions now to secure our future.

As I come to the end of my posting to the Holy See, I have been exploring the countryside beloved by St Francis of Assisi

by walking the long-distance footpath, the Via Francesco, which links many of the monasteries founded by the saint and places where he prayed around Rieti, Assisi and La Verna. The countryside is, I like to think, little changed from St Francis' time – green and beautiful, with mountains, rivers and waterfalls. It is easy to see why St Francis was inspired to write his Cantic of the Sun which includes the line '*Laudato Sie, mi signore cum tucte le Tue creature*', which translates to 'Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures'. Pope Francis was inspired by St Francis, and we are inspired by *Laudato si'*. Let us protect our world so that future generations can experience the beauty of the natural world, which is still around us, and let our life-giving planet continue to give us life.

Laudato si' – Chapter 5 and the Escazú Agreement

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When Pope Francis published *Laudato si'*, he delivered a roadmap to the world, an important guide for urgent ethical, political, economic and social decisions to save the planet, our common home.

This happened 6 years ago and Pope Francis said once again it was urgent to take action to stop damaging the environment and drew attention to the fact that we were reaching a point where effects would become irreversible.

This paper's purpose is to think about how important the 2018 Escazú Agreement is as a Latin American and Caribbean States' policy decision, and one that, based on our selection criteria, leads to materializing Section III in Chapter 5 (Dialogue and Transparency in Decision-Making) of *Laudato si'* (LS, 182-188).

It is a fact that Escazú Agreement discussions started in 2012, and followed a systematic process until its entry into force on 22 April 2021. Although it does not formally mention Pope Francis' orientations, it is clearly evident that there is a deep connection between what Section III in Chapter 5 of *Laudato si'* and the Latin American and Caribbean States' goals in the Escazu Agreement¹.

This regional agreement about access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean was adopted on 4 March 2018 in

¹ CEPAL, N. (2018). Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Available at: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43583/1/S1800428_en.pdf

Escazú, Costa Rica. It was ratified by 24 countries, among them Paraguay, but the ratification process took time because of stiff opposition from powerful economic sectors linked to large-scale agricultural production and industry.

The Catholic Church figures amongst sectors where there is opposition to ratifying the agreement, perhaps because they do not see the complete text is a legal tool. This is the reason why it seems relevant to describe in this document that, according to our criteria, Catholics and people of good will should see the connection that exists between the goals, text and spirit of the Regional Agreement, and Pope Francis' proposal.

What does the Escazú Agreement propose? It guarantees to Latin America and the Caribbean full and effective access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making processes and access to justice in environment matters, and also creation, improving cooperation. It contributes to protecting rights, for present and future generations, to live in a safe environment and for sustainable development (Article 1 – Objective)¹.

In Chapter 5 of *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis proposes dialogue and full disclosure in decision making. The Holy Father asserted that “the environment impact the of 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 to allow for full debate” (LS, 182).

Pope Francis states that in the decision-making process of environmental projects, local inhabitants should have a special place and their participation required all of them to be properly informed in the different issues, explaining risks and options. This applies not only to initial decisions on a project but involves reporting and constant monitoring (LS, 183).

The Escazú Agreement gives local inhabitants rights to access all information about projects whose environmental impact could affect the living conditions of current and future generations and the right of access to justice in environmental matters. In this way, it emphasizes that states should ensure that vulnerable people were able to use these rights (Article 2 – Definitions)¹.

Francis warns that, when any environmental risks to the present or future common good appear, this situation requires decisions based on comparing risks and profits. Some projects, if inadequately analyzed, can deeply affect a place's living conditions. "The culture of consumerism, which prioritizes short-term gain and private interest, can make it easy to rubber-stamp authorizations or to conceal information" (LS, 184).

Beyond more positive environmental legislation for transparency and people's common good, the Escazú Agreement obliges ratifying states to guarantee and promote public participation in decision, revision and implementation processes related to projects and activities. They must also ensure others authorization of environmental processes that could have a significant impact on the environment, particularly where people's health could be affected (Article 7.2 and 7.3).

In *Laudato si'*, the Church does not oppose development and technological innovation, but it says that profitability cannot be the single criterion to be taken into account. The outcome of discussions, involving fully informed communities, could be not to progress on a project but could also be to change it or search for alternative propositions (LS, 186).

If the relevant government takes a decision to authorize a project, against the wishes of communities, that believe the risks outweigh any profits, the Escazú Agreement requires states to guarantee access to legal and administrative authorities to appeal the decision, both in respect to substance and procedure.

Pope Francis recognizes that in some debates about environmental questions, it is hard to reach a general agreement and

the Church makes no claim to define scientific questions or intervene in political issues, but invites an honest and transparent debate: so that private interests and ideology do not affect the common good (*LS*, 188). Here is where we see that the Escazú Agreement, as an expression of states' political will, is an opportunity to implement Chapter 5, Section III of *Laudato si'*.

In the case of Paraguay, we sincerely do believe that Catholics, along with people of good will, should not oppose the ratification and full entry into force of the Escazú Agreement, because it is a special legal tool to put into practice the teachings of Pope Francis.

Harmonizing People and Nature Through Humanity

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I am extremely grateful that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, shared with the world the encyclical *Laudato si'*: on Care for Our Common Home. *Laudato si'* is truly relevant to my work and my life. Looking around our world today, it is sad to see how our Mother Earth is suffering, being assaulted by our greed and inconsideration for our own fellow beings. The positioning of integral ecology in *Laudato si'* as the bridge for life and the environment, is key to the survival of humanity. It is the fundamental value to sustain the integrity of God's creation, the garden of the world.

Reflecting on *Laudato si'* since its publication and on this special anniversary, I cannot help but share the concern for our Mother Earth, who is still faced with tremendous threats and pressure to continue sustaining lives. This brings me to think about the very basic necessities of life: water and food. All living beings: humans, animals, insects, plants, microbes – need water and food. Water, itself, is the basic ingredient for producing food. With water becoming scarce and polluted, food production is also affected. Yet, the way food is produced is itself responsible for polluting the water, soil, and human health. Industrial food production is now opposed to the very purpose of food: that is to nourish lives, not just physically but also culturally and spiritually.

Laudato si' shows up the systematic, policy-driven, white-washing, industrial revolution mantra that more food needs to be produced to feed a growing world population. Corporate opportunists take up this mantra to produce more food

by whatever means to justify the end, from using agrochemicals to genetic engineering to artificial intelligence, *taking away any form of humanity*. There is no humanity in the use of agrochemicals that are systematically designed into our food systems, polluting our food, water and soil. This abuse in food systems not only makes people sick but also makes agrochemical companies flourish, and indirectly the healthcare and pharmaceutical companies, that also reap profits from the sickness created. There is no humanity shown to poor farmers who are caught in the web chemical-based food production and suffering tremendous backlash. They are losing control of ownerships of production resources, as well as losing control over their own well-being and health. Unfortunately, the safe and socially responsible option of using agroecology-based approaches is not as popular and not promoted or supported enough by policymakers.

The one-dimensional technological paradigm in food production becomes more and more invasive and inhumane. Invasive and inhumane, because these so-called 'modern technologies' such as genetic engineering are being abused to treat humans, animals and plants as subjects in an experiment, changing the course of life that would otherwise be determined by nature through the will of God. Invasive and inhumane, because the genetic make-up of organisms is violated and purposely engineered to change life forms and enable the use of poison to eradicate unwanted lives. Invasive, because of the shameless disregard for transparency or prior informed consent from lives that are affected.

Pollution in our food systems represents a heavy burden of care and well-being for everyone, more so for the poor. In many parts of the world, the poor and marginalized have limited or almost no access to good healthcare. Yet, they are the ones who are affected the most by polluted food systems. When the cheapest food they can afford, or even scavenge, is almost entirely laced with all kinds of chemicals, they have extraordinarily lit-

tle chance of escaping poverty because their health is compromised. Their vulnerability is heightened when sickness or death occur in the family. How can we provide affordable, sustainable means for everyone to feed themselves with healthier and safer food options? With no access to land and production resources, many would not be able to farm. Many would depend on wages to buy food. This also means that the privatization of water would also make it more expensive to live on the planet. Life on earth is becoming more and more expensive for many. With our global struggle to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, good immune responses built through healthy and nutritious food is the first line of defence. For the poor, this has been a major constraint.

Laudato si' showed me the widening of social and economic gaps as the result of the trajectory pursued by future investors in food systems. During this tumultuous COVID-19 pandemic, human survival seemed to have evolved from selection by 'survival of the fittest' to 'survival of the elite and rich'. The future that is currently shaping up seems to hold no place for the poor. The jobs or roles that are being performed by the working class and the poor are likely be replaced by robots and artificial intelligence (AI). AI is taking away the human dignity of people being able to think for themselves. Farmers could no longer be required in the future, as their job is taken over by private interests that tirelessly promote AI farming systems. Even 'meat' is being produced by scientists and technicians in labs. At the very least, this is what seems to be our future course. There is no humanity in the displacement of people. The future is likely to be shaped by injustice.

However, *the blame rests not solely on the big corporations* but also on each and every one of us, the consumers. As consumers, we need to rethink the way we consume resources through our demand for material goods. Consumers often think that it is their right to buy or have what they can afford, driven by 'wants'

and not 'needs'. From food to other material goods, everything is exploited beyond need. Humanity should instill the value of shame in consumers when food is wasted or when water is polluted with our refuse. Humanity would then feel a sense of empathy for those who do not have or cannot afford. Consumers must not feel their rights are being infringed when sustainable choices are presented to them and wasteful and damaging consumption habits need to be changed. We, as consumers, must realize that our consumption choices are directly affecting the health of our planet and other people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and less fortunate.

Through connections with the consumer movement, we receive constant reminders that we are directly making statements about the kind of world we are shaping through the items we purchase. Consumers must recognize and consciously change their consumption choices or lifestyles that are causing harm to others and generating pollution, waste, and the throwaway culture. Sadly, today many of us consumers are still unable to embrace ecological culture, due to our self-imposed constraints. Nonetheless, we all, as consumers, including the poor, must step up and look to our sense of responsibility and humanity when we produce, consume, and throw away our refuse.

I recognize that consumers' self-gratifying aspirations and corporate's profit-seeking culture are a feel-good factor and flaunt our wealth. They have to a large extent contributed to damaging consequences for God's creation and remind us that "to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God" (*LS*, 8).

To bring people and nature into harmony, we must be mindful and recognize the boundaries for sustaining and respecting lives and God's creation. Integral ecology calls for re-engagement with God's creation through the social responsibility of mankind to champion humanity. Bringing people and nature into harmony through humanity is the basis for the integral ecol-

ogy that requires continuous inter-connectedness between all forms of God's creation. Re-engagement with nature calls for collective effort to change our actions that have contributed to the exploitation of Mother Earth and the harm caused to people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized. As the encyclical summarises it, "When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society" (LS, 82).

Humanity is the biggest force on the planet. This force must be harnessed to power the interconnectedness of all entities on earth to bring our Mother Earth back to health. We should not have to seek another planet to inhabit if we cannot even take care of this one. The next key milestone of human progress will only be meaningful when ecological conversion is fully realized. Through integral ecology, the moral characters of producers and consumers need to reconnect with human values. To end, I will keep in mind that *"The earth is the Lord's"* (Psalms 24:1); *to him belongs "the earth with all that is within it"* (Deuteronomy 10:14).

Happy Anniversary, Laudato si'.

Part V – Pastoral Leadership & Bishops’ Conferences

The Impact of *Laudato si'* in the Archdiocese of Bombay

OSWALD CARDINAL GRACIAS

Archbishop of Bombay; President, Catholic Bishops' Conference of India

The issue of climate change became a reality for many of us when, with the encouragement of German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation (MISEREOR), we had two Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) seminars for Asian Bishops on this topic in 2011 and 2013. Meeting people from islands in the Pacific that were facing extinction due to the rising sea-levels caused by global warming, we were shocked to discover that this impending disaster was already at our doorsteps. Fully conscious of the importance and urgency of the matter, a department was started at the FABC Secretariat to work on this. In India, our Bishops' Conference was preparing a Pastoral Plan and climate change was soon identified as one of the priorities. In the Archdiocese of Bombay, Care for Creation was declared the theme of the year in 2011, and all the 150 schools under the Archdiocesan Board of Education were asked to prepare at least one project to make pupils and their families aware of the great need to protect the environment. We realized that climate change was a priority, but it was not yet on the top of the list. Then came *Laudato si'*.

Pope Francis made reference to care for nature in his homily at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate. It was therefore not surprising that he soon issued an encyclical on our responsibility for the environment. I later learnt that this was a focus of attention for him already as Archbishop of Buenos Aires.

Laudato si' made a great difference. The ground had been prepared. We had been acquainted with the problem, but this

initiative of the Holy Father deepened our awareness of the developing situation and impressed upon us the urgent need for effective action, pushing this priority right to the top. Care for creation and climate change became an issue not just for NGOs and social activists, but an integral part of the Church's mission of spreading God's Kingdom. Caring for the environment is evangelization indeed, we realized.

As a result of Pope Francis' encyclical, the Church plunged into the issue of climate change in a big way in Asia, India and the Archdiocese of Bombay.

At FABC level we had many initiatives. I met the heads of different Continental Conferences to discuss how we could collaborate on the issue. Four regional seminars were held in different parts of Asia in the lead up to COP21 to raise consciousness among our bishops. We discussed *Laudato si'* and the role of Christian businesses at a meeting in Mumbai. Later we discussed climate change research and collaboration in Asia. The impact of climate change on the family, on seminary formation, and the involvement of the Church in this were also studied.

We realized the Asian countries would be most affected by climate change and this was no time to postpone action. We sought to raise consciousness among the peoples of Asia and there was intense lobbying at different levels.

At national level, the Commission established by our Bishops' Conference, prepared a booklet, "Green Pathways – Onward to a Greener Diocese" with ecological considerations, published in e-format. We examined ways of collaborating with different CCBI Commissions for pan-Indian activities connected with ecology and sought to link the study to various areas of life. In September 2020, in the midst of the pandemic the Commission inaugurated the Season of Creation with a youth event.

At diocesan level, the Archdiocese of Bombay was declared a Green Diocese on September 2018, the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. On the first anniversary of *Laudato si'*,

ten schools participated in a green competition for schools. The following year, carbon fasting was encouraged during Lent and each parish in the Archdiocese was allotted one day to implement an activity which would help in reducing climate change. Faith-Formation programmes for children were organized: "Nurturing faith through nature". Every parish was encouraged to have Green Teams and a follow-up rural exposure visit was organized for our climate change ambassadors to appreciate ecological interconnectedness.

Laudato si' has made a great impact on the Church in Asia. The results are clear for all to see. The momentum gained by the Holy Father's encyclical cannot be lost. The world remains deeply grateful to Pope Francis for this initiative of his. The Holy Spirit has enlightened our minds to impending disasters and moves us to act effectively. The world, the Church in India and the Archdiocese of Bombay give praise to God for the gift of *Laudato si'*.

The Renewal of the Ecological Pastoral Care in Africa

PHILIPPE CARDINAL OUEDRAOGO

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On the occasion of the proclamation by the Holy Father of the year of *Laudato si'* (24 May, 2020 to 24 May, 2021), the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) had the opportunity to revisit the impact that this encyclical has had on the Church's mission in Africa. In July 2019, during the celebration in Kampala of the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of SECAM, the African Church recalled that: "The Church-Family of God in Africa must listen to the sufferings of "Our sister the Earth", by proposing credible alternatives capable of causing a profound change in mentalities..."¹ Since then, she has increasingly structured her pastoral work in the service of integral ecology. Indeed, the environmental and climate landscape of Africa being complex, since it is made up of desert regions, the Sahel, the savannah regions and finally the rainforests in the centre of the continent, the message of *Laudato si'* was welcomed and put into practice according to the environmental specificity of each region.

Social and Environmental Challenges of the Church in Africa

Individual African Churches have taken the encyclical according to the social and environmental challenges of each of them, and according to the place of their mission.

¹ SECAM (2019). Pastoral Exhortation of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar. Kampala Document. May they know Christ and have life in abundance. (cf. Jn 17, 3; 10, 10). *Kampala. No.99*.

The advance of the deserts

The African continent is sandwiched by the Sahara Desert to the north, and that of Kalahari to the south. These two deserts are advancing dangerously and disturbing communities. The climate instability to which the Holy Father draws attention is now a lived reality. In 2018 for example, southern Africa was hit by a clean water crisis; the Cape Town region in South Africa was the most symbolic case in this regard.² In the Sahel, the situation is even more alarming: Lake Chad, which in 1960 covered an area of over 26,000 km², shrunk to 1,500 km² in 2000, thus losing 90% of its surface.³ This situation does not only have climate consequences; it is also, among other things, the cause of the rise in conflict and the crisis of forced migration. In this region, climate change and conflict between herders and farmers are linked.

One of the consequences of the Holy Father's ecological encyclical in southern Africa was to mobilize the Church in the pastoral care of the rational use of water. In the Sahel region, the Church is taking the initiative in participating in efforts to slow the advance of the desert. This is what justifies its interest in the Great Green Wall⁴ project, an initiative of the African Union to build a wall of trees of nearly 8,000 km that will cross 11 African countries from east to west, greening some 100 million hectares of degraded land.⁵ This project is, according to the recent biodiversity

² Forson, V. (2019, November 4). *Crise de l'eau : l'avertissement venu d'Afrique du Sud*. Le Point. https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/crise-de-l-eau-l-avertissement-venu-d-afrique-du-sud-04-11-2019-2345167_3826.php (Accessed 23 March, 2021).

³ *De la sécheresse aux crises dans le bassin du lac Tchad*. (2020, January 20). Afrique Renouveau. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/fr/magazine/d%C3%A9cembre-2019-mars-2020/de-la-s%C3%A9cheresse-aux-cries-dans-le-bassin-du-lac-tchad> (Accessed 29 March, 2021)

⁴ Martin, J. B. E. C. (2021, January 11). *Environnement: qu'est ce que le projet de "Grande muraille verte" en Afrique?* BFMTV. https://www.bfmtv.com/environnement/environnement-qu-est-ce-que-le-projet-de-grande-muraille-verte-en-afrique_AD-202101110382.html (Accessed 29 March, 2021)

⁵ The Gambia, Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

summit⁶, one of the largest ecological projects in the world. “By 2030, the ambition of the initiative is to restore 100 million ha of currently degraded land; sequester 250 million tons of carbon and create 10 million green jobs. This will support communities living along the Wall.”⁷ This Great Wall project is therefore good news for integral ecology, the protection of biodiversity, and an opportunity for agriculture and the food security of populations.

Cyclones and floods

In April 2019, Cyclones Kenket⁸, in March, and Idai⁹ destroyed Beira in Mozambique and damaged much of Zimbabwe. It caused hundreds of deaths and led to hundreds of thousands of people becoming homeless overnight. In May and September 2020, floods invaded the eastern region of Africa¹⁰ causing damage in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and Eastern DRC. Lakes and rivers overflowed, homes and crops were destroyed, negatively impacting food production.

Even after the publication of *Laudato si'*, the African Church was warned that climate conditions could change drastically and that it was necessary to develop mitigation, adaptation and resilience very quickly. However, no one believed that climate change would occur so quickly and that its consequences would be so violent. Faced with the environmental crises affecting the continent, the awareness-raising work undertaken by the dioceses following *Laudato si'* has served to better prepare people to understand and explain the reasons for this generalized enthusiasm for the issue of climate and to develop action to deal with it.

⁶ *One Planet Summit – Des engagements pour agir en faveur de la biodiversité.* (2021, January 12). elysee.fr <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/01/12/one-planet-summit-des-engagements-pour-agir-en-faveur-de-la-biodiversite>

⁷ <https://www.unccd.int/actions/great-green-wall-initiative>

⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-48091231>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-47611818>

¹⁰ https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/05/08/inondations-en-afrique-de-l-est-65-morts-au-rwanda_6039054_3212.html

Safeguarding the Congo Basin Forest

The Church's commitment to safeguarding the Congo Basin forest is an initiative that deserves to be highlighted. In October 2015, the African Church set up an ecclesial network for the safeguard of the Congo Basin (REBAC).¹¹ This network is an immediate response to the call of the Holy Father. Indeed, *Laudato si'*, which calls on humanity to join forces to safeguard the common home, drew everyone's attention to the role that the Congo Basin forest plays and should continue to play.

