

On care for our common