"We are well aware of the importance of these places for the whole planet and for the future of humanity. The ecosystems of tropical forests have a biodiversity of enormous complexity, almost impossible to list in their entirety" (*LS*, 38).

REBAC is today engaged in popularizing the teachings of the Holy Father on integral ecology and helping local churches in this region to identify their pastoral and socio-environmental challenges.¹² Guided by the teaching of the Bishops of Africa, these churches are developing an ambitious integrated ecological programme: "Aggression against nature is no longer just the act of big business. It also stems from unsanitary conditions in homes and neighbourhoods, and constant noise pollution etc. The issue of land grabbing, the excessive exploitation of lakes and rivers and the lack of responsibility and inventiveness in dealing with the problem of the riches of the African soil and subsoil should not be ignored. The challenges of the land are multiple in Africa. The ecological dimension of evangelization deserves the full attention of our Church as much as the ethical question that needs to be analyzed."¹²

¹¹ <https://rebacongobassin.org/>

¹² REBAC (2019) *Report on the mapping of pastoral and socio-environmental challenges in the Congo Basin region*, Kinshasa, éd. Cepas, Septembre, 118 p.

Laudato si' and Social and Environmental Pastoral Care of the African Church

The current climate disturbances and their consequences on our populations have shown that the African continent was, until now, the least prepared to face climate change. The efforts undertaken by the African Church since the publication of *Laudato si'* now commit it to exploring and implementing the axes of a pastoral, social, cultural and environmental commitment that match the pastoral and socio-environmental challenges on the continent. This work was prepared by mapping the pastoral and socio-environmental challenges.

“The overall objective of the mapping exercise was ... to collect information on how the Catholic Church responds to pastoral, social, and environmental challenges ... to seize ecological challenges and opportunities ... ‘to provide concerted and coordinated pastoral responses to the socio-environmental challenges facing the people of God’.”¹²

This work has enabled the Church-Family of God in Africa to identify its pastoral priorities in ecology.

Ecological Priorities

The Sahel region

The Church in the Sahel region has adopted an integrated approach to combating poverty, helping the excluded and safeguarding our common home. Some dioceses are developing technological skills in maintaining and restoring plant cover, grass strips, baobab food banks, construction of living hedges, windbreaks, improved crop rotation, and assisted natural regeneration. Others are involved in planting apple trees in the Sahel,

setting up fodder banks, and maintaining village woods. Christians adopted techniques to improve their capacities in water and soil conservation by mastering the construction of earth and stone bunds. All these increase technical skill in growing plants, fighting erosion, improving biodiversity, controlling wandering animals as well as contributing to domestic energy consumption through the rational use of wood. They are all contributing to the success of the Church and Great Green Wall projects.

The Church created an institution inspired by St John Paul II. Being aware of the precious value of our “common home” and above all of the absolute necessity of its protection, she set up the *Jean Paul II Foundation for the Sahel*. The following mission has been assigned to it: “To promote the formation of people who want to engage effectively in the service of their countries and their citizens, without social, religious or ethnic discrimination with a view to the integral promotion of the human person through the protection of the environment”. It aims at integral, united human advancement by fighting desertification and its causes and bringing relief to the victims of drought.

In its 37 years (1984-2021), the *Jean Paul II Foundation for the Sahel* has recreated joy and hope; relieving the suffering of Sahelians and giving life to the Sahel. Its funding of more than 38 billion FCFA (€57.9 million) has been invested by the institution in financing training and implementation projects for the benefit of the people. This money has made it possible to finance over 5,000 projects across 43 dioceses and one Apostolic Vicariate.

The results of the funding allocated to the environmental sector over these 37 years are also reflected in the Sahel by the planting and maintenance of millions of trees in the different zones, the installation of thousands of nurseries, the development of a large number of anti-erosion devices (water and wind erosion), village woods, and increasing the ability of the people to intervene by providing equipment and materials. Also, the dissemination of many techniques of conservation, defence and

restoration of soils has made it possible to rehabilitate more than a million hectares of land, increase soil productivity and, by extension, agricultural yields.

Thus providentially, the *John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel* was able to begin the process of protecting our environment and it continues in this work today. It translates *Laudato si'* into action through *Laudato Tree*, which is a highly ambitious project to plant 7 million trees in the Sahel from 2021 thanks to the support of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The Congo Basin

The mapping carried out in this region has identified a number of challenges, recommendations, and proposals for a pastoral care of integral ecology. Among the priorities retained, we can cite the fight against massive deforestation by international timber companies, preventing land grabbing by international companies, improving small farmer subsistence agriculture and reducing the practice of slash-and-burn agriculture as well as bushfire prevention. One of its major projects is opposing mining and oil exploitation on the continent, which, while it does not improve the lives of the local population, is the cause of the pollution of rivers and water and the multiplication of new diseases. In addition, artisanal mining takes place in inhumane conditions that drive some to drugs, crime and prostitution on mining sites. REBAC is also developing programmes to combat the unchecked hunting of animals, the poaching of elephants and other endemic animals and birds, and the destruction of biodiversity caused, among other things, by the intensive use of dangerous pesticides. REBAC is also committed to guaranteeing access to drinking water for many populations as millions of children continue to die from water-borne diseases. In more than one place, women, girls and children often have to travel long distances to access safe drinking water. The REBAC programme also

covers the protection of indigenous¹³ peoples. The scale of exploitation in the forests threatens the life of many of these communities. Their environment is disrupted, and people are forced to wander the forests making it difficult to access means of subsistence and causing health problems.

Conclusion

The response of the African Church to the call of the Holy Father in *Laudato si'* is effective. It is structured along two axes. From now on, everywhere in Africa, the pastoral care of the Church is called to combine the concern for in-depth evangelization and the commitment to safeguard our common home, "We urge Christians and all pastoral workers as well as Christian communities to always link evangelization and integral development, especially in the field of ecology...".¹³

As a result, throughout Africa, Christian communities are implementing various ecological practices and multiple structures of evangelization. Several religious congregations have set up *Laudato si'* groups. In schools, there are movements of young Catholics who fight against the harmful effects of climate change. Green economy programmes, organic farming, and campaigns to plant trees are on the rise. Parishes are setting up soil erosion control brigades while Christians are joining citizen teams to fight flooding, unsanitary conditions and plastic recycling.

To make this movement sustainable in view of the proliferation of these initiatives, the African Church would benefit from drawing inspiration from the recommendations of the Synod on the Amazon, "We propose ... to create special ministries for the care of the common home and the promotion of integral ecol-

¹³ Bihuzo SJ, R.M. (2019) *Indigenous population in the Congo basin forest* (in Lorenzo Baldisseri (ed), *Verso il sinodo speciale per l'Amazonia. Dimensioni regionale e universale*). Vatican, ed. Vaticana, pp. 237–245.

ogy at the parish level and in each ecclesiastical jurisdiction, which have as functions, among others, the care of the territory and of the waters, as well as the promotion of the encyclical *Laudato si'*".¹⁴

Coordination of all these actions is essential. To be effective, pastoral care in this area should include, as *Laudato si'* recommends, the formation of pastoral agents on subjects related to integral ecology. "I hope ... that in our seminaries and religious houses of formation, we educate ... to protect the fragility of the poor and the environment" (LS, 214). The Amazon Synod goes in the same direction and speaks of an ecological programme open to the entire Christian community. It is now urgent to consider profoundly the best way to engage the whole Church as well as Christian communities, not only in an ecological pastoral ministry but also in coordinating these actions at community, parish, diocesan and bishops' conference level.

¹⁴ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for the Amazonia (2019) Amazonia: New paths for the Church and for an integral ecology. *Final Document* n°82.

6 years of *Laudato si'* – A Programme for COMECE's Work?

H.E. JEAN CLAUDE CARDINAL HOLLERICH, SJ

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When Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'* was published in Rome on 18 May 2015, COMECE's first reaction was also: this is the hitherto missing environmental encyclical, which adds the chapter on 'ecology' to the corpus of the Church's existing social teachings. After a more detailed study of the text of the encyclical, however, it very quickly became clear: *Laudato si'* is much more than just an environmental encyclical, it is a social encyclical that continues and updates the existing social teaching of the Church with regard to the questions and problems of the present. Could it not, with its clear language and its clear, as well as political, emphasis be a kind of 'basic document' for the work of COMECE (and thus the socio-political work of the Church)? Would it not be possible, with the help of the encyclical, to build a new bridge between the politics (and the politicians) of the European Union, and the Church and its socio-political work? Is it not possible to find fundamental impulses here to revitalise the relationship between these two social actors? In view of the brevity required here, I would like to highlight three aspects that strengthen my assumption.

The encyclical is based on a clear method that can be traced back to Cardinal Jozef Cardin, the founder of the Young Christian Workers: see, judge, act. This three-step approach is not only found in the structure of the encyclical, Pope Francis himself applies it consistently in the encyclical. He invites us to perceive and describe the state of the world clearly and without

prejudice, and in doing so to call a spade a spade: the over-exploitation that we are enforcing on the earth, the pollution of water, air and soil, the exploitation of natural resources, the marginalisation of people who no longer seem to be profitable for a one-sided economy and who stand in its way, a throwaway culture that does not even stop at people. "The earth, our home, seems to be turning more and more into an immeasurable rubbish dump" (*LS*, 21). It is this clear language that is ultimately also appreciated by politicians in conversation. The Church does not need to be tactical, but must say what is the matter.

A clear view of things also demands of us, against the background of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, clear and unsparing judgement. This is not about condemning people, but about judging social, economic and political conditions that are destroying our common home, planet Earth, and using people as a means to their ends. Assessing our situation leads to the conclusion: "There are not two crises side by side, one of the environment and one of society, but a single and complex socio-ecological crisis" (*LS*, 139). This observation is of great importance for the work of an ecclesial socio-political institution like COMECE. It enables it to avoid the dichotomy of ecological and social commitment which very often determines the political debate and plays these two aspects off against each other: "We cannot afford an ecological turnaround socially". At the same time, this also makes it possible to broaden the 'spectrum of the benevolent' in politics, who often seem to be committed to either the social or the ecological cause. *Laudato si'* offers them a way to approach each other here: "We cannot avoid ... recognising that a truly ecological approach always transforms itself into a social approach that must include justice in environmental discussions in order to hear the complaint of the poor as well as the complaint of the earth" (*LS*, 49). In the years since the encyclical was published, this sentence has become a guiding principle for COMECE's socio-political work and for its dialogue with the

various groups and actors in the European political context: “We hear the cry of the poor and the lament of the earth”.

A clear view and an honest and unsparing assessment ultimately ask for decisive action. However, it is important to avoid the ‘technocratic trap’ – the idea that a solution to urgent ecological and social problems will depend (exclusively) on better technical solutions and just on a more efficient use of available resources. This thinking is indebted to a “science-believing” worldview that sees the earth and all its goods preferentially as material for moulding in the hands of humans but overlooks, or deliberately negates, their intrinsic value. In *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis proposes a different, non-technocratic way of acting.

As already mentioned, the encyclical emphasises the necessary connection between ecology and the social question and outlines the approach of an ‘integral ecology’ for concrete action, which relates and connects these two aspects. This approach is comprehensive: it includes not only our ways of producing and consuming, but also the entire shaping of the world. This also includes aspects that seem strange to mention in this context, such as urban development or art. At the same time, however, it is not so strange: the European Union has also recently adopted a ‘New Bauhaus Project’ that combines economic action with aesthetic and socially responsible design of our (surrounding) world. Moreover, an integral ecology will always be aware in its actions of the “upper limit of planetary carrying capacity” and the “lower limit of a resilient social foundation” (as proposed by Kate Raworth’s Doughnut Economics, explicitly mentioned by Pope Francis in his book “Let us Dream”).

In the public debate as well as in the political discussion, attempts to take clearer steps towards an ecological transition are rebuffed by pointing out that this would ultimately mean ‘renunciation’: after all, who wants that? A call for renunciation instead of growth would be tantamount to suicide, at least politically. The encyclical is very coherent here because it does not speak

of renunciation, but of “ecological conversion” – a conclusion from the insight that we, especially in the northern half of the world, cannot possibly continue our resource-wasting lifestyle or promote it as an ideal. It is this insight that, as a result of unvarnished observation and honest assessment of our behaviour, leads to an imperative “ecological conversion” and a new, freer lifestyle appropriate to planetary limits: “Awareness of the seriousness of the cultural and ecological crisis must be expressed in new habits” (LS, 209). This conversion is not ‘doable’, but the result of a process that takes time – but which is salutary, also for politics and politicians. It is all the more effective if it focuses above all on the positive effects of this conversion on the lives of future generations and does not forget those who are marginalised by our lavish lifestyle.

In this context, it is not only the individual who is called upon: “However, it is not enough for each individual to improve ... Social problems must be responded to with networks of community, not with the mere sum of individual positive contributions” (LS, 219), because according to one of the four principles of Pope Francis’ thinking: “The whole is more than the mere sum of the parts.” For this reason, COMECE, together with five other partners – Caritas Europa, CIDSE, LSM, JESC (Jesuit European Social Centre) and Justitia & Pax Europa – founded the European *Laudato Si’* Alliance, or ELSiA for short, last year. This network attempts to bundle existing church expertise in the areas of social justice, poverty reduction, ecology, international cooperation and human rights in order to become active together – with a view to the policies of the European Union. With the presentation of the ‘European Green Deal’ in winter 2019, there is a concrete starting point for discussion and cooperation between the Church and European politics on the topics just mentioned. At the same time, it is also important to promote and strengthen interest in and work with *Laudato si’* within the Church: on the one hand, there are already many small different initiatives and

projects for the practical implementation of the encyclical, but on the other hand, much more would be possible – and necessary.

Ultimately, however, and this is the key point of the encyclical and an essential difference to the above-mentioned ‘technocratic thinking’, the ecological conversion and the transition to a more socially just and ecologically responsible lifestyle are based on a spirituality that is aware of the limits of a finite planet on the one hand, but on the other hand also of the unimaginable possibilities when people go out of themselves and towards others, and begin to really live in relationship: “For the human person grows, matures and sanctifies himself increasingly in the measure in which he enters into relationship, when he goes out of himself to live in justice with God, with others and with all creatures” (*LS*, 240). This is true for every individual, it is also true for institutions, be they political or ecclesial. Five years after its publication, the encyclical is slowly beginning to penetrate the consciousness of politics and the Church and to show practical effects. Now it is important to continue this path consistently, with concrete steps, with confidence. As COMECE and as ELSiA we will take up this challenge.

Laudato si' and the New Evangelization

ARCHBISHOP JOSÉ H. GOMEZ

Archbishop of Los Angeles; President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USA

Reading *Laudato si'* five years on, and in light of the release of *Fratelli tutti*, I am struck by the originality of the Holy Father's presentation of the Church's social doctrine.

Both of Pope Francis' social encyclicals are best read, I believe, as missionary texts, examples of the new evangelization of culture. The Pope is writing to evangelize global elites and leaders, consciously bearing witness to the perennial truths of the Gospel in an intellectual and political culture that has become aggressively secularized and, in many respects, hostile to Christian ideas and values.

Five years on, one is impressed by the letter's confidence and openness to the world. Pope Francis draws on an ecumenical and interdisciplinary range of authorities – from scientists, saints and theologians to international agencies, from other world religious leaders to previous Popes and Catholic bishops' conferences in every continent: he even quotes a Sufi mystic in one of his footnotes.

Pope Francis understands that in the modern world the Gospel message needs a new hearing, a fresh presentation rooted in the concrete realities of our times. He understands that the Gospel and the Church have no necessary 'authority' in today's secularized global society, in which the idea of God is either dismissed or deemed irrelevant. "Theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract," he acknowledges.

Nevertheless, the "the gaze of Jesus" remains at the heart of the Pope's vision in *Laudato si'*. In *Laudato si'*, and again in

Fratelli tutti, Pope Francis is advancing the project that he has described as a new Christian humanism, rooted in “the humanity of the Son of God.” As the Holy Father has said, “Jesus is our humanism” when meeting with participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church on 10 November 2015.

In passages filled with quotations from the Gospel, the Pope in *Laudato si’* presents Jesus as a man of work and a man who “lived in full harmony with all creation”.

“In talking with his disciples,” the Pope writes, “with moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God’s eyes ... As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things.”

In the name of Jesus, Pope Francis is issuing a call to conversion in *Laudato si’* – a call for all of us to look at the earth and all its creatures with the eyes of Jesus. Because “the earthly Jesus” is also the Creator and Lord of the universe, the world has been transfigured.

The Pope writes: “Thus, 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. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.”

Much of the initial reaction to *Laudato si’* focused on the Pope’s “positions” on controversial political questions such as climate change, the disappearance of plant and animal species, the culture of waste and consumer lifestyles, and the global inequalities of wealth and access to resources.

These passages of the encyclical deserve careful reading and rereading. The Holy Father’s proposals, for instance, on the urgent need for the world’s governments and international agencies to take concrete steps to address global climate change, will

continue to be debated and should be studied in the spirit of fraternal dialogue that he offers them.

“The Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics,” he writes. “But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good.”

As the Pope affirms that Catholic social doctrine does not offer technical solutions, at the same time a close reading of *Laudato si'* demonstrates how the Church's wisdom could help our societies in the West to better steer a rational course between the extreme ideologies that so often seem to dictate the terms of today's environmental debates.

Laudato si' is not so much a work of politics or economics – it is a moral and spiritual reflection on our times. The Pope's tone is urgent, passionate, and personal. He writes with a prophet's eye for injustice: “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”.

Five years on, I am still struck by the broad range of issues that he believes are contributing to the environmental crisis of our times – “the noise and distractions of information overload” – access to clean drinking water, the crisis of hope in a ‘better tomorrow’, ‘the myth of progress’, modern architecture, the ‘culture of relativism’, drug abuse in rich countries, the diversity of species, rising sea levels, and global inequality.

While voicing his respect for those “who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant,” the Pope does not hesitate to challenge the idea that we can heal the earth or build a just global economy without reference to God.

“A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable,” he insists. “That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot.” He stresses the need to accept “one's own

body in its femininity or masculinity" and how it is "not healthy to cancel out sexual difference".

Offering a beautiful array of biblical wisdom on the order and beauty of creation, the Pope often writes in a poetic, even mystical tone. We should stand before the natural world with an "openness to awe and wonder," he writes, and "feel intimately united with all that exists".

The created world is "a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty," according to the Pope. At the heart of God's design for creation is his unfathomable love: "God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things. ... Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection".

Perhaps Pope Francis' most enduring contribution in *Laudato si'* is to restore the human person to the centre of our contemporary conversation about the environment. The care for creation that he calls us to includes care for the human creature, who is the glorious summit of God's plan for creation, created in the divine image and "possessing a particular dignity above other creatures".

While he accepts the scientific theory of evolution, he refuses any attempts to "reduce" men and women to mere products of natural processes. There is something greater in the human person, something sacred.

"Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other not yet discovered capacities, are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology," he writes. "The sheer novelty involved in the emergence of a personal being within a material universe presupposes a direct action of God and a particular call to life and to relationship on the part of a 'Thou' who addresses himself to another 'thou.'"

The Holy Father pushes back strongly against what he calls “a misguided anthropocentrism” and the “omnipresent technocratic paradigm”. These ideas lead to a mentality that treats the natural world as only a source of raw materials to be exploited for the narrow self-interests and selfish lifestyles of powerful groups. But these also produce a “culture of relativism” that denies “any pre-eminence to the human person,” and considers the human to be just one species among others in creation.

Building on Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI’s concept of a “human ecology,” Pope Francis speaks of a ‘profound relationship’. He challenges those in the secular environmental movement to deepen their moral reflection and examine the consistency of their ethical convictions, using strong words to condemn those who would propose population control and abortion as solutions to environmental problems.

“Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion,” he writes. “How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties?” between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment.” (*LS*, 120).

In the five years since its publication, it is clear that *Laudato si’* has changed the conversation in the universal Church and impressed upon all of us in the Church the urgency of working to shape a global future that protects our natural environment and seeks sustainable and integral development.

In the United States, the encyclical’s vision of “integral ecology” has become the guiding vision for the American Church’s witness and advocacy on environmental issues – inspiring local diocesan initiatives and national programmes and advocacy from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Cam-

paign for Human Development, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Relief Services.

The bishops welcomed the encyclical and carried out an extensive national campaign to share the Holy Father's teachings and raise awareness of the importance of adopting lifestyles and supporting policies that promote sustainable development and care for creation. A summary of some of these efforts can be found at the US bishops' website¹.

Again, and again in *Laudato si'*, the Pope returns to what has become the key theme running through his pontificate – the need to restore our sense of our fraternal responsibility for others and for the world entrusted to us. Along with his ideas of “human ecology,” Pope Francis speaks of an “integral ecology” that connects our care for the earth with our duty to seek justice for the poor and vulnerable.

In this, we see the deep connection between *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, the two social encyclicals of this pontificate. Together, these documents challenge us to “broaden our vision,” as the Pope says, and to work together to shape our future – aware that we are children of God, created equal in sanctity and dignity, and called to form a single human family in which we live as brothers and sisters in harmony in our common home.

¹ <https://www.usccb.org/resources/summary-activities-laudato-si.pdf>

Laudato si': A Road Map for Advocates

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We are called to be advocates; called to announce the reign of God; called to make loud noise and good trouble on behalf of Earth and all people. As people of the Gospel, disciples of Jesus, we cannot remain silent in the face of the suffering of our brothers and sisters and the destruction of our Earth home.

In his teaching, Jesus clearly links discipleship with advocacy. We need only recall the Sermon on the Mount. Here Matthew gathers up Jesus' teachings and His promise that justice-seekers and peacemakers will be called children of God. It was on Mount Eremos that Jesus commanded his followers to be bold in their advocacy. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others" (Matthew 5:14-16). Advocacy, especially with and for the most vulnerable, is an essential component of living the Gospel.

We are commissioned by our baptism to be advocates; to 'call out' the injustice embedded in our institutions and behaviours; to call out the structural causes of poverty, racism, environmental degradation and violence of every sort. Christians cannot absent themselves from the hard work of building the beloved community.

As our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has said, "A Good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of themselves, so that those who govern can govern well". He goes on; politics "is one of the highest forms of love, because it is in the service of the common

good. We engage in this political process not because we are partisans, but because we're Christians."¹

The Gospel of hope, which we are called to proclaim by word and deed, both challenges and empowers us to be actively involved in shaping public policy to serve the common good. *Laudato si'* provides a road map for our advocacy. Amy Woolam Echeverria, International Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Coordinator for Columban Missionaries, expresses the sentiments of many religious congregations when she says,

"Laudato si' is our North Star in our understanding of mission and all of our justice endeavours. Laudato si' gives us impulse when speaking with policy makers about climate legislation, educating communities, or adjusting our investment policies. It is the spirituality of care and interconnect-edness of Laudato si' that permits us to enter into the work in myriad ways that respond most directly to the needs and longings of the land and people, wherever we are."

Called to Risk Encounter

First, *Laudato si'* reminds advocates they must risk encounter and embrace communion 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" (*LS*, 19).

We must listen; really listen to the cries of Earth and God's people, for they cry out in unison for justice. We must see; really see the world from the perspective of the suffering of all creation. We must feel; really feel the pain of those injured by our greed, marginalized by our fear. Encounter must be the start-

¹ Catholic News Service (2013) *Pope Calls Faithful to Pray, Participate Actively in Politics*, 16 September. <https://licatholic.org/pope-calls-faithful-to-pray-participate-actively-in-politics/>

ing point and the constant reference of our advocacy. We must have our hearts broken by authentic encounter with God in all of creation, if we are to love as God loves. To risk encounter is to know the mysterious presence of the Holy all around us, to know, deep in our souls, that we are connected to each other and to all things through ties both visible and invisible.

The Sisters of St Francis of Philadelphia witness first-hand the truth that, “the gravest of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest” (*LS*, 48). Their motherhouse is located only a few miles from the city of Chester, a low-income, historically-marginalized Black community, which houses the Covanta trash incinerator, a leading source of pollutants that contribute to cancers, birth defects, and more. Sister Nora Nash reports that the Sisters regularly join Chester residents in meetings and protests against this worst-case scenario of environmental racism.

If we are to be advocates, for Earth and God’s people, “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world” (*LS*, 229). We must be convinced anew that we are created for communion and accomplish little by ourselves. Kim Lamberty, Director of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation for the Society of the Sacred Heart, knows, “Individual actions are not enough. What keeps people engaged is working in community, forming bonds, and seeing that together they can actually influence change. Too many of us forget this important truth.”

Called to See Things Whole

Secondly, *Laudato si’* teaches us about the intrinsic interconnectedness of the challenges before us. “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach

to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature" (*LS*, 139). Pope Francis' explanation of integral ecology has deepened our understanding of the complex connections between the various concerns we too often see as discrete problems and address in isolation.

"We cannot adequately address the climate crisis without also addressing the systemic racism that causes communities of colour to be disproportionately impacted. We cannot meaningfully advocate for justice for immigrants without understanding how climate change contributes to forced migration," notes Sarah Nash, Director of Justice, Peace and Sustainability, for the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Marianne Comfort, Institute Justice Team, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas echoes that theme, "We can't keep our calls for systemic change in separate boxes labelled 'environmental justice' or 'economic justice'. Connecting the dots makes the work richer and challenges us to address the root causes of injustice."

How many times have advocates fallen into the trap that pits one justice concern against another; that prioritizes poverty eradication over environmental health or sets the critically important need for jobs against the equally important need for clean air? It is a false dilemma.

We are coming to understand that just as all of creation is interconnected, all of the threats to our wellbeing intersect as well. Participation in God's creative act of building the beloved community requires an integral approach that sees things whole and includes the dimensions of mind and heart, science and art, faith, and the whole spiritual life.

Called to Act

Finally, *Laudato si'* inspires us to take action rooted in reflective encounters with the Holy manifest in all of creation. It is

only action born of contemplation, that has the power to repair relationships and transform our social and political institutions.

“Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity, which affects not only relationships between individuals but also macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones” (*LS*, 231).

Engaging with the encyclical has emboldened many congregations to address injustice at its root. The justice coordinator for the Congregation of Bon Secours, Mary Beth Hamm, SSJ, reports that they have been able to address both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor through shareholder resolutions and dialogue with corporate and legislative leaders on issues from climate change to human rights.

Christians cannot shrink from the challenge to be vitally involved in the political process on behalf of earth and God’s people. We know deep in our hearts that the commitment to the creation of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world is an integral dimension of our witness to the Gospel. Pope Francis reminds us that our vocation is inherently political, “authentic faith... always involves a deep desire to change the world... If indeed ‘the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics’, the Church ‘cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice’” (*EG*, 183).

Let me conclude with a bit of wisdom from still another advocate who knows the way of *Laudato si’* well, Lucy Slinger, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, “Chaotic times call for definitive actions. *Laudato si’* is the eminent guide calling forth from science and theology a comprehensive integral ecology to provide rationale and motivation for actions essential to safeguard the human future on our one small planetary home, Earth.”

Personal reflection on *Laudato si'*

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I was in the Piazza of St Peter the night Pope Francis was announced to the Church and the world and swooned with the crowd when his name was given as Francis of Assisi. My Franciscan group was next to an astonished group of Jesuits. I must say that on that night, the Franciscans and the Jesuits became the best of friends.

My own journey has been influenced by St Ignatius, having earned advanced degrees at a Jesuit university. Like Pope Francis, my life as a Franciscan Sister is deeply inspired by St Francis, whose love for God extended to all of creation. I, too, have tried to follow the example of this man of poverty, of peace and one who loves and protects all of nature. Franciscan spirituality has influenced my work from the development of Integrity for Non-violence to the JPIC Commission. To be called upon to share this life and commitment for this reverent relationship to all of creation is a responsible honour.

When I read and reflect on *Laudato si'*, I feel that I am reading the deepest thoughts of a dear friend who is sharing what matters most to him. I find a deep kinship with what Pope Francis has written, but I also find challenge and delight in the differences of our personal experiences. When Pope Francis refers to St Francis falling in love with God, he is accentuating his own experience. "Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his presence" (*LS*, 11). My heart resonates with this understanding too.

Laudato si' has had a profound effect on my spiritual development. This encyclical infused spirituality into our work with the environment. I have studied and tried to actualize the example of St Francis who “shows us how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace” (LS, 10). Soon after its publication, I contributed to a Franciscan reflection guide for *Laudato si'*. Our times need the message of St Francis, the patron saint of ecology. I knew it was important to respond personally and candidly about how the encyclical needed to promote a new way of life to listen to the cries of the earth and the poor.

In 2015, I began my ministry as the Co-Executive Secretary of the JPIC Commission. I watched as Pope Francis strategically released the encyclical prior to major global events, gracefully drawing attention to the significance of his message. From this I learned the importance of being forthright with ecological spirituality to enhance political agendas. Advocacy inspired by *Laudato si'* created impacts at the United Nations as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted and at the Climate Change Conference in Paris, COP21, addressing the rising temperature crisis. Pope Francis' deep study of both theology and science had formulated his message that everything was interconnected in both social and environmental concerns.

In 2018, the JPIC Commission of USG-UISG [Union of Superior Generals – International Union of Superior Generals] endorsed the proposal to implement the goals of *Laudato si'*. This would become the “Campaign for Sowing Hope for the Planet” (SHFP). In 2019 the UISG Plenary Assembly of religious women accepted by acclamation the commitment to realize *Laudato si'* through personal and communal conversion. In 2019, there was continued involvement with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in the development of the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform regarding the seven goals. This would encompass all Church sectors and would become a 7-year plan and a

projected outcome of the Covid-19 Commission. Education and inspiration are needed for change and so webinars and an interactive website with resources, videos, prayers and a newsletter continue to develop the message. Besides the environment and concerns for the poor, there are many areas to address, such as the economy, education, spirituality and responsible lifestyles. To reach the tipping point for change we need to coordinate our advocacy efforts. Past and upcoming webinars continue to promote the seven goals of the *Laudato Si'* Action Plan along with sharing ways to implement them.

Sowing Hope for the Planet has worked vigorously to adapt our framework to make this vision a reality. The religious sector is moving forward with the 3 pillars of the plan: a public commitment to the charisms of the congregations, transition to an integral ecology using a complementary assessment process, and engagement in local, national and international networking. The USG executive council for male religious declared their support of the *Laudato si'* Action Platform and encouraged its members to coordinate efforts with SHFP. This is a realization that the 'whole' of religious involvement is better than 'the sum of its parts'.

Additionally, my work with a process called Integrity for Nonviolence has been influenced. In *Laudato si'* Pope Francis clearly states that "it is no longer enough to speak only of the integrity of ecosystems. We have to dare to speak of the integrity of human life, of the need to promote and unify all the great values" (LS, 224). Values important in the practice of nonviolence are: creating respect for universal basic dignity, providing a safe non-threatening place, practicing honesty and truthful communication, the freedom to discover the true self, promoting justice through accountability and responsibility, fair negotiations, nurturing wholesome relationships through trust and ensuring that there are adequate resources for persons to have a healthy lifestyle. In reflecting on the words of Pope Francis in *Laudato*

si', I found the encouragement that "no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself" (LS, 225). This is the place of integrity.

Pope Francis also has developed a pastoral plan for change and an integrative approach that is a template for us in the JPIC Secretariat too: *time is greater than space*, we are "always more effective when we generate processes rather than holding on to positions of power" (LS, 178). In situations where dialogue concerns difficult advocacy issues, sensitivity is imperative. *Laudato si'* has provided guidance in that *unity is greater than conflict* in caring for the environment or protecting the vulnerable. In considering that *realities are more important than ideas*, Pope Francis stresses the importance of respectful dialogue. "The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline, and generosity" (LS, 201). Focusing on the *whole being greater than the sum of the parts*, he reminds us that: "Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds." (LS, 219)

Pope Francis has a wonderful way of giving examples of how everything is interconnected socially and environmentally. I marvel at the way he interconnects global actions with everyday life. He encourages us to have the attitude that "one approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full" (LS, 226). This is an important emphasis on the quality of our presence and in the way, we are asked to do whatever God asks of us.

Another way of understanding is how he uses the wisdom of St Bonaventure writing about contemplation and the mystical experiences of life when he says, "contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside our-

selves" (LS, 233). I find great resonance here reflecting upon the graces of the moment in preparation for whatever God has in store for me. Pope Francis said, "Love, overflowing in small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world" (LS, 231). With these words he is calling for a "civilization of love" (General Audience, September 2020).

We must reach the tipping point for systemic change by acknowledging the strength and ministerial growth that comes from interconnections. The difficult time of the pandemic has opened our hearts to the call for ecological integrity. The time is now ripe for spiritual seeds to be sown and bloom forth.

Pope Francis encourages us to engage with one another and create sustainable, effective networks. We must act together as a family to address the crisis that troubles our common home. To see the spirit of *Laudato si'* so richly realized in this challenging and rewarding journey is an amazing work of the spirit. To be a part of this is elating! We have made commitments to the essential dignity of all people, including respect for human rights at all stages of life. We must also commit to listening to every voice and appreciating every effort to repair and heal our irreplaceable Mother Earth.

Laudato si' – A Convergence Point for All

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Laudato si', Pope Francis' encyclical on care for our common home, has attracted enormous attention from communities, environmental activists and people of different walks of life about working towards achieving the seven goals. The appeal of Pope Francis, "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together ... Humanity still has the ability to work in building our common home" (LS, 13), has been met with an eager response because it is an issue that touches real lives and calls for participation.

The impact of *Laudato si'* to some extent is characterized by harmony. Instances where unity is seen in diversity include young people working in unity with the elderly, government working with the Church and the non-governmental sector, and Christians taking an interdenominational approach in responding to *Laudato si'* goals! In 2015 when the encyclical was released, Anne Ngoga Byengye, who provides Day Care services (In Need Home) for vulnerable slum children, especially those who are denied food and toilet facilities by carers 'to cut costs,' officially launched *Laudato si'*. Among other invited guests was Archbishop Michael Blume SVD, the, then, Apostolic Nuncio to Uganda and various people from different walks of life. The location was a serene olive garden in Kampala.

The document meant a lot to Anne and many others: "After taking in the challenge posed by the document, some of us ladies stopped buying leather shoes and bags having been told by the Nuncio that; "an animal must die before you enjoy its product! We chose to go moderate in purchases and did away with

the emptiness of plenty. Even in need at home, we cut down costs and preserve woodland by using volcanic stones and charcoal dust for cooking,” Anne added.

In the same year, the Sisters of St Charles Boromeo, serving in the Diocese of Nebbi, got busy with young people and formed the St Charles Eco Club. “We started with a drama of the story of creation; where God created everything that was good. In the drama, children acted everything including birds, butterflies, plants, the sun, moon and everything in the creation account where justice and peace prevailed, till evil descended upon humanity. The drama went on to reveal how evil causes massive destruction to creation. Many people moved by the play resolved to join our club in repairing what was destroyed,” Sr Roseline Aind, SSCB, Treasurer of the St Charles Eco Club, recounted.

However, this initiative came in handy when the Ecclesiastical Province of the Archdiocese of Gulu introduced a tree planting competition and campaign in the four dioceses of the Province: Gulu, Nebbi, Arua and Lira. This practice became an integral part of the provincial Peace Week, which is observed as a process of peace-building after the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) civil war in the northern region of Uganda. It became clear that, once the Sisters of St Charles joined the tree planting campaign, Nebbi Diocese would always emerge victorious in the competition. By press time, it was clear that the St Charles Eco club had resolved to make Nebbi clean and green!

The tree planting campaign operated all over the Diocese of Nebbi. However, planting is one thing but nurturing growth is yet another challenge. “We had a big challenge of watering the trees during drought periods, many perished others survived, and we took the responsibility of replacing those dead plants. We planted thousands and the varieties included, fruit trees, shade, wood and timber trees. Those who embraced fruit- tree planting early enough are enjoying the fruits of their labour in season and out of season here in Nebbi”, Sr Roseline added.

The community of the Sisters of St Charles Boromeo in Nebbi was recently approached by a team from the Nebbi Municipal Council seeking to partner with the sisters and the parish community. "When the government, through Nebbi Municipal Council, came to know what we are doing with young people, they added their voice to ours and urged schools, the police, 'white house' (the residential quarters of civil servants), health centres, bankers and various communities and denominations to join the tree-planting campaign. We are working in collaboration with Muslims and Protestants, engaging in the common goal by planting trees around the Immaculate Heart of Mary Cathedral of Nebbi Catholic Diocese. We planted trees around the Mosques in Nebbi Town. We are moving to plant around the Protestant Church. We want to meet the aim, goals and objectives of the Club!" Sr Roseline said.

In another meeting with the Residence District Commissioner, (RDC), the stakeholders were reminded about the green and clean environment campaign where another team was formed to manage waste and recycle plastics. Sisters of St Charles Boromeo also responded to this call. Sr Sagaya Raju SSC, the new Chairperson of the St Charles Eco club and team responded to this call to "hear the cry of the earth". They started recycling waste by making briquettes out of waste material, thus supporting a clean environment and reducing the risk of deforestation by making an alternative charcoal.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic dawned with disruptions to meetings and teamwork. "Nonetheless, we are now making masks with some of the young, disadvantaged girls, and we used the lock-down period to carry out restricted tasks like restocking birds and domestic animals like goats, sheep and pigs," with a radiant face said Sr Roseline, concluding our conversation.

Another community impact was created by the Sisters of the Holy Cross (CSC). As an Institute, they practice environmental friendliness. Sr Semerita Mbambu CSC who doubles as Area

Council Member and Justice and Peace Coordinator for East and West Africa is encouraging environmental friendliness in East and West Africa. "We are undertaking carbon footprint reduction. Each community does something in response to *Laudato si'*. For instance, we plant trees, we encourage the use of solar as opposed to electric heaters that use fossil fuel. We also promote the use of eco-stoves, make bio-briquettes, and promote afforestation in local communities," Sr Semerita reported.

On the same note, Sr Jane Aluku, CSC, of the same community has created local communities to join in making seed-beds for trees, fruit plants and vegetables. The local communities produce pineapples, passion fruits, tomatoes and sugar cane. They share produce equally with the local community. "Some families used to take food from our gardens; since we started working together, we now lose nothing and share surplus harvest with team members and students. We also collect assorted seedlings from the natural forest and plant them with the help of local community members. We have improved banana plants with compost organic manure. During COVID-19 lockdown we worked hard, and we are still enjoying the fruits of our labour in a good environment and food varieties."

Another unique impact is the academic dimension of Fr John Mary Mooka Kamweri AJ, PhD who shares his dynamic input; "When Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'*, was issued in 2015, I was the Director of the Institute of Ethics at Uganda Martyrs University. The Institute of Ethics initiated three activities. It organized a conference at the university to discuss the encyclical and its relevance in the environmental crisis in Uganda. I wrote a paper explaining the relevance of the encyclical *Laudato si'* and its relevance to the crisis of environmental risks in Uganda and the future of humanity.

The paper was an invitation to the Association of Religious in Uganda (ARU)/Conference of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Uganda (CICLSALU) to

be stewards of the natural environment resources in the wake of Pope Francis' encyclical. The topic of the paper was: *Stewards of the Natural Environment Resources: A Role for the Association of Religious in Uganda (ARU) in Sustaining Uganda's Natural Environment Resources*. The paper was presented at a *Laudato si'* Conference organized by the Institute of Ethics at Uganda Martyrs University (2015), at the Catholic Youth Conference (2015) at Nsambya, Uganda, and at Duquesne University Integrity of Creation Conference (30 September – 2 October 2015).

A book resulted from the Duquesne University conference. The chapter in the book is Kamweri John Mary Mooka. *"Stewards of the Natural Environmental Resources: A Role for the Association of Religious in Uganda (ARU) in Sustaining Uganda's Natural Environment Resources (Chapter 22)." In Magill, Gerard & Kiarash Aramesh, 2017. The Urgency of Climate Change: Pivotal Perspective. Cambridge Scholars Publishers.*¹The teaching of *Laudato si'* was also incorporated into the course outline of a Bio-Environmental Ethics Course for students in the Faculty of Ethics and School of Arts and Social Sciences.

In another development, the Apostles of Jesus Religious Missionary Institute integrated echo-spirituality into its spiritual retreat programmes at The Apostles of Jesus Spiritual Retreat Centre at Jinja Uganda. Also, in Comboni Spiritual Centre, Sr Josephine Nafula MMS (Medical Mission Sisters) has developed an Ecological Spirituality retreat. In addition to the Gethsemane Prayer Garden of the Apostles of Jesus, the St Francis *Laudato si'* Prayer Garden was established to blend the inspiration of the natural environmental beauty with the spiritual realities of prayer and meditation.

¹ <http://ir.umu.ac.ug/handle/20.500.12280/423>

Laudato si' in Ireland

FR SEAN McDONAGH SC

Columban Priest of Ireland, Eco-Theologian, Ireland

One of the most memorable *Laudato si'* projects in Ireland for me to date has to be the *Our Common Home* project of the World Meeting of Families in 2018. Guided by the *Laudato si'* Working Group of the Irish Bishops' Conference, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, and Trócaire this project aimed to break open *Laudato si'* to a global Church audience and to the wider public. It was a moment where we could showcase *Laudato si'* as a vehicle to "enter into dialogue" with all people who are "united by the same concern" (*LS*, 3;7), where we could share the wisdom of *Laudato si'* with all ages. This included educational workshops for children, teenagers and adults as well as three large panel discussions on *Our Common Home*, eco-prayer and meditation spaces as well as special 'moments' across the venue celebrating *Laudato si'*. The highlight of all this had to be the *Laudato si'* garden, that was built in the car park of the Poor Clare's Monastery beside the main venue. Many who visited the space during that week found it to be a transformative place, peaceful, inviting participants into a deeper connection with God's creation. Cardinal Tagle kindly blessed this space on the opening day and noted, "In the bible, the garden is very significant, the garden of creation is also the garden of the fall... Jesus struggles with God's will in the garden but also the triumph of God's will [takes place] in the garden... the place of resurrection... God will always go back to the garden to make God's power and love felt. It's a place for re-creation."

One of the most memorable actions in recent years has been the inter-faith community's involvement in the Global

Youth Climate Strikes. On 19 September 2019, twenty-thousand people gathered on the streets of Dublin calling for urgent climate action, joining with millions worldwide, inspired and led by Greta Thunberg. It was a beautiful day in Dublin, blue skies and sun shining. For the first time, an interfaith group gathered on the banks of the River Liffey, near the Famine memorial, to pray together before the Climate Strike began. We read passages from the sacred scriptures of each tradition on care for Mother Earth and from *Laudato si'*. Many people joined us. It was a beautiful moment of solidarity and afterwards we marched together under the banner of "Faiths for Climate Action".

Baha'i – "Know that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God."

Buddhism – "Uproot greed, anger and delusion, not the sacred forests of the Earth."

Sikh – "Air is the Guru, Water is the father, and Earth is the Great, Mother of All."

"We join with the earth and with each other, as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery, for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life. Amen."

Our famous, *Laudato si' Global* led the climate protest that day, followed by thousands of people raising their voices in the public sphere. Since then, the *Laudato si'* movement in Ireland focused on hosting large conferences around the country, diocese by diocese to help people explore how to practically live *Laudato si'* and how to implement the enormous changes that are needed. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 this outreach was postponed. As we pondered what to do next while the world closed; the grassroots *Laudato si'* movement in Ireland began to flourish in a different way. Hundreds of people have gathered online to journey with *Laudato si'* in parish and faith community

book clubs. These book clubs have been reflective, nourishing spaces where people spend six weeks delving into the wisdom of *Laudato si'*, listening to the cry of the earth, praying together and discerning where they are being called to act to protect our common home. The pandemic has given us a space for genuine ecological conversion; a chance to consider what is truly important and how we want to emerge from this crisis, especially in our church communities. We await with fierce excitement the launch of the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform so that all the wonderful people who have spent this year reflecting on *Laudato si'* can put their energy and enthusiasm into action. "Truly, much can be done!" (LS, 180).

Background to the Diocesan Focus & Promotion of *Laudato si'* – Sowing the Seeds

The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Committee of the diocese was set up in 1997/8. There has been a strong focus on ecology in the diocese from our first celebration of Earth Day in 1999. This became Earth Week and was the perfect preparation for *Laudato si'*. The Diocese's weekly radio programme *Horizons* and a daily *Just A Thought*, on local radio in Kerry, and the Diocesan Director of Communications are vital 'tools' in promoting all JPIC's activities across all media¹. The Diocese of Kerry (53 parishes) was the first diocese to receive its eco award by Eco Congregation Ireland in 2012. At that time 19 parishes also received eco-awards for their work in holding and promoting Earth Day initiatives in their parishes, all supported by the Diocesan Committee².

¹ www.dioceseofkerry.ie/justice

² <https://www.dioceseofkerry.ie/parish-map/>

Key Actions Since *Laudato si'* was Published in May 2015

- 1 September 2015: The 'World Day of Prayer for Creation' was celebrated in Tralee Town Park with a short ritual including prayers and readings from *Laudato si'* and an invitation to commit to caring for creation.
- 28 September 2015: Following the publication of *Laudato si'* in May 2015 JPIC co-hosted a public evening seminar on the document with theologian Fr Donal Dorr. Since that time, different themes from *Laudato si'* have been the focus for *Earth Weeks* which evolved into the *Season of Creation* with a brochure sent to all parishes, public events held in the two main towns: Killarney (Cathedral town) and Tralee (County capital) and wide media coverage.
- April 2016: Brochure circulated to all parishes and an evening seminar with an evening speaker Fr Sean McDonagh SSC (Society of St Columban), Eco-Theologian on biodiversity: *Laudato si' A Prophetic Challenge for the 21st Century*. Note: In 2017 the Diocese of Kerry showed its particular commitment to the work and ministry of JPIC by appointing a new pastoral worker to work closely with the JPIC committee (all volunteers) and support ministry to families.
- September 2017: Cherishing God's Gift of Food with a particular focus on avoiding food waste.
- September 2018: Be the Solution to Plastic Pollution
- September 2019: Climate Crisis. 11 years to save Our Common Home. Launch of Season by Bishop Ray Browne by planting a native Rowan sapling in the grounds of a Parish Church.
- Public Talk Food, Floods and Faith workshop—examining impact of climate change related storm and flood events on coastal communities and availability of food and ways

to become more sustainable including a marketplace of locally based climate action groups and our Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and Trócaire³. Also, there was a meditation in nature walk organised with local St John's Parish, Tralee '*Climate Crisis to the Oak*'⁴.

- 20 September: Support for Global Day of Climate Action incorporating *Fridays for Future* (Young people)⁵.
- September 2020: Theme: Cultivating Hope. A Faith Response to the Climate Crisis. In light of Covid-19, the brochure was not circulated but promoted on diocesan social media and radio. World Day of Prayer for Creation was marked with a socially-distanced reflective prayer ritual event in Tralee Town Park with a Ritual Leaflet⁶ and Prayer Event liturgy⁷. A *Season of Creation* webinar which was held in conjunction with the Laudato si' Working Group of the Irish Bishops with a variety of presenters of various ages on aspects of biodiversity, energy reduction, water conservation, youth and family action, and poetry⁸.
- 2021 Laudato si' Promotion: In January, Diocesan Mission Online had 4,000 registrations. Additionally, Jane Mellett Trócaire's Laudato si' Officer was a speaker at the Laudato si' Working Group (Irish Bishops)⁹. St John's Care of Creation Group (Tralee) has been particularly active: with in 2020 (pre-Covid): a reading group of *Laudato si'* and in Feb-March 2021: an online reading of *Fratelli*

³ <https://www.dioceseofkerry.ie/gallery/food-floods-and-faith-17th-september/>

⁴ <https://www.dioceseofkerry.ie/gallery/season-of-creation-park-walk-sept-19/>

⁵ <https://www.dioceseofkerry.ie/gallery/climate-action-march-tralee-sept-20th/>

⁶ <https://www.dioceseofkerry.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SOC-2020-Outdoor-Liturgy1.pdf>

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XA_NTB89-0A

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeuSV4TBtds>

⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Nmhn6GHvwc

tutti with Dr Suzanne Mulligan, Moral Theologian, Maynooth, to embed the two calls of Pope Francis to respond to the cry of the earth and of the poor. It also has a small Hub with a large window used for promotion.

- Lent 2021: St John's parish has continued this focus incorporating a Stations of Creation into its Lenten booklet with a mini booklet for families. It has also started a biodiversity garden. At Diocesan level the JPIC committee is drawing together reps from different parishes online to support the setting up of Care of Creation Groups during 2021. Networking on ecumenical, interfaith and secular levels has always been part of this work.

Protecting Water: National Holy Wells Day

Our small group of five is taking seriously the strong message in *Laudato si'* about the right of everyone to have access to clean water. Since 2017, we have organised an annual National Holy Wells Day. The Vatican document *Aqua Fons Vitae (Water the Source of Life)* of March 2019 has given us further impetus. Since there are more than 3,000 Holy Wells in Ireland—an average of 100 per county—no one is far from a well; and while other aspects of the local landscape may change, Holy Wells remain constant, faithful.

Wells are durable; they have survived the ravages of the Vikings, the Penal Laws, the Famine, the War of Independence. They are integral parts of our natural, human and sacred landscapes. Though silent, they have endless stories to tell. Today, now that the struggle for water has become a burning issue for the planet, we are encouraging people to gather at their Well to celebrate water and to reflect together on what they can do—locally, nationally and internationally to protect this indispensable gift.

Over the centuries, when the practice of religion was forbidden in Ireland, Holy Wells acted as the cathedrals of the poor and the oppressed. Within our Irish culture they remain as places to visit in times of difficulty and personal need. They are wayside sanctuaries. People alienated from the institutional Church can find calming and restoration in the folk liturgy of the well; motorists driving by may stop at a well for a moment's prayer. The water revives their spirit, puts them in touch with their ancient roots and gives them a sense of belonging. Now wells are being restored as community projects, schools undertake projects around them, and a new reverence for the mystery and importance of water is quietly flourishing.

Final Thoughts

The sowing of seeds is essential, but workers are needed to look after and tend the crop to make it yield abundant fruit. There are now significant green shoots in different parishes, but key people are needed with spheres of influence (ie a systematic approach to integrate it into all aspects of parish life). There is hope to maintain and help grow what we have but also that the Laudato Si' Action Platform will provide clear pathways to follow and that this will receive the necessary support at all levels: family, school, parish, pastoral area and diocese. As stated in Luke 12:49, "I come to cast fire...and would that it were already kindled."

The Impact of *Laudato si'* on Communities, Researchers, Decision-Makers and Activists in Zambia

SR MATILDA MUBANGA

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Zambia*

In his introduction to the encyclical, *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis says, "I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home" (LS, 3). By the term 'common home,' the Pope is referring to planet earth. Our home is also our precious gift from God: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to serve, guard and protect it" (Genesis 2:15). The Pope bemoans what is happening to our home. He talks about how our growing pollution, waste and the throwaway culture, have been putting pressure on Mother Earth's capacity to renew herself and take care of us. Pope Francis, using the Bible, scientific data and different wisdom traditions, establishes a clear and compelling link between the following issues: human activity, the global challenge of access to clean water, loss of biodiversity, decline in the quality of human life, the breakdown of society, and global inequality.

Has this message impacted the lives of communities, researchers, decision makers and activists in Zambia?

The beginning of the dissemination of the message of the encyclical in Zambia was most profound at the international conference that was held in Lusaka on 24 April 2016. This conference, which attracted the participation of the Zambian bishops, government policy makers, farmers and the mining sector, was graced by a presentation of the encyclical by His Eminence Peter K.A. Cardinal Turkson, then President of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace.

The Impact of *Laudato si'* on People's Lives

Communities: At community level, in areas where the message has reached and is understood, we see behaviour change in the way they dialogue around issues related to governance, environment and agriculture. Farmers and others involved in agriculture are becoming more and more interested in making sure that their methods of growing crops take into account the value of biodiversity and the ecosystems in their area. Communities are taking steps to show their understanding that all things on earth are interconnected and that environmental destruction prohibits the earth from regeneration. This realisation has influenced communities to form forest management groups and also influence policy changes to respond to climate change as a result of the malfunctioning of the environment that has been distorted by human economic and social activities.

Researchers: In Zambia, researchers who have come across the message of *Laudato si'*, especially in the area of agriculture and health, have changed their perception on the role nature plays in food production and the control of human diseases. Realizing that food production and the methods used to produce the food have a direct link to the strength of human immunity systems is slowly tilting the balance of agriculture towards agro-ecology rather than industrial agriculture.

Decision Makers: Zambia has four levels of important decision making. Nationally, the Cabinet, Judiciary and Parliament make decisions affecting people's lives at the policy and legal framework level. Due to the interaction between Caritas Zambia and the three arms of government, some policies and laws have been framed that take into account the message of *Laudato si'*. Some of these laws include the Agriculture, Biosafety, Forest, Minerals and Mining Acts. Others include policies such as the Climate Change, Biosafety, Lands, and Decentralisation policies.

At the local government level, councillors and the district authorities are supposed to deliver services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, health care, education and social security. The impact of *Laudato si'* at this level is confined to councils that have worked with Caritas Zambia at diocesan level on the areas of the environment. Guided by policies that take into account the principles and values of *Laudato si'*, decisions made by some councils have been influenced by its principles.

In villages, Zambia still retains the committee of traditional leaders who make decisions on behalf of the village communities. By using some of their indigenous knowledge, which sits well with the message of *Laudato si'*, the leaders have been able to pass byelaws that protect the environment such as banning bush fires, controlled fishing, and reduced tree cutting at the same time as encouraging the planting of trees and, where known, using regenerative methods to allow trees to grow again.

At family level, for those in rural areas who have received the *Laudato si'* message, in their day-to-day activities they generate income working with the soil and their land; they take into account the connectedness that is found in the environment. Therefore, *Laudato si'* has influenced some to achieve ecological conversion.

Activists: These include political and environmental activists. In Zambia, *Laudato si'* has impacted these people more, as they use the message to influence government to change policies and formulate ones that are ecologically friendly in all spheres of Zambia's development agenda. On agriculture and food production, the Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB) has increased its advocacy work and also the promotion of agroecology as the best way of growing food. ZAAB is an environmental and agricultural activities organisation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we in Zambia, especially Catholics, always remember the message of Pope Francis when he reminds us that “we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climate system ... Humanity is called to recognise the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it” (LS, 23). A greater sense of intergenerational solidarity is urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of our use of common environmental resources.¹

He tells us to wake up to the reality that the boundaries between one nation and the next, one region of the world and the next, one person and the other, are simply artificial. We – people and everything else on earth – are much more connected than we tend to realise. This we believe is systems thinking; the ability to see the natural relationships between all beings on earth and honouring this co-existence in our day-to-day actions.

We heed Pope Francis’ call for *Ecological Conversion* – “a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness” (LS, 220). Ecological Conversion should inspire greater creativity and enthusiasm so that we can find solutions to living in harmony with the rest of God’s creation. This has continued to impact our lives and the way we do things.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI (2010). *If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation*, World Peace Day Message 2010. Available at: http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html

The Impact of *Laudato si'*: California

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Archdiocese of San Francisco, USA

Since the promulgation of *Laudato si'* on Pentecost Sunday in 2015, I have been invited to deliver various guest lectures on the encyclical at different universities, conferences, and colloquiums in the United States and Europe. Apart from having been a professor of moral theology at universities in the United States, currently I serve as the Pastor of St Rita Catholic Church in the town of Fairfax in Marin County, just north of San Francisco. Fairfax is the hometown to such musical groups as the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and more recently Metallica. It is also the first town in California to open a marijuana store. Marin County is also the wealthiest county in California.

The parishioners at St Rita Church have often inquired about my professional and personal interest and concern for environmental issues, particularly the challenge of climate change. They have wanted to know why I have not only a professional interest as a moral theologian, but why I have such a personal interest.

So, I decided to speak on that question in my Sunday homily in August 2019. I said bluntly: "There are exactly three reasons why I am so concerned about climate change". Then, I turned and faced the first pew up front in the Church. I said: "*opstaan alstublieft*" [stand up please]. Immediately, three young boys stood straight up, at the time, aged thirteen, eleven, and nine. "Those are the three reasons," I said, "Linus, Wannes, and Florian". They were Flemish kids visiting from Belgium, the grandkids of my close friend, Gie Goris, the former editor-in-chief of both *Wereldwijd* [worldwide] and *MO** magazines.

What kind of world are we welcoming those kids into? What will the world be like when they become parents and grandpar-

ents and great grandparents? What kind of world will they be handing over to their own kids and grandkids and great grandkids?

Laudato si' serves to bring to bear the full weight of the Church in support of the earth, our God-given home. The social, as well as individual and personal impact of *Laudato si'* appears to reveal itself in three sequential stages: education, enlightenment, and engagement. How has this panned out in California, at the full ecclesial level including bishops, priests, and laity?

California Conference of Catholic Bishops

California is the most populated state in the United States, with over 40 million citizens. Upwards of 67% are Catholics. There are two archdioceses (Los Angeles and San Francisco) and ten dioceses.

Looking towards the fourth anniversary of *Laudato si'*, the Catholic bishops of California decided to produce a special pastoral statement for the occasion. They established a committee of experts from various disciplines to draft the document. The committee was titled: California Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Environmental Stewardship. The Committee consisted of twenty members representing academia, pastoral and religious life, civil politics, and various environmental organizations. I was invited to serve as one of the members, representing both the theological and the pastoral realms.

The initial task of the Committee was to determine what the California bishops should say to Catholics and all people of good will, first to animate and energize the implementation of the actions called forth by *Laudato si'* specifically in California, and second, to be a dynamic teaching and evangelization tool for the Catholic faith community and beyond, especially for young people.

The final statement is entitled: *God Calls Us All to Care for our Common Home*. It was released in June 2019. The 25-page document outlines the application of the basic principles of *Laudato si'* for California Catholics and all people of good will. It highlights key themes of Pope Francis, and applies them to the lived reality of California, with the explicit purpose of educating, enlightening, and engaging in greater care for God's creation. It includes the goal of inspiring specific groups to take specific actions based on an appreciation of the created world. The statement identifies special opportunities and specific obligations of Californians to care for God's creation in ways that are inspirational, reflective, and full of hope.

Clergy Study Days and Green Teams

Acknowledging that educated estimates indicate that only 15% of priests worldwide have given even a cursory read to the encyclical, it becomes a daunting task to educate the clergy about the imperative and prophetic urgency of *Laudato si'*. Indeed, Pope Francis and other world leaders now define climate change not just as a pending critical concern, but as an outright emergency.

The Archdiocese of San Francisco established the Office of Ongoing Formation for Clergy. Every two years, it organizes a full two-day conference for all the priests of the Archdiocese, now numbering 376 priests, serving 88 parishes and other ministries.

Anticipating a Clergy Study Days conference for 2020, I proposed to the Archbishop and the Ongoing Formation Office, the theme of *Laudato si'* in its fifth anniversary year. My proposal was accepted. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the event was reduced to an internet online programme with three speakers.

The three speakers were: Rev Dr Joshtrom Kureethadam at the Vatican Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human De-

velopment; Dr Christiana Zenner at Fordham University; and, Rev Dr Alexandre Martins at Marquette University.

Rev Dr Kureethadam spoke on “An Integral Vision for Action”. Dr Zenner spoke on “Science and Tradition in *Laudato si’*”. Dr Martins spoke on “Integral Ecology and Learning from Below: Care for the Earth and for the Poor”. All three complete presentations can currently be found on the website of the Archdiocese of San Francisco¹.

Green Teams

Impacted by *Laudato si’*, the Green Team project is an initiative of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. A Green Team is a group of parish volunteers who plan, organize, carry out, evaluate, and report on parish-based environmental actions, in accord with Catholic Social Teaching. The Green Team helps the parish increase parishioner participation in environmental activities, to help it save money on energy, and strengthen its engagement with the local community, and, most importantly, assist parishioners to live out their Christian values.

The Archdiocese first organized a gathering of parish priests and parishioners from all the eighty-eight parishes in December 2016. The meeting began with a keynote lecture that I had been invited to deliver, “Global/Local Climate Perspectives: *Laudato si’* and Green Teams”. It was followed by various presentations from representatives of city, county, state, and professional as well as volunteer environmental groups.

The parish Green Teams, impacted by *Laudato si’*, are now well underway to achieving their objectives, and reaching out to their greater parish family encouraging education, enlightenment, and engagement for all.

¹ <https://sfarchdiocese.org/clergy-study-days-2020>

St Rita Lenten Lecture Series

In 2007, I started the St Rita Lenten Lecture Series. Parishioners would gather together on the Tuesday evenings of Lent for a Lenten Soup Supper followed by a guest lecture and discussion. The lecture series (2007-2020) has been extremely well received by parishioners. They reflected on how well the lectures and discussions enabled them to become educated, enlightened, and engaged with contemporary moral issues, including climate change.

For the Lent weeks 2019 and 2020, the lectures were devoted to *Laudato si'*. The theme for our 2019 Series was: "The Future of Life on Earth: Reflections on the 4th Anniversary of *Laudato si'*". The five guest speakers included: Dr Christina Astorga, "The Triple Cries of Poor, Women, & Earth: Interlocking Oppression"; Dr Christiana Zenner, "Just Water: Pope Francis, Science, and Fresh Water Ethics"; Rev Dr Alexandre Martins, "Integral Ecology: Care for the Earth and for the *Poor*"; Most Rev John Wester, "How to Carry the Cross in an Anesthetized World"; and, Dr Barbara Green, "*Laudato si'*: Why We May Resist, How We Might Resist Our Resistance".

The theme for our 2020 Lenten Lecture Series was: "*Laudato si'* and World Peace: Celebrating the 5th Anniversary of *Laudato si'*". The two guest speakers (due to Covid-19) were: Most Rev John Stowe, OFM, "We Are All in This Together: Interconnectiveness in All Creation"; and, Dr Lisa Fullam, "We Are the Meteor, We Are the Dinosaur: Integral Ecology & Biodiversity Loss".

Conclusion

Impacted by the wisdom and inspiration of Pope Francis' *Laudato si'*, it is the bishops, priests, and people of California who now have the challenge and task of putting into practice the social, economic, and political implications of an ecological view in a prophetic response to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor.

Big Dreams and Small Beginnings – *Laudato si'* from the Ground and the Peripheries!

RAYMOND DANIEL H. CRUZ JR (JUN CRUZ)

Head of the Care for the Common Home Committee of the Council of the Laity of the Philippines; Director for Laudato Si' Relations at WeGen Laudato Si'

*"This is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek and commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of."*²

Pope Francis is a BIG DREAMER! His dreams in *Laudato si'* are 'God-sized'. And when people read this, the work can be daunting until they understand that it will always have to start with small beginnings... from the ground and the peripheries, usually.

Last May 21, 2020, WeGen Laudato Si' celebrated the 4th anniversary of the first Island Electrification Project in Pamilacan, Bohol, Philippines. As an energy company established to give communities and organizations a concrete way of responding to the challenges of Pope Francis, WeGen Laudato Si' dreamed with the people of the island to install a solar photovoltaic system that will provide their community with day-time electricity. Since time immemorial, the island residents only had electricity from 4pm to 12pm, supplied by a diesel generator. And when it tripped, as often happened, children would have to work on their assignments with flickers of light coming from a piece of cloth dipped in bottles of kerosene, consequently, school children never experienced having lights and electric fans in school. There was no computer-aided education, no refrigeration in households, and all aspects of their economy were hindered

² Francis, P., (2020). *Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*. Simon and Schuster.

by this lack of day-time electricity supply. We started at grass-roots, speaking with the people, their community leaders and then their local government officials. That was 4 years ago and looking back, so many lives were changed, including mine, so be sure to watch our video.¹

In the video, there are eight men who are known as ‘Pam-lacan Heroes’. They were local fishermen who offered ‘sweat equity’ to install the solar panels in the peak of those hot summer months. These eight men were then trained and became seasoned installers. Some were already aged 60 when they were hired by WeGen Laudato Si’ and became ‘regular employees’ for the first time in their lives. I have seen the joy and gratitude of these heroes as they travelled the seas, installing *Laudato si’* projects throughout different dioceses.²

Aside from having a regular and decent livelihood, these men became the main installers in the Diocese of Maasin, which later was cited by the *Inter-Dicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology-Vatican* as the “world’s first diocese to have all their parish Churches transition toward the use of renewable energy.”³ From a small island to an entire diocese of forty-two parishes, local *Laudato si’* actions from the ground began bearing fruit. Dreams from the peripheries were being realized. And with these small beginnings right before my very eyes, who would not be encouraged? Who would not dare to dream?

The dreams are getting bigger. Aside from having solar panel systems installed in 195 Catholic Churches and Church-owned buildings nation-wide, religious institutions have also signed-up. The Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines recently signed a MOA with WeGen Laudato si’ to encourage all their members to take concrete steps to transition towards the use of renewable energy.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGkmZG3UwIA>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKcglbx9wsA>

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOj5Dn-_fY

From the ground and the peripheries, we have witnessed the Holy Spirit's work. The dream has now become more ambitious and challenging as four dioceses have set their hearts to work collectively and become *Laudato si'* dioceses together.

In the next four years, the *Dioceses of Bacolod, Dumaguete, Kabankalan and San Carlos*, four dioceses on Negros Island, have accepted the services of WeGen Laudato Si' to install 260 MW of solar panel systems to proactively counter the construction of coal-fired power plants on the island and address its energy requirements. Their dream and vision are clear: "to be the world's first coal-free Island powered by 100% renewable energy and operating within a genuine distributed energy resource system."

Is this achievable? Yes, but only by God's grace. And I know that this dream is also God's dream. Listen to this young person from Negros as he declares in triumph, "In Negros Occidental, *Laudato si'* helped us secure our victory in protecting our island from the deadly impacts of coal for years and decades to come."

Joshua Villalobos (18 years old) and his friend were only 16 years old when they convened *Youth for Climate Hope for Negros Occidental*. But just like Pope Francis, they stood up and cried: "Let us dare to dream. God asks us to dare to create something new." Indeed, *Laudato si'* has made me and a thousand others dare to dream with God. And, in this dream, we all say "Si!" to *Laudato si'*. We say "YES!" to all these challenges. Will you dream God's dream with us? Can you please pray for us? If yes, then from the ground and the peripheries we invite you. Come, dream God's dream and work with us!

Insights and Reflections of the Youth on Laudato si'

"Advocating in raising climate change awareness has always been hard and with *Laudato si'* bringing a sight of spirituality in the narrative of taking care of our common home brought in a

way, a leverage, a tool for inspiration for such advocacy. It has greatly motivated me to continue fighting to protect our environment and promote sustainable lifestyles for the betterment of our community."

Judimer John S Zarate, Age 18

*Lunhaw – Ecology Desk of the Diocese of San Carlos
Philippines*

"*Laudato si'* has provided us with a fresh perspective on the struggle against climate crisis. The encyclical connected to us in a deeper, spiritual way, showing us that ecological degradation is more than just scientific facts. Rather, it is a product of our failures and negligence in the obligation of being stewards of the Earth, as Christians."

Mary Crystal Kate D. Mosquera, Age 18

*Lunhaw – Ecology Desk of the Diocese of San Carlos
Philippines*

"*Laudato si'*, a letter from one of the world's key leaders, affirmed young people's call for radical changes in our social and economic systems if we want to survive in the decades to come. It rallied behind the voice of science, youth, and the poor. Moreover, in Negros Occidental, *Laudato si'* helped us secure our victory in protecting our island from the deadly impacts of coal for years and decades to come."

Joshua Villalobos, Age 18

*Joint Convenor – Youth for Climate Hope for Negros Occidental
Philippines*

"*Laudato si'* was one of reasons my motivations to take action for the injustices done to the environment. With this, I know that the things we do to take care of the Earth as stewards of God's creation, no matter how small they may be, are significant. The

steps that we take, when done collectively, have a great impact in the pursuit of saving our home.”

Izabelle V Mondia, Age 18

REpower Negros

Philippines

“*Laudato si’* changed my perspective such that the key to attaining genuine sustainability lies in the regeneration of our humanity. What gives all the innovations and solutions their true worth is not just the benefits they provide, but the accompanying values and attitudes that guide these actions. To address the ecological crisis and achieve inclusive and just development requires us to rediscover our roots, reconnect with our environment, and respond to the cries of others.”

John Leo Algo, Age 27

Deputy Executive Director for Programs and Campaigns, Living Laudato Si’ Philippines

Philippines

“*Laudato si’* has truly made me reflect on my current relationship with nature and the impact of my lifestyle on the environment. I gradually changed my lifestyle by becoming more conscious of what I buy and eat. And lastly, we may have different religions and beliefs, but the message is clear – that we are part of nature and interconnected. We must stop destroying our common home, and the solution is within us if we work together for the common good.”

Sheena Katrina Orihuela, Age 27

Advocacy Officer for Local Actions and Community Engagement, Living Laudato Si’ Philippines

Philippines

“Nature is not a place where we live to enjoy and abuse everything that we use. Nature is a portal of life where we see

the meaning of living. *Laudato si'* affected me in a holistic, spiritual and social manner. It has become my guiding principle to continue my advocacy for healthful ecology. *Laudato si'* gave me strength and motivation to fight against the proposed Coal Fired Power station on our Island. It has also taught my heart not to hate our common enemy but love them as if they were my siblings who had lost their way. Thank you Pope Francis, Thank you *Laudato si'.*"

Roberto Miguel Yulo, Age 20

Konsyumer Negros

Philippines

"*Laudato si'* helped me explore and discover the world that I am living in. It enables me to appreciate and acknowledge the amazing creations of our great God that changed my perspectives in life. The encyclical from Pope Francis didn't just give me enough knowledge about how to protect our environment, but it also encouraged me to be empowered in order to empower others to have a sustainable and liveable future."

Ritzie Mae Jean D Lao, Age 18

Volunteer-Lunhaw, the official Ecology Desk of the Diocese of San Carlos

Philippines

"I learned that teaching them the *Laudato si'* ways will always be the first step in learning. I realized that people should not only be aware, but should also know how to learn how to effectively help our common home when it comes to taking care of it. There are no big or small things whenever we act upon the calling of our common home."

Deliza Rois H Reyes, Age 23

Alumnus, Lasallian Vigilance for Environmental Development Core, Laudato Si Gen-Pilipinas Youth

“As a social sciences student, the wealth of perspectives available has been perplexing. Before, I beheld the world as something to be observed from afar. Now, because of *Laudato si’*, I have found myself deeply integrated with it, and the whole of creation and its Creator likewise with me.”

Kenan Gawaran, Age 20

Ateneo Student Catholic Action

Laudato Si’ Gen – Pilipinas

Personal and Communal Engagement of *Laudato si'*

Sr ANNE FALOLA,
Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA), France

In the effort to implement Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si'*, we discover the paradox of the ecological crisis that humanity is grappling with. A catastrophe is looming over the universe as we humans continue to destroy our own life support system, and concerted action is urgently needed to avert the situation. Yet, the greater part of the human family does not see the urgency to '*do something*' to avert it. The reality of the ecological crisis is quite enormous, and many people feel their small actions are inconsequential. There is even a perception that climate change and its consequences are somewhat apocalyptic, that the evil cannot be averted, so we should just give up and wait for doomsday! These diverse positions towards the care of our common home make the encyclical not only necessary, but also timely.

Although the protection and care of the environment has been an area of interest for our congregation in the years preceding the encyclical, the advent of *Laudato si' – On Care of our Common Home* gave us a fresh impetus with a renewed sense of responsibility. The publication of *Laudato si'* in 2015 by Pope Francis expanded the discussion of climate change beyond science and activism and brought it to the domain of faith, not just for us as Catholics. It provides a platform and a tool to concretely and constructively engage in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue with our sisters and brothers of other faith communities and indeed with people of no faith. The Care of our Common Home is a rallying point and a bridge uniting all humanity.

In order to reflect on the core issues raised by *Laudato si'*, my congregation, the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA),

developed reflection sheets which encouraged every Sister to make a personal journey to grow in awareness and take personal responsibility for the Care of God's Creation. These reflection sheets encouraged us to read *Laudato si'* in the light of our missionary charism, provided us with guidelines for communal engagement, and thus set the pace for concrete actions which emerged from these reflections. Another effect of the reflection sheets was that they provided us with a contemplative reflection on the daunting issues of the environmental crisis facing humanity, and this launched us to action on the concrete issues touching on our own lifestyle choices, the way we organize our physical environment and engage in our mission.

The celebration of the *Special Anniversary Year of Laudato si'*, which began in May 2020, and the open-ended list of initiatives released by the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development gave inspiration to our desire for concrete actions. Taking part in a series of webinars helped us surmount the fear of being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems. Those encounters helped us know that we are not alone on this journey; they gave us the courage to do something, no matter how small.

The Laudato si' Week, which was marked in the midst of the pandemic in May 2020, helped us start the year with sobriety, acknowledging the human excesses that were bringing disaster upon all creation. The anniversary year was indeed a time of grace for us Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles, providing us with a perfect platform to launch our *Laudato Si Congregational Project – OLA Green Community – Apostolate Campaign*.

The project was solemnly launched with a congregational webinar during the Season of Creation in 2020. It was a time to make our public and communal declaration by bringing together our concrete actions from different parts of the world, an experience of living integral ecology touching on the diversity of realities and living the interconnectedness of our human family:

- *Laudato si' Missionary Rosary* developed by the Sisters in Cordoba (Argentina) and used with Small Christian Communities and youth groups.
- Friends of Nature Youth Club in our Schools in Lagos, Nigeria.
- Catch them young Peace Club in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria.
- *The Cork Conference on Intergenerational Climate Justice: Collaboration – OLA, SMA and the local Community in Cork, Ireland.*
- The Charter of Environmental Protection developed by the students and signed by parents and teachers of OLA Schools in Lebanon.
- The recycling of water from the laundry and kitchen to create magnificent gardens in the drylands of Botswana.
- Supporting migrants in Botswana and Italy.
- The tree planting and recycling campaigns in OLA Schools in Ghana.
- The *No to Single Use Plastic Campaign* in all our communities and places of mission.
- The care and empowerment of Internally Displaced People in Abuja, Nigeria.
- Women Empowerment Centre making reusable shopping bags in Burkina Faso – They earn some income while contributing to the campaign against the use of plastic bags.
- Making organic compost and vegetable gardens in all our communities across the Congregation.

A special song was composed with the slogan – *Do Something ... No matter how small ... Let us care for the gift of Creation*. This song, which was composed by an OLA Sister to mobilize people for this project, has been uploaded on YouTube by *Sowing Hope for Planet*. It is also being used to mobilize

students of different ages in all the schools we manage in different parts of the world.

This campaign has helped us to grow in key areas of our lives, focusing on prayer and spirituality, house and environment, lifestyle choices and building local awareness. The project uses an approach that encourages everyone to engage in small actions within their reach, and we gradually grow together into an integral ecological conversion. Therefore, everyone can creatively engage with the values of *Laudato si'* in their daily lives because we realize that for very busy people, we have to avoid adding on new activities; rather we encourage a new lifestyle within our existing apostolates and multiple missionary engagements. The vision and good practices are then shared and promoted within the congregation, using various means, such as congregational statements, documents, newsletters, webinars and other publications, short formation programmes, documentaries, etc. We also develop simple resource materials that can be adapted to the local realities. We use images, logos, and short online courses to strengthen the commitment of the Sisters.

Integral Ecology Focusing on Interfaith and Peace Building

One example of this journey of promoting integral ecology is the use of one of our existing platforms, the *Women's Interfaith Council (WIC)*, based in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria. WIC brings Muslim and Christian women's associations together to build interfaith understanding, engage in conflict analysis and transformation, tackle health and environmental issues, women's voicelessness, and poverty. This initiative has strengthened the relationship between Muslims and Christians in this conflict-prone part of the world. This is also creating a model of peaceful co-existence which has led to new initiatives among young people such as *the Catch them Young Peace Club*. Thus,

by implementing *Laudato si'*, we not only care for creation, but we also build bridges across the religious divide, promoting peaceful co-existence and social cohesion.

Conclusion

We thank the Lord for this journey while we recognize that a lot still needs to be done. For example, we would like to do more to influence policies both locally and globally, by improving our capacity for advocacy for climate justice. We would like to do more to care for and support migrants, especially women. We would like to promote farming methods in Africa that respect the natural environment and protect biodiversity. Our engagement with *Laudato si'* has greatly influenced our understanding of being missionaries today. The missionary mandate of Christ: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15), means *All of Creation* – humans, plants, animals, insects, rivers and seas, mountains and valleys – all are God’s creation. Our responsibility goes beyond the direct care of the human person alone; we cannot ignore any part of God’s creation, because everything is interconnected. We experience this interconnectedness, because we see concretely in many parts of the world where the consequences of climate change and of the abuse of the environment are the root cause of conflicts, migration, poverty, and so much human suffering.

As we stated in our booklet for our Congregational Commitment to *Laudato si'*, we want these not to be just fleeting campaigns but for it to be a continuous and ever-increasing engagement:

“...to sustain the process of OLA Green Community, because the project is ongoing – It does not end. The aim is that

these values will become part and parcel of our OLA life and we will hand them over to the coming generations”.

Our prayer is that Laudato Si values would become:

- *a lifestyle for every Sister,*
- *a project for every community,*
- *a way of life in our missions.*

Laudato si' – A Path We Are All Called to Live

MAUREEN VILLANUEVA LECUONA

*Laudato Si' Movement (LSM) Mexico Chapter, Pastoral Verde
Monterrey Archdiocese and Universidad de Monterrey, Mexico*

As a professional sustainable practitioner, I have had the opportunity to develop different projects in sustainability at NGOs and universities but this experience as a practicing Catholic made me ask myself: should we not be applying this also in our parishes?

Personally, I have also started to make changes in my lifestyle, looking forward to reducing my environmental impact and I felt that this was also part of living my faith. Later on in 2015 when *Laudato si'* was published I was so excited about the document because it totally answered my question, but once I read it, another question came to me: what was our Catholic Church doing in order to respond to Pope Francis urgent call to act upon the socio-environmental crisis we are facing? After this reflection I then found myself confronted by the same question: How was I helping answer this call since I am also part of the Church? Therefore, I felt the call in my heart that I needed to place my experience at the service of God, especially trying to help our local parishes start action.

A group of friends in faith had the same concern and we joined together to develop a strategy for our Archdiocese of Monterrey, and we developed a program called "*Haz Verde tu Parroquia*" (make your parish green). This programme was a guide for those who wanted to respond to the call of *Laudato si'* by implementing specific actions in order to preserve our common home, reduce their environmental impact and work for the wellbeing of humanity and all living beings. With this guide, communities could now follow a path and understand what ac-

tions could be done in order to start educational and lifestyle changes based upon an ecological spirituality. The idea was not only to have sustainable temples or facilities but to encourage a Catholic community that lived differently in harmony with the environment and people in its daily life.

Even though the programme was planned to be used locally, it was also used in some other places like the Diocese of Sonsón-Rionegro in Colombia, the Diocese of Obrera in Argentina and in Quito, Ecuador. The project became a national programme named "*Iglesia que Cuida de la Creación*" (Church that cares for creation), which can be implemented throughout the Catholic Church in Mexico in order to live the *Laudato si'* message.

At the beginning, the programme was planned to be used by parishes but it is now open to schools, religious orders, community kitchens, Catholic groups or movements. The programme works in nine specific topics addressed in *Laudato si'* with 85 possible actions that can be selected by the participants and that are adaptable to different contexts, some activities can be implemented at little or no cost. The important thing is to start and that we can be an active and responsible Church that cares for our Common Home and the well-being of our most vulnerable communities. Participants in this programme receive recognition for their work but most of all for being living examples that things can be done differently.

The participants promoted several activities within the main topics of the programme in their schools, groups and parishes. As regards ecological spirituality, communities were invited first of all to get to know the encyclical through brief courses, they also celebrated mass on special occasions such as the Time of Creation or the *Laudato si'* anniversary. They also offered other courses to inform their communities about the climate crisis and also shared solutions to work upon them. In this particular topic, priests have been a great support in motivating and talking about

the topic, but also giving testimony that care for creation is a call to everyone in our Church. Social programmes were also part of the project since they looked forward to helping vulnerable groups and also encouraging healthy lifestyles through sport events for all ages and offering healthy eating programmes since Mexico ranks amongst the top countries, worldwide, for obesity. This topic was included since health is part of integral ecology.

In regard to conscious consumption, they worked against the 'throw-away' culture, young people now take their thermos and food container to events. Catechism groups have their own cutlery and during festivities and charity fairs the community is encouraged to bring its own thermos and container, all of this in order to avoid the use of disposable materials. Air pollution is a critical reality in the big cities of Mexico, especially Monterrey and consequently several groups now promote carpooling to travel to different events but also alerting the community on bad air days. In relation to energy and water, a parish installed solar panels, some others installed systems for water conservation and energy efficiency but above all they work to create in their community a culture of conservation, understanding that resources are finite and for everyone. Regarding biodiversity, clean up campaigns were organized especially by young people in which they cleaned streets, parks and natural areas, making this activity part of their apostleship. This and many other actions were done by God's people wanting to live out integral ecology in our Catholic communities in Mexico.

A key success factor was the team in each community, it was in charge of spreading the seed, and it was the leaven in the dough and the messenger that brought good news. It was extraordinary what they achieved through their passion, love and hope for a better place for everyone. Even though we are going through a complex situation in Mexico as regards poverty, security, environmental problems and the pandemic, our hope stands firm knowing that our strength lies in Jesus Christ living in

the hope that things can change.

People understand that we are facing this crisis, but they are also willing to begin to change. Participants shared that they wanted to be part of the solution, but they did not know how to start. Together we need to help each other to take the first steps to the new lifestyle to which God has called us all.

Sustainable development should be a reality to everyone and no one should be left behind in achieving this goal, but this is not easy for everyone, especially for vulnerable, marginalized and poor communities, since moving in this direction involves resources, tools, work, planning and strategy. Context and realities will vary in each place but there is no doubt that change must be made immediately, and each individual is called to take action. People no longer want to be part of a system that hurts and damages creation and our sisters and brothers.

Undoubtedly, *Laudato si'* was the spark that motivated action in all sectors of the Catholic Church and made us understand that care of creation is part of evangelization and living our faith. This encyclical also brought faith and science into action and collaboration. The crisis we are facing requires reuniting the gifts, talents and participation of everyone. Without collaboration we cannot achieve a better world for everyone and we need to remember the words of Paul the Apostle that we are one body in Christ and there should be no division in the body, If one part suffers, every part suffers with it and if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. With these last words I would like to honour everyone who helps and has given their life to build the Kingdom of Christ, specifically in the care of God's creation.

It Is the Poor Who Will Save the Planet

FR JOSEPH EMMANUEL KAKULE VYAKUNO

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Italy*

Humanity is currently living through the Covid-19 crisis, which is causing millions of deaths and a collapse of the world economy. In addition to this health crisis, humanity has already been experiencing a climate crisis for several decades, which manifests itself in the resurgence of extreme weather phenomena such as heat waves and tropical cyclones. Finally, humanity is concerned about the availability of the natural resources necessary for its long-term livelihood.

To these three concerns this reflection gives a simple answer: it is the poor who will save the planet! We will show how the poor have the solution to each of these three problems. These solutions follow this order of succession: the solution to Covid-19, the solution to climate change and the solution to the shortage of natural resources.

The Solution to Covid-19

possessing few pharmaceutical laboratories, without breathing apparatus and without even social security, several poor countries have considerably limited the number of deaths from Covid-19 by scrupulously following two principles: social distancing and traditional pharmacopoeia.

In terms of social distancing, the habits and customs of some of these countries prohibit talking with faces too close to each other, kissing in public, organizing homes for the elderly, etc. The poverty of these countries does not allow frequent mobility

or grouping the population in large cities but favours the dispersion of housing in the countryside. Some of these countries, having already suffered the effects of previous epidemics such as ebola, are quick to follow the basic rules of washing hands and distancing from each other. The principle followed is simple: “anyone who has ever been bitten by a snake fears even a simple earthworm”. These social behaviours make it possible to limit the number of deaths. It is a simple solution that the poor offer to humanity: respect for barrier measures.

The second solution to the health crisis that poor countries offer humanity is the use of traditional pharmacopoeia. Several medicinal plants, well known in the tropical world, are used by the population to treat Covid-19. These plants are: *Acacia Senegal*, *Aloe vera*, *Artemisia annua*, *Eucalyptus maidenii*, *Cinchona sp*, *Zingiber officinale*, etc. Several governments and researchers in poor countries have developed effective potions made from plants from local biodiversity to treat the population. The organization of health care in these countries is not monolithic, the population uses these potions as ‘grandmother’s recipes’ to treat themselves¹. The Church recommends valuing the knowledge of indigenous peoples in the use of herbal therapy (LS, 32-42; QA 48, 51)^{2,3}.

Researchers from all over the world ought to analyze the active properties of these plants in specialized laboratories, sanc-

¹ Mahomoodally, M. F. (2013). Traditional medicines in Africa: an appraisal of ten potent African medicinal plants. *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 2013.

² Note: François, *Laudato si’*. *Lettre encyclique sur la sauvegarde de la maison commune*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2015, 235 p. [cited as LS]; François, *Querida Amazonia*. *Esortazione Apostolica Postsinodale al popolo di Dio e a tutte le persone di buona volontà*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2020, 94 p. [cited as QA]; François, *Fratelli tutti*. *Sur la fraternité et l’amitié sociale*, Typographie Vaticane, Cité du Vatican, 2020, 215 p. [cited as FT].

³ Segretariato per la Giustizia Sociale e L’Ecologia (2019), *Diritti degli indigeni ed ecologia integrale: Amazonia, bacino del Congo e boschi del Pacifico Asiatico*. *Promotio Iustitiae*, 127, 101 p.

tion the manufacturing protocols of the medicinal products derived from them with patents and recognition of the intellectual property rights of the researchers who discovered them. This is provided for by the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Conference of the Parties, COP 15, that is in preparation^{4,5,6,7}.

The poor teach us that the effectiveness of a therapy is not judged by considering the millions invested in research or the sophisticated equipment used for care, but by the biological reaction and the healing it causes in the human body. On this point, once again, the poor teach us that a great war can be won with the means at hand. Another battle where the poor will ensure the victory of humanity is climate change.

Climate Change

As we already know, climate change is caused by greenhouse gases. The natural greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), water vapor (H₂O) and ground-level ozone (O₃). To this we add chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are purely of anthropogenic origin⁸. These gases are produced mainly by industrialized countries. The culprits of the climate disorder are the rich countries of the planet.

⁴ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2003). *Convention on Biological Diversity. Text and annexes*, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Montreal, 34 p.

⁵ Secrétariat de la Convention sur la Diversité Biologique (2012). *Protocole de Nagoya sur l'accès aux ressources génétiques et le partage juste et équitable des avantages découlant de leur utilisation relatif à la Convention sur la diversité biologique : Texte et annexe*, Secrétariat de la Convention sur la diversité biologique, Montréal, 26 p.

⁶ Secrétariat de la Convention sur la Diversité Biologique (2020). *Perspectives mondiales de la diversité biologique 5*, Secrétariat de la Convention sur la diversité biologique, Montréal, 26 p.

⁷ Convention on Biological Diversity (2020). *Update of the zero draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework*, 17 August 2020.

⁸ Tabaud, M. (2000). *Climatologie*, Armand Colin, 175 p.

Poor countries, sometimes humiliated by poverty and accused of several evils, contribute a small proportion to global warming.

Global warming has several consequences: drought, desertification, destruction and flooding by tropical cyclones, etc. It is poor countries that suffer most from them because their vital activities, such as agriculture and fishing, depend directly on nature (LS, 25, 48; QA, 31, 32).

To mitigate global warming, greenhouse gases must be reduced by consuming fewer fossil fuels and adopting simpler lifestyles (LS, 111, 206, 210-211; QA, 20, 71)⁹. However, rich countries find it difficult to apply this principle because, in doing so, they would weaken their industrialization and perhaps their standard of living. If we consider greenhouse gas emissions today, we notice that poor countries emit less and therefore allow the earth to continue to breathe properly. Their industrial weakness, decried as an economic blemish, is paradoxically a health advantage for the entire planet (QA, 29). If the poor countries of the world were to emit the same quantity of greenhouse gases as rich countries, there would be a considerable rise in temperature and greater climate change.

To mitigate warming and absorb CO₂, which is the main cause, we must conserve forests and plant trees. Trees sequester CO₂. Tropical rainforests and evergreen forests sequester more than other forests in the world. These forests retain their leaves all year round, carry out their photosynthetic activity continuously and therefore permanently sequester CO₂, unlike their deciduous counterparts in temperate zones, which do not perform these functions in winter. However, these tropical forests are mainly found in poor countries. Indigenous people only cut or harvest wood to open fields, for livestock farms, fuel or building

⁹ Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology (2020). *Journeying towards care for our common home. Five Years after Laudato Si'*. Celebration of the Fifth Anniversary of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, p. 215-216.

materials. They are selective, cutting down only the desired species. They leave some land fallow and even for gradual recolonization by forest plants. Their plots of cultivated land are a mosaic that also contains scrub. Their methods of exploitation conserve the forest far better than those of multinational or national firms that clear fell and deforest large areas using motorized vehicles. Local populations therefore conserve the forest better than non-native peoples (*LS*, 146, 164; *QA*, 9, 42, 50).

Regarding the reforestation that needs to be done, the poor reforest degraded land more easily thanks to several factors. They have easy access to these lands, they live on these lands and feel more than anyone the urgency to restore them, they are used to manual work and know how to navigate the steep terrain that tractors cannot reach.

Finally, it is in poor countries that there are huge empty areas that can be reforested. If humankind needs huge areas covered with forest or vegetation to sequester the excess CO₂ contained in the atmosphere, it is in poor countries that these spaces can still be found. The salvation of humanity through the use of plants to sequester CO₂ will therefore come from the poor. These same poor have yet another asset to save humanity, that of natural and energy resources.

Natural Resources

The majority of the planet's natural resources are concentrated in the tropical zone for the simple reason that the hot climate easily alters the rocks there and therefore allows the release and concentration of minerals in exploitable deposits. For centuries the poor countries of the tropical world have provided thousands of tons of ore and barrels of oil for the economic development of the rich countries of the world. These mineral and energy resources are taken for nothing or at low cost by the

iniquitous capitalist system imposed by world markets. This truth is hidden from international public opinion because the wealth of rich countries depends on it. This inequality in the consumption of the planet's resources is denounced by the Pope: "Twenty percent of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive" (*LS*, 95, 204). "It was always a minority that profited from the poverty of the majority and from the unscrupulous plundering of the region's natural riches" (*QA*, 16). These inequalities are to be condemned (*LS*, 82; *FT* 166-167). On this point, out of intellectual honesty, we must have the courage to publicly declare that it is the poor who support the rich today and that they will still save them in centuries to come (*LS*, 50-51; *FT*, 16).

Due to the ecological crisis, humanity is gradually abandoning the use of fossil fuels and making an energy transition. This consists of switching from fossil fuels, pollutants and greenhouse gases, to clean, renewable energies. These clean, renewable energies are solar, wind, hydroelectricity, biogas, etc.

To conserve energy long term and also ensure the digital transition, we use minerals with high thermal resistance like coltan and cobalt. These, like uranium and many others, are called strategic minerals. Yet, clean energies and strategic minerals are once again concentrated in poor countries. Hot deserts and Sahelian areas in poor countries can supply the whole world with solar energy. The mighty rivers of poor countries can generate electricity for entire continents. To provide the energy transition and the digital switchover, it is therefore still the poor who will save the planet. They are the guardians of the planetary treasure for the future of humanity (*QA*, 29). In addition, strategic minerals from poor countries are already fuelling the global mobile phone, weapons and computer industries. These minerals are extracted, for a pittance, by children, despite child labour being prohibited, and by adults without protective equipment. Here

again, it is the poor who provide huge gains for high-tech industries. They are the saviours of the planet.

In conclusion, therefore, it turns out that it is the poor who provide the present well-being of the rich and who will save the planet in the decades to come. While they suffer injustice and unbearable poverty, the rich are being asked to start paying the ecological debt that is affecting the poor most heavily (*LS*, 25, 48). We must avoid the savage destruction of sanctuaries kept inviolate and preserved until today by the natives. Indigenous populations, often poor, are encouraged to develop, but without destroying the environment (*LS*, 139, *QA*, 17, 51). As everything is linked on earth (*LS*, 86, 101) and the wealth of some causes the poverty of others (*LS*, 95, 204; *QA*, 16), a circular economy is recommended (*LS*, 22)⁹, a solidarity economy (*LS*, 159, 193; *FT*, 138), respect for the rights of indigenous peoples (*LS*, 32-40, 146; *QA*, 9-14, 40, 51; *FT*, 52, 169, 220)¹⁰ and an integral human development that takes care of all the material and spiritual dimensions of humankind, leaving no one outside common growth (*LS*, 93-94; *QA*, 17)¹¹. Poor people are encouraged to keep their usual calm and patience and find, as they already do, their happiness in the heart and not in the accumulation of material possessions (*QA*, 20, 71; *FT*, 220).

10 Segretariato per la Giustizia Sociale e L'Ecolgia (2019) *Op. Cit.*, 101 p.

11 Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (2017). *Note of the Holy See regarding the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, p. 33.

Despite the Dark, Let's Sing as We Go: Fruits of *Laudato si'* in Latin America

FR DARIO BOSSI

Churches and Mining Network, Brazil

Until recently, the commitment to save the environment was considered in the Church as something added on and secondary. It was eventually added among other priorities. It was also the same in civil society. As much as it is said that human rights are indivisible and interdependent, they are still thought of and defended in terms of progressive categories, as if some were more urgent than others.

In supporting the struggles and claims of communities in Brazil's Amazonia Oriental, even today we realise that the State and the companies responsible for mega predatory mining projects oblige us to choose between the right to a healthy environment and the right to work, for example, as if they were separate but incompatible human rights.

In the Church, frequently, the same hierarchy of pastoral ministries exists. The more important ones seem to be those *ad intra* (liturgy and catechesis for example); possibly, there is some commitment *ad extra* (Christian solidarity and social pastoral ministries, though preferably limited to emergency help rather than devoted to social transformation). In last place, if there is time and personnel, some environmental commitment as the 'latest generation' pastoral ministry is considered.

Laudato si' came as a real 'cultural revolution' in the way it builds a commitment in defence of our Common Home. It is not a document that adds another dimension onto the Church's mission, but one that radically rethinks and challenges us to a Copernican reinterpretation of the Principles of Social Doctrine of the Church. Its central unifying point is integral ecology, and its

permanent challenge (that still requires a profound conversion in Christian culture and spirituality) is the passage from domination to reciprocal caring, overturning the anthropocentric model. In Latin America, this model of domination is still linked to the colonial culture, which crosses and influences the polyhedron of integral ecology in its environmental, social, cultural, spiritual, economic, political dimensions and daily lifestyles. The Final Document of the Amazon Synod reminds us, “it is important we are aware of the force of neo-colonialism which is present in our day-to-day decisions”¹.

On the other hand, in our continent, this encyclical is a seed that is taking root and generating new intuitions and commitments. There are many fruits, in faith conversion and practices in the Church, as well in the life of society. In the few lines to follow, I would like particularly to highlight some processes and initiatives that, structurally, will be able to guarantee a continuous and progressive ‘incarnation’ of *Laudato si’* in *Abya Yala*².

The first ‘son of *Laudato si’*’, as Pope Francis himself says, is the Amazon Synod, which still continues to give value to listening, dialogue and participation of communities. Once we understand Integral Ecology as a polyhedron that needs a plural, inculturated mission, the Synod challenges us to identify and institute ministries that recognise the creativity of the Christian laity, with special stress of the protagonism of women in the Church.

The Pan Amazonian Church Network (REPAM) was born shortly before *Laudato si’*. It profoundly inspired and reinvigo-

¹ Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio* (2018). On the Synod of Bishops. 15th September. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituizione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html

² ² *Abya Yala* in the Kuna Language means a mature earth, a living earth, earth that is flowering and is a synonym of America. It is an expression of the original peoples of the continent, being the opposite of the colonial expression “America”, and the European Conquistadores.

rated the Synod to place itself at the service of the Amazonian Peoples, believing in their protagonism. Together with the defence of human rights, the network is, little by little, also promoting the rights of nature, as the Final Document indicates¹. Amazonia is not only a paradigmatic context for the defence of human life, but one of the vital locations to be urgently and radically protected because it guarantees the climatic equilibrium of the entire planet. Conscious of this challenge, REPAM also opened itself up to organizations and institutions at the international level, as one of the protagonists in creating the World Assembly for Amazonia, a platform that brings together ethnic groups, religious, militants, researchers, artists and politicians in defence of the biome.

The ecumenical Latin American network Churches and Mining, born in 2013, re-launched its commitment with the encyclical in mind, also inspired by CELAM's [Latin American episcopal council] "Missionary Disciples, Custodians of our Common Home" (2018) document. The Churches and Mining network uses *Laudato si'* in its understanding of its commitment to defence of life land and communities for the transition to post-extractivist economies. In the spirituality of people resisting the aggression of predatory mining, it seeks the source of inspiration and strengthening of the communities. It contributes to influencing national and international organizations in defence of human rights, and it proposes a campaign for divesting from mining. As Pope Francis noted in the World of Prayer in May 2021, "To avoid the poor paying the consequences, the financial speculation must be strictly regulated. May finances be instruments of service, instruments to serve people and care for the Common Home".

The Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR) set up the Integral Ecology Working Group , It provides training for religious communities, implements the *Laudato si'* Action Plan for consecrated life and proposes divestment from mining for catho-

lic congregations. Similarly, in Brazil, the Episcopal Commission for Integral Ecology and Mining, an organization of the Brazilian National Bishops' Conference (CNBB) was established in 2019. Over these two years, the Commission offered training courses about *Laudato si'* and issued public statements, open letters and official communications to representatives of the executive, legislature and judiciary, on the impact of mining, particularly regarding the Brazilian corporation, Vale. Other international activities have taken place including attending the 43rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, and a meeting in the Vatican with Pope Francis and Cardinal Turkson of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Recently, the Commission took part in the initiative by an international group of Catholic investors who sent a letter to the Brazilian Government, threatening divestment because of its neglect of the indigenous peoples and Amazonia.

Considering these and many other local church initiatives in Latin America, we can affirm that *Laudato si'* gave fresh life, new breath and more depth to evangelization in our continent, allowing the presence of the Kingdom of God through the caring for the Common Home and universal brotherhood and sisterhood. Many communities and networks have taken *Laudato si'* on board as a project of life and work. The creativity of the Spirit incarnate in the encyclical and present in unexpected Church and socio-environmental processes was increased thanks to the *Kairos* of the Amazon Synod, demonstrating that "the voice of Christ speaks through the entire people of God," and by listening, we can "breathe in the desire to which God calls us"¹.

Looking from the inside, in an attitude of continuous conversion of our Church, many challenges remain open: ministeriality, women's protagonism, a radical review of the anthropocentric dominator and a self-referential paradigm. Anyway, "Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope" (*LS*, 244).

How *Laudato si'* Shaped the Growth of a Commission on Creation Justice

GERALDINE CLARE WESTWOOD

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of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei*

This is a story of how *Laudato si'* (*LS*) shaped the growth of a whole commission – the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei (ECCJ-MSB).

For many years, I had worked with grassroots groups and communities in up to 16 countries in Asia on ecological agriculture, food sovereignty, climate change and building community resilience to climate impacts. When *Laudato si'* came out, I was invited to give a talk on it to the clergy and religious of my diocese of Penang in Malaysia.

I learnt then that *LS* was the first encyclical of its kind addressed to the whole world about the state of the whole world. Honestly, I had never read an encyclical before. But I finished reading *LS* within hours in a single day. The pages just flew by – like reading a story I had lived in some way. I read about the struggles of the poor due to all the ecological crises. I read about the powers of greed and corporate aggression that harmed small farmers and robbed them of their land, health and livelihood. I read of the violations suffered by these communities and by creation itself in land, air and water. And as I read, I saw the faces of all the villagers of rural Asia whom I had had the privilege to serve. It was like Pope Francis had written *LS* for them. In this way, the work I had been doing in the field was the perfect backdrop for diving deep into the encyclical and losing myself in it.

I felt a sense of worlds merging. All boundaries dissolved between what was considered secular and religious. I felt oneness. *LS* felt like an articulation whose time had come. It felt right and

made complete sense. And so, it began – my own *LS* journey. When I first started working on community resilience to climate change in Asia, my challenge was how to help small farmers understand climate change and resilience. In praying on it, this answer came to me – tell them a story. And so, I did. The story of the world and how we ended up in the situation we were in today. And it made sense to the communities because it was the story of their very lives. I used that same story to talk about why *LS* was the call of the times. After reading and analysing the book over several rounds, I ‘reassembled’ it into segments woven into a storyline... a storyline that would show how *LS* is the story of all of us; that it is a story we need to continue to write by making right decisions that would affect the entire future of the planet and generations to come.

That first session with the clergy and religious of my diocese in late 2015 became the first of many in the months and years to come. Sometime in 2016, I was asked by Fr Andrew Stephen, then the head of the Justice & Peace Commission of Penang Diocese, to facilitate the two-day annual meeting of the Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, headed by Bishop Joseph Hii (of Sibiu Diocese, Sarawak, Malaysia) as President. It was timely as the commission was considering turning its focus to the environment. That meeting in February 2017 was a turning point for the Commission. We did a full workshop on *LS* and the climate crisis and from there, unanimously decided to change the name of the commission to the Episcopal Commission for Creation Justice to reflect the fresh focus of *LS* on justice for all creation. This was subsequently ratified by the Bishops’ Conference of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

By then, I had also been appointed by Bishop Sebastian Francis of the Diocese of Penang as the new Head of the Justice & Peace (now Creation Justice) Commission to replace Fr Stephen who had left for further studies. In Advent 2017,

Bishop Sebastian issued a pastoral letter to his diocese on the climate crisis and *Laudato si'*. And he threw his full support behind the commission, which enabled me to achieve all the work I have done for the commission at both diocesan and regional levels.

The ECCJ-MSB developed a new vision-mission-objectives-strategies-measures statement and a logo with the slogan “We Are One” for the whole Episcopal Commission to reflect one mission and one identity. Our vision is: people living in oneness with all creation, upholding creation justice. Our mission is: to advance creation justice and resilience. Our objectives are: (1) building a movement of ecological citizens and (2) establishing living pathways of creation justice and resilience. Our four strategies are: (1) building leadership and capacity to spearhead and drive the process, (2) awareness-raising and empowerment through ecological education and a strong ecological spirituality, (3) building the ecological movement and ecological models of dialogue, interaction, development, and governance, and (4) establishing ecological focal points of hope and resilience. Measures for each strategy are spelled out. At the centre of all this is Christ who holds all creation together (Col 1:17); a deep truth ingrained in every sentence of *Laudato si'*. A basic two to three-day workshop on *LS* and the climate crisis became the norm to mobilise diocesan Creation Justice Commissions (CJCs). These were rolled out throughout the dioceses. We strove to make these workshops spiritual encounters and not merely high-level events. Over these past four years, each of the nine dioceses in Malaysia has run its own CJC as part of the ECCJ-MSB. Although Creation Justice and *Laudato si'* were unfamiliar terms to the faithful, we were determined that we needed new wine for new wineskins. We needed new words, new lessons, a new understanding, and a new urgency.

The ECCJ team was and is the anchor for our work, each member imbued with a renewed sense of mission for creation

justice and with it, *living Laudato si'*. The Commission President, Bishop Joseph Hii, who has a truly ecological heart and who is committed to justice for all creation, recognizes that all creation is infused with the Spirit of God, our Creator, and that all living creatures have the right to live with dignity. It acknowledges that we, humans, are creatures too, meant to live as one with the rest of creation, and carry a special responsibility to care for and love our created brothers and sisters, from the poor and marginalized in society to the moss in the forests and the fish in the oceans. It embraces the interconnection and interdependence of all beings (including natural entities) in the Earth community.

Creation/Ecological Justice thus encompasses justice for Mother Earth, climate justice, intragenerational and intergenerational justice, and social, economic, cultural, political, gender, food, energy and technology justice has guided and supported us every step of the way. We began the painstaking work of building this new mission from the ground up, to make it seem to be as spiritual and legitimate as any other church ministry, for it to be taken seriously, and be given its due space to be, speak and act. In some instances, it was easier and in others, very challenging. It was literally converting people one by one. It was sowing seeds everywhere in the hope that some if not all of them would find fertile enough soil to grow.

Well, four years have passed and diocesan CJs individually and as a collective regional body have taken amazing steps under each strategy. These include

- a gruelling five-day training course for *LS* facilitators in Miri Diocese, followed by Sibu Diocese,
- Sibu Diocese declaring a Decade of Creation Justice (2017-2026),
- setting up CJ ministries in parishes,
- incorporating *LS* into catechism lessons,
- establishing our own ecological diocese and parish protocols,

- doing workshops on *LS*, creation justice, planting, composting, the 6Rs (refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle and regenerate),
- initiating a Malaysia-wide 'Protect Our Earth, Protect Our Children' Campaign (2020-2025),
- ecologically-themed masses, prayers, and prayer events,
- collaborating with local, regional and global partners including LSM to build the ecological movement,
- promoting the Season of Creation and Laudato si' Week,
- building resilient communities,
- training in disaster risk management,
- setting up ecological food gardens/farms on church grounds,
- greening parishes,
- cleaning up public spaces,
- and many others too numerous to list here.

Perhaps the most important factor is the rising ecological citizenship among the faithful. The ECCJ has always been cognisant that while activities are important, the focus is always the mission. We are first and foremost, evangelizers whose work is to set hearts on fire with love for all God's creation. We acknowledge that we ourselves have been converted at different times and places by the will of God and called to service to spread the same Good News of hope to a world in crisis.

Although the mission has not been an easy one, all I can say is that it's more a case of the mission driving us than we are driving the mission. We are just the vehicle. This is the only explanation when we look at the garden of all that has been grown these four years and wonder at how it all came to be when we started with almost bare soil. In spite of all the obstacles and heartaches, it has been God who has made things grow (1 Corin 3:7) and if we keep our hands to the plough, He will continue to do so.

As I write this, I see the faces of all who have made and continue to make the *Laudato si'* vision come to fruition in small and big ways. I see the faces of our supportive bishops, clergy and religious; of those who participated in our workshops, how they were touched and laughed and cried, how their eyes lit up when the truth hit home. I see the food gardens – once dead soil – now lush with joyful plants and little creatures and the faces of the dedicated volunteers who lovingly toiled the earth. I see the earnest faces of my comrades in intense meetings as we prayed and planned on how to carry out the mission. I see the volume of resource material created and wonder at how it came to be. I see all the faces of the farmers and rural women and children of Asia who are forever embedded in my heart and who – whenever I felt like giving up in despair – were the very reason I could not. I am humbled and grateful to have been part of this “great rebuilding” led by God’s Spirit Himself. I know my comrades in the ECCJ feel the same about our joint *Laudato si'* journey. We thank God for Pope Francis and *Laudato si'*. Let me leave you with some comments from those who have joined us on our mission:

“I feel I’ve attended a retreat... It’s like Jesus calling for repentance” (after a *Laudato si'* workshop)

“It (*LS*) has created an urgency in us to be really committed to take care of our common home”

“*LS* has made mundane activities such as walking more/driving less and bringing reusable containers to take away food/groceries into joyful service”

“*LS* has resolved family conflicts regarding extra efforts to segregate waste and do home composting”

“We are part of the problem – now we have to be part of the solution”

“We are One”

“The climate, Covid-19 and other ecological emergencies are the signs of the times and *Laudato si'* is the call of the times, reminding us to exercise our social responsibility to protect all creation”.

The Inspiration of *Laudato si'* in an Action-Reflection Process for a Global Community

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“The Spirit of God has filled the whole universe with possibilities and, therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge” (*LS*, 80).

The encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, is so clearly the work of the Spirit in our world today. It evokes hope and a new sense of call for the faith community and indeed for all people, in the face of major challenges in our world, such as global climate change, extreme poverty, displacement of peoples, loss of biodiversity, degradation of the environment and inadequate access to clean water. Into a void of confidence in the face of these global challenges came the gift and direction of *Laudato si'*.

Global Appeal

“Now, faced as we are with global deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet...In this encyclical I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (*LS*, 3).

The insights of *Laudato si'* have given support to the broad community for the confident design of new pathways for effective action to reverse, heal and regenerate what is being destroyed in our natural world.

It has provided new theological and scriptural narratives to facilitate dialogue with the growing scientific evidence that

humanity is at the centre of the activity causing global warming and, hence, climate change. It has also clarified that we are clearly called to respond to those who are living in the extreme poverty of economic deprivation, displacement, war or exploitation, and that there is an intrinsic relationship between the cry for help from the most vulnerable people and the cry from the impoverished, exploited and neglected earth and its creatures.

Sisters of Mercy Reflection Process

In the words of Pope Francis, “Everything is connected. Concern for the Environment thus needs to be joined to sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of our society” (*LS*, 91).

Inspired by the insights of the new encyclical, the Mercy International Reflection Process (MIRP) was developed by the Sisters of Mercy in late 2015. Joined together across the world through our common faith in Jesus Christ and the inspiration of our founder, Catherine McAuley, we engaged the Mercy community – our Sisters, colleagues and friends and broader networks – in a theological reflection process. Holding a shared history and a living story of Mercy, we came together globally to address the challenges of our world, in the light of the new teaching, energy and call of *Laudato si’*.

The focus of our process was on “the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor” and the consistent prayer throughout our Process was “A Prayer for our Earth” from *Laudato si’*.

The MIRProcess began on 8 December 2015 and concluded at the end of the Year of Mercy in 2016. Participants read *Laudato si’* before and during the process as well as exploring many related resources.

Drawing on sources of inspiration from existing Mercy practical theological processes and respecting the value of the Cardinal method of SEE, JUDGE and ACT, a four-stage process was developed for the MIRProcess.

When it began, it involved groups of people meeting, in many countries where Mercy Sisters lived and worked, to reflect on their experiences and concerns in relation to the most vulnerable and displaced peoples and the earth's degradation.

This Mercy International Reflection Process was engaged in over the course of the year with four interactive stages: beginning with experience and the sharing of concerns relating to the focus of the cry of earth and the cry of the poor, analysing those concerns with the expertise drawn from a broader context, engaging with the Wisdom Tradition in the light of questions arising from this analysis, and concluding with an articulation of vision that would find expression in new actions to effect change on their original concerns.¹

There was a growing awareness in our Mercy community that having been so practised at responding to the most vulnerable of people, we were now being called to understand the causal link between their poverty and the poverty of the earth, a poverty often caused by the neglect or degradation of their environment. The new call of *Laudato si'* was to a spirituality of ecological conversion, which integrated a response to both the social and the ecological dimensions of our contemporary reality. This was a call to develop an integral ecology.

This process also facilitated our ability to gather with people of many faith traditions. Together we began to search for new understandings, new language and new theological insights. Through considered reflection we hoped these would enlighten and guide our responses to the new scientific consciousness and to the urgent need for greater care for our common home.

¹ <http://www.mirprocess.org>

This process has been a practical and pastoral way of engaging many people from different walks of life and cultural backgrounds with the teachings of *Laudato si'*, particularly in relation to the call for ecological and social action for justice. It resulted in the articulation of a new vision for action for the Mercy community and all participants. This vision was applied in their local, regional or international arenas of action, advocacy and prayer. At every stage of the process, participants shared prayer and marked the completion of the stages with times of community celebration.

Communicating the Process

The MIRProcess had a core guiding group who developed the process and accompanying resources, then prepared the institute and congregation coordinators to pass on to their local facilitators the purpose and the approach of the process. A face-to-face workshop for these coordinators was held in Dublin at our Mercy Centre for a week during which we shared with them the theology, practice, context and application of the four-stage Mercy theological reflection process. Beyond our first coordinators meeting and for the remainder of the process, our ability to engage with each other face-to-face was enhanced and supported through a highly developed, active online Mercy communication network.

A 'microsite' was established on the Mercy website² to carry the invitation and information materials about the process, including the core diagrams and explanations of the process and their stage descriptions, as well as related questions according to the core focus. Images, music and presentation materials were also suggested. A series of video interviews with theologians and scholars from across the world was produced and uploaded to

² <https://www.mercyworld.org>

the website for reference by participants.³ A particular section on the website was dedicated to *Laudato si'* materials, such as videos featuring Pope Francis, articles, book references, reflective materials for prayer, the two *Laudato si'* prayers and other related and emerging resources.⁴ The weekly Mercy eNews carried regular reports from the groups about their shared concerns in the process. The Mercy eNews also alerted its recipients across the world to new reports or resources on the website which related to the MIRProcess and to *Laudato si'*.

After the initial workshop and on returning to their congregations or institutes, the coordinators appointed facilitators who organised local groups. These grew to over 5,000 registered participants in approximately 275 formal groups in many countries and in both in English or Spanish. A particular project management software was chosen to house all the regular reports and relevant data from the groups as they met. This proved to be invaluable as a collection place for information and emerging insights regarding the groups' issues of greatest concern. It was a place to record the reflective emphasis of different approaches to prayer and formation, as well as to the emerging action plans. It could be seen as a report of reflective-action from across the world on the themes and the call of *Laudato si'*.

In my own region of Australia and Papua New Guinea, with its vast geographic spread, key facilitators were invited to lead regional groups of facilitators, who in turn set up and led local groups. These included people from local school, parish, health, aged care and community groups who wanted to meet, and use the process around the focus of *Laudato si'*. Sisters of Mercy were involved in these groups with teachers, pastoral workers, justice groups, local farmers, communities living near degraded reef and river systems, seaside communities with issues of degradation of soil and waterways, country groups facing drought and

³ www.mirpvoices.org

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/2x44hy6k>

water shortages and also those who were significantly involved in concerns for homeless and displaced people, particularly refugees and asylum seekers who were being held in detention centres.

Action Plans from the Process

During the process the key issues of concern were identified from the groups in various countries. The areas of common concern that emerged included;

- Calls to transformation in relation to the cry of Earth – Issues relating to degradation of Earth: Environmental devastation – effects of cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, forest depletion, soil degradation through erosion and overuse, mining; Water – degradation of river systems, commercialisation of water as a commodity, effects of drought on agriculture, food production and livelihoods; Sustainable Living; fracking; garbage/pollution; regenerative practices and
- Calls to respond to the cry of the Poor – Issues relating to displacement of persons, refugees and asylum seekers, homeless, poverty, human trafficking, violence and domestic violence, and dementia

In stage 4 of the reflection process participants were invited to imagine and commit to new action to bring about change at local, regional, national, and/or global levels. The groups identified a broad spectrum of such actions that were linked with either displacement of persons or degradation of the Earth. Some examples of groups' action plans include:

"Laudato si' has enabled me to deepen my relationship with the earth community – the land, air and water. So I started

talking to people in my own place about caring for their Earth on which they live. I also started encouraging people to clean and protect the rivers, creeks, plants and animals around their environment. Degradation of the soil and waterways is a project I have done recently in my village. I have encouraged some young people to plant trees and I am still doing that. I am hoping that this project will help to revive the lost forests and waterways. I have also done a few workshops on *Laudato si'* and am doing awareness-raising on the care of the Earth in churches, women's groups and schools."

– *Mercy Sisters, Papua New Guinea*

"The focus of our concern was clean water, which was appropriate at the time as the local and regional areas of the district had been in drought for more than four years. During the year a visitor spoke to the parishioners in the MIRP group about the lack of clean water for school children in Myanmar. Conscious of our blindness to the care of the earth and needs of people and inspired by *Laudato si'*, we raised the money to install two water tanks for pupils in Myanmar."

– *MIRP parish group, Gunnedah, NSW, Australia*

"In response to the appeal of the Pope in this Jubilee Year of Mercy to "hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth", our group has committed to the following actions to support Timor Leste, offering continuing support to a women's group, 'Blue Mountains East Timor Sisters' who support a scholarship programme to enable girls in Timor Leste to attend university, purchasing Fair Trade goods wherever and whenever possible including Timor coffee, which is their chief export, continuing to support, however we can, calls to lobby for justice, and being ever more conscious of our use of electricity, water and food."

– *MIRP group, Lavender Bay, North Sydney, Australia*

“It would be true to say that our group of country women who live on rural properties west of Casino, NSW, made a commitment to listen more carefully, encourage positively, inspire by the way we are living and be inspired by the young people in our sphere of life – children and grandchildren in particular (LS, 213). (1) We, as a group, plan to become more proactive as we follow up the outcome of the release of children from detention centres, by reading more articles regarding this situation, writing letters requesting changes to unjust policies and signing petitions which request such changes. (2) We, as a group, have committed to pray daily the Prayer for the Earth and for each member of our group. (3) We planned to meet four times in 2017 for a reflective process – continuing to use *Laudato si’* as our inspiration and our challenge.”

– MIRP group Country Casino, NSW, Australia

“In this wisdom stage of our MIRP process, considering the ‘Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor’, I find myself being called and challenged by some of the reflections to put myself in the place of other peoples who see and know their worlds differently. It is also calling me to put myself in the place of other created beings; we have been looking at the impact of water problems in the Darling River on indigenous peoples, who see water as more than an economic resource. There is also a cultural and spiritual dimension to their connection to the river.”

– Marcy Sisters, Australia

“In a second group at my workplace we are looking at the impact of sea-level rise caused by climate change on people of the Pacific Islands, specifically Kiribati and Tuvalu. Some of our staff have had visits to the islands and have witnessed first-hand the problems the people face. We have also hosted visits by delegations of young people from the islands. They have given powerful witness to the impact of flooding by high tides; the loss of

land, crops and houses, and the impact on their livelihood, way of life and culture as they are forced to move. Again, their indigenous perspective is different from the western mindset that sees land water as a resource for us to control and use.”

– Mercy Sisters, Australia

A Continuing Process

In March 2017 the Guiding Team and Coordinators met again in Dublin to reflect on the findings of the Process which had unfolded during 2016. From their reflection on the experiences of their groups there emerged a new vision for Mercy’s global presence and practice.⁵ Having heard anew the urgent call of *Laudato si’* to respond to ‘cry of the Earth and cry of the Poor’, the Mercy community committed to being a countercultural sign in a world that has made more extreme the displacement of persons and the degradation of Earth. And so, a further process of education, prayer and reflection was planned and is being implemented.

In 2021, after two years of presentations, reflection and sharing, the Mercy Global Presence process (MGP) will conclude in October with online gatherings in the countries across Asia-Oceania, the Americas, Africa and Europe. These gatherings are timed to take place at the conclusion of the Season of Creation on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, and coincide with the formal launch of the *Laudato Si’* Action Platform. All members of the Mercy community are being encouraged to participate in this ‘footsteps’ process for the Seven *Laudato si’* Goals, led by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. All are being called to take forward into this process of their learnings from the past 6 years of reflection on and living out *Laudato si’*.

⁵ <http://www.mercyglobalpresence.org>

Our ongoing invitation is to take the journey of integral ecology in the spirit of *Laudato si'*, not only as individuals, but together, in order to develop networks of people with a commitment to reflective action on protection of 'our common home.'

Laudato si' – A Prophetic Voice for Humanity and Creation

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Six years after the publication of *Laudato si'*, it is timely to reflect on its influence in various spheres – on the international agenda, in the faith community and, more generally, in society.

On the International Agenda

Laudato si' made a major contribution to the global debate on the environment and it became part of the international agenda. It is no coincidence that it was published in May 2015, a few months before the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. With the principle of 'leaving no one behind', the international community committed to achieving sustainable development by 2030 across economic, social and environmental spheres. *Laudato si'* also links the three dimensions of sustainable development by illustrating the connection between poverty and environmental degradation through the concept of integral ecology; it does something more, too, by proposing an ecological renewal. The complementarity between the encyclical and the 2015 international initiatives is clear, as is the impact of *Laudato si'* in the global arena, in the very year that such key agreements were being forged on the international stage.

In the Faith Community and in the Society of Jesus

In addition, *Laudato si'* offered believers an integrating vision that emphasized care for the common home as a substantial element of faith and, in this sense, has had a decisive influence on the religious sphere. "Christians realize that their responsibility within creation, as well as their duties towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith" (LS, 64). In the case of the Society of Jesus, the encyclical was a confirmation of a call foreseen a few years earlier at General Congregation 35 "Care of the environment affects the quality of our relationships with God, with other human beings and with creation itself ... Our care for the environment is inspired by what Ignatius teaches in the Principle and Foundation when speaking of the goodness of creation, as well as in the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* when describing the active presence of God within creation"¹. This call was confirmed in 2019 with the four universal apostolic preferences that will guide the Society of Jesus in the coming years, one of which, the fourth, concerns the care of our Common Home. As the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Father Arturo Sosa, points out: "Never has our commitment to care for our common home and to heal this broken world been more urgent. We cannot heal this earth by ourselves. Healing begins by joining others, especially the most affected and vulnerable, the poor, the indigenous, the migrants, the refugees ... and by turn ourselves collaborators for the care of our common home."

Father Xavier Jeyaraj, Secretary for Social Justice and Ecology of the Society of Jesus, adds: "*Laudato si'* was and remains a prophetic text that energizes, builds bridges and gives new hope to all. In this time of crisis of Covid-19, we must turn to the prophetic words of *Laudato si'* that invite us to admit the fragility of our science, technology and intelligence and invite us to marvel at the beauty of creation and our interconnectedness."

¹ <http://www.sjweb.info/35/documents/Decrees.pdf>

Everything is Interconnected: Listen to the Cry of the Poor and of the Earth

However, *Laudato si'* was not only addressed to the faith community, but to the whole of humanity, and its influence has been remarkable in many other areas. Perhaps what it expressed most clearly – and which takes on a greater dimension with the Covid-19 pandemic – is that “everything is connected”. “We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis, which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (LS, 139). The call to “listen to the cry of the poor and of the earth” is also very powerful. This cry speaks to us of environmental destruction and the loss of human, social and cultural richness caused by a mentality of exploitation. “Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble” (LS, 117). The encyclical states that, rather than being God’s collaborators in the work of creation, humans claim God’s place and thus provoke a rebellion on the part of nature.

Thus, issues such as climate change, irresponsible mining practices, consumer-driven overproduction, and the privileging of economic growth over human development are only manifestations of this disruption. Vulnerable communities – children, the elderly, indigenous peoples and migrants – are left most exposed to this socio-environmental crisis. Several members of indigenous communities in different parts of the world shared their views with us as follows²:

Amba Lobota Bongila, from the Ekonda community in the Bikorom territory in the Congo Basin said: “The forest belongs

² The testimonies in this article come from the Global Ignatian Prayer Vigil Breathing Together and can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEkODqXm9yA>.

to us. It belongs to our ancestors. Now it has been destroyed and we, the owners of the forest, are not getting anything. Our rivers have become polluted; animals have run away, the caterpillars are not growing anymore on trees. Loggers enrich themselves at the expense of the indigenous people.” Dorothée, of the BAKA community in Yahuma territory, spoke about her community in the Congo rainforest: “Our community is threatened by the loss of their land, land expropriation by Bantu neighbours, forest companies, mining companies and others seeking natural resources.” Enesio Martins, belonging to Amazonia’s Ticuna community, described how “we have been affected by the forest fires and by the deforestation carried out by the big multinational corporations”.

The Call to a Personal and Collective Transformation

In addition to analyzing the current reality and its causes, *Laudato si’* proposes a path of conversion, a profound transformation that powerfully challenges us. “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself” (LS, 118).

It is an appeal to reject the ‘throw away’ culture of consumerism and to embrace a culture of care and commitment to pursue integral ecology. It is a call for individual and collective conversion. However, there must also be structural changes at the political and social level. It is more urgent than ever to call on the international community and political representatives to adopt effective measures and action to build fair relationships that respect and defend the lives of people and nature, guaranteeing the life and balance of our Common Home.

As Jason Menaling from Mindanao, Philippines, noted: “I hope the rest of the world will not turn a deaf ear to the cries of indigenous peoples. We want a future in which we can live in peace, nurturing our relationship with our environment and with each other.”

Laudato si' – Source of Inspiration for the Path of Religious Life in Latin America and the Caribbean

SR DANIELA CANNAVINA, CAPUCHINE SISTERS OF MOTHER RUBATO
on behalf of the Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR)
& Integral Ecology Commission, Argentina

The path of religious life in Latin America and the Caribbean, inspired by CLAR³ and in the light of *Laudato si'*, invites us to develop a comprehensive ecological awareness in communities of faith and the different mission areas. This process increasingly urged religious to live a profound personal conversion in their way of thinking, spirituality, lifestyles, mission, and governance structures, to incorporate a real culture of solidarity.

From our realities, we are aware that we need to respond to the drastic needs of our peoples and the planet urgently, with renewed prophesy at the service of the poor and in defence of the common home. Therefore, the religious life, supported by the values needed to live the challenge posed by *Laudato si'*, makes the prophetic hour our own and invites us to:

- defend this fragile life and feed on deep ecological spirituality as part of our life
- denounce the destruction and exploitation of Mother Earth, respect the planet's biodiversity and defend land to ensure it is habitable for everyone;
- protect and safeguard "the common good", calling for a

³ Acronym of the Latin American Confederation of Religious. It is an international body of Pontifical Law with an ecclesiastical legal person, not for profit, erected by the Holy See on March 2, 1959 and depends on it through the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVC-SVA). It is composed of the National Conferences of Major Superiors of Latin America and the Caribbean. It aims to promote, coordinate, and encourage the common initiatives and services of these Conferences, respecting the legitimate autonomy of each of them, in fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church and to the rules of Canon Law.

- new relationship between society and power, stopping political and economic entities to curtail the making of all being and doing the commoditizing everything in life;
- develop types of organization and production that are more connected to life and seek to be builders of a solidarity-based justice for the good of the planet.

The continuous search and efforts toward creative and assertive ways to care for the common home have helped generate a gradual process of changing mindsets and hearts to recognise, respect, and seeing the intrinsic value of every person, nature and everything that exists. In this way, we all feel involved in building a society that is welcoming, inclusive, empowers people and cares for the planet.

The Presidency of CLAR established the Committee on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation to encourage four aspects:

1. Religious Life and Integral Ecology
2. Afro-descendant Religious Life
3. Indigenous Religious Life
4. Amazonian Religious Life

Following the rhythm of the above-mentioned inspiration and recognizing that it is time to repair our common home, the Commission, in its desire to encourage religious life – integral ecology and aware of the mission of forging ahead by singing praises to the Creator *with the music of Laudato si'* and the polyphony of voices collected by the Synod on the Pan Amazonian Region, made a public statement with the aim of adopting a policy of integral ecology in each of CLAR's areas of action.

To this end, it opted for community consistency in everyday life, in a permanent awareness of consumption habits, choice of suppliers and the ethical investment of funds. Mutual care as sisters and brothers, self-care, and the defence of the integrity of creation are an expression of peace based on social and climatic

justice and include processes of forgiveness, reconciliation, reparation, and non-repetition.

It proposed that, In any event, seminar, and meeting promoted by CLAR or where CLAR is the architect, we propose parameters of responsible environmental management should be followed, such as those proposed by the Blue Flag Ecological Programme, the Global Catholic Climate Movement and the Green Church of France among others., They offer a methodological guide to consolidating an appropriate institutional response to the severity and complexity of the socio-environmental situation.

At the same time, it is recognized that it is now time for alliances, networks and synodality, and for our witness to the Living Gospel to be realized in the specificity of each territory. For this reason, it included in the agenda, the attitude and interest in weaving *and bridging* the relationship between human beings and their environment, so that good wine will never be lacking in the Easter Feast of Creation, of which we are part.

In developing the above, of practical tips, proposed by the 'life-giving laboratory' of *Laudato si'*, were launched, inviting, the inclusion of the following nurturing proposals at each CLAR event:

- *Deplastify*: avoid plastic bags. stop using plastic bottles. reject "single use" plastics.
- *Decarbonize*: less travel. less fossil fuel consumption. encourage purchase of local products.
- *Deconstruct*: Reduce, reuse, recycle, reforest, reflect on networking.

In fulfilling its commitment, CLAR raised awareness and made visible over time a process of training on ecology. These are some of the activities

1. Seminar on Justice, Peace and Creation. Justice, peace, and life of the planet in Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. DEJUSOL-CELAM [Justice and Solidarity Department of the Latin American Bishops' Council], with support from

- CLAR. Seminar on integral ecology. Missionary Disciples Custodians of Creation.
3. Vida Nueva Colombia, together with REPAM [Pan-Amazonian Church Network] and the University of La Salle: Integral Ecology Round Table in dialogue with the Amazonian peoples.
 4. CLAR – CELAM – CIEC [Inter-American Confederation of Catholic Education]: Integral Ecology Round Table with Leonardo Boff.
 5. Seminar on Integral Ecological Conversion. Challenges of the Amazon Synod for Religious Life.
 6. Meeting with El Salvador (CONFRES): Integral Ecology / 2.2020
 7. I. Webinar on Objectives of *Laudato si'* –CLAR and the year of *LS*: General Overview.
 8. JPIC Seminar – Afro: Afro-Ubuntu and Au-Buni spirituality. Contributions for Integral Ecology.
 9. II. Webinar on Objectives of *Laudato si'*-Ecological Conversion: Time for Creation.
 10. III. Webinar on Objectives of *Laudato si'*- Defence of the Common Home Citizen Participation: Panamazonian Synod.
 11. IV. Webinar on Objectives of *Laudato si'*-Social Action: Communities listening to the cry of the vulnerable – Hand in hand with the poor.
 12. V. Webinar on Objectives of *Laudato si'*-Sustainability – Ecological Christmas.
 13. CLAR and the Churches and Mining Network Reflection Day, preparing for the Latin American Ecclesial Assembly. Samaritan Economics and Integral Ecology: beyond extractivism. World Earth Week. Models of development, capital through development and justice for the poor and land.
 14. CLAR and the Churches and Mining Network Reflection Day, preparing for the Latin American Ecclesial Assem-

- bly. Samaritan Economics and Integral Ecology: beyond extractivism. Anniversary of *Laudato si'*. Communities standing up to the mining industry and dreaming of integral ecology.
15. CLAR and the Churches and Mining Network Reflection Day, preparing for the Latin American Ecclesial Assembly. Samaritan Economics and Integral Ecology: beyond extractivism. Marking the International Day Against Desertification. Churches and alternatives to unfair economics.
 16. Committee on Education – in educational contexts –facing the challenges of the Global Educational Pact. Integral ecology from the perspective of *Laudato si'* – synodality and development.

Participation activities

1. Pontifical Gregorian University: Seminar on Integral Ecology and Integral Human Development.
2. CCM: Online Symposium “From *Laudato si'* to Dear Amazon: 5 years since the encyclical in Latin America”.
3. Pontifical Missionary Projects (Venezuela): Ecological conversion.
4. CIEC: Integral Ecology and Educational Pastoral Centre.
5. Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development: Presentation of the future multiannual platform of *Laudato si'* initiatives.
6. Commission on Integral Ecology: Meeting with Dicastery for Human Development, together with USG and UISG [Union of Superiors General & International Union of Superiors General] – Plan *Laudato si'*.
7. AUSJAL [Jesuit universities in Latin America] – REPAM: Presentation of Interdisciplinary Training Programme in

Human Rights and Integral Ecology of Indigenous Peoples and Peasant Communities of Pan-Amazonia.

8. Churches and Mining Network: Opening of Reflection Group on Theology, Ecology and Extractivism.

Other

1. Lectio Divina. (Brochure) Ecological Conversion to permit Integral Ecology.
2. Under one roof. The house of the earthen jars and the four winds. World Environment Day.
3. Reflection of Ecological Rosary with *Laudato si'*.

We know that much remains to be done, but “in the meantime, we come together to take care of this house entrusted to us, knowing that all that is good in it will be assumed in the heavenly feast...” (*LS*, 244). May our struggles and our concern for this planet commit us more and more as Latin American and Caribbean religious.

Praise Be to You, My Lord! Laudato si'!

MARÍA VICTORIA HERNÁNDEZ DELGADO (TRANSLATED BY JUAN F
HERNÁNDEZ D)

Religious of Mary Immaculate, Spain

In 2015, Pope Francis pronounced a few words that have profound resonance throughout the world. He drew our attention to Saint Francis of Assisi, a true pioneer in caring for our Common Home.

Pope Francis focussed on the figure of a Christian, who captivated our hearts, being an example of charity, service, poverty and confidence in Divine Providence, wisdom, simplicity and humility. Have we never been challenged by, or ever wished to be like Saint Francis of Assisi and less like ourselves? Deep within, our image and likeness of God calls us to leave his impression on everything we experience and everyone with whom we relate.

When elected shepherd of the Church, the Pope took the name of the saint of Assisi, showing us we need to follow the saint's vision of life, if we want to preserve the Earth and everything requiring special care in it. By choosing the saint's name, he shared with us his approach to life that requires everyone's commitment to live the goals proposed in *Laudato si'* – aspects of which are reflected in the person of *Francis, the poor man of Assisi*.

- He heard the cries of the Earth demanding justice for the needy, the poor, the lepers; and showed how to be compassionate towards those excluded and cast away to a periphery of rejection and oblivion.
- Willing to possess only what is truly necessary, he dedicated his life and mission to the good of all, respecting every creature without depriving creation of its resources and assets, always aiming to do good.

- He encouraged a simple, modest, humble lifestyle.
- His spirituality showed itself through his service and admiration of God's entire creation.
- Like Jesus, he taught us how to praise and feast our eyes on God's work.
- Therefore, commitment is of the utmost importance.

Laudato si' is, for me, an announcement of hope, inviting us to lead more caring lives, following Jesus' example to recover that humanity which God created out of love, causing no harm to the rest of creation, being endowed with infinite wisdom and feeling responsible for each and every creature. *Laudato si'* places us and other creatures at the same level of everything created.

It speaks to me about beauty and recovering goodness and righteousness of intention for everyone's benefit. Pondering on it, while praying with the word of God, helps me to rediscover the true value of everything that happens in my daily life, in reference to God the *Father* – Creator, God the *Son* – Saviour, and God the *Spirit*, who instructs me as a disciple of Jesus, without myself forgetting the first condition of being daughter of God and sister to my fellow beings and everything created.

Praying, with *Laudato si'*, in these Covid-19 pandemic times, has helped me become aware of the usefulness of everything, helping me feel that I live, in a sense, *in communion*. Due to lockdown measures, everyone was focused on what really matters: life, the value of every single human being, and their loved ones, and the beauty of nature free from all human ill-treatment. This unexpected situation encouraged us to have concern for one another.

Respect is the door leading to charity. But we must cross the threshold of respect, to gain access to the initiative proposed by Pope Francis – charity that promotes education and ecological spirituality, the defence of the dignity of every person, nation, immigrant and refugee, and each and every one of us. It reminds

us that, “many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it demands that we set out on the long path of renewal” (LS, 202).

Where would we be going if we did not care for those left behind, far from us? Can we not try to understand their limitations and needs? Why not be more grateful towards this ever-bountiful Nature and make sure we leave behind the least possible trace?

Laudato si' invites us to keep moving, to reaffirm our conviction about what it has taught us through meditation, prayer and action, so that we can continue to safeguard all God's creatures. This encyclical is rich and innovative in its proposals and claims. But if I were to choose one of them, I would pick paragraph 208:

We are always capable of going out of ourselves towards the other. Unless we do this, other creatures will not be recognized for their true worth; we are unconcerned about caring for things for the sake of others; we fail to set limits on ourselves in order to avoid the suffering of others or the deterioration of our surroundings. Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment. These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us. If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society.

What we do or do not do, causes an impact around us. We need to learn to identify and respect limits we should not go

beyond, so as not to harm or deplete God's creation with our wrongdoing.

"The JPIC Commission which promotes and supports the integration of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation through experience, social analysis, spiritual reflection and action"¹, motivated me and gave me knowledge of many environmental and social initiatives taking place in different parts of the world. I also had the chance to discover Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. I am realizing how *everything is interconnected* and together we have to make our "concern for the environment grow ... joined to a sincere love of our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment in resolving the problems of society" (LS, 91).

For this reason, I decided to participate in the JPIC Promoters Formation Workshop: "Commitment with *Laudato si'*". I try to share everything I have learnt, so that it can be included in developing permanent training materials for our Congregation, apostolic reflections and community work. I know that the teachings present in *Laudato si'* are already being applied in different parts of the congregations around the globe. To name a few:

- Some communities read, reflected, and studied this encyclical, and included their resolutions in their community projects. The purpose was to raise awareness for the need to help implement environmental measures to combat the challenges ahead.
- In some places, both our sisters and young girls are working together on the reforestation of swamps and the cleaning and collection of garbage on beaches.
- In other places, various actions are being promoted to encourage solidarity and social awareness, with voluntary work and solidarity campaigns, among our pupils and teaching staff.

¹ <http://www.jpicroma.org>

- For the World Mission Sunday campaign, the pupils were offered talks on its meaning and effect, giving them the chance to understand the reason for collecting money, for what and where it was eventually destined. Solidarity bonuses were issued in the form of cards whose price ranged from €0.20-165 ensuring everyone could be involved.
- While working on *Laudato si'* and the relevance of the environment, a cherry tree was planted, next to the statue of Saint Vicenta Maria López y Vicuña (our Mother Foundress), and cards, with lively expressions of solidarity, were hung from its branches for sale.
- In another Province, *Laudato si'* is widely followed, and the pastoral letter on the environment has its own space in the action plans of every house and country. Healthy relationships between the participants and towards the environment are promoted for caring for our planet (eg recycling, minimum waste, saving energy, re-using materials, farming and gardening). Some sisters have joined the Climate movement and others in studying and spreading *Laudato si'* across their social networks.
- Elsewhere, this subject is being tackled from different angles: making people aware that we share common bonds, promoting healthier lifestyles, environmental education, respect for the environment and fostering active participation in celebrating environmental awareness dates.

Among other messages from Pope Francis, I believe that *Laudato si'*, *Dear Amazon* and *Fratelli tutti*, will always be relevant and necessary in the care of our beloved Common Home.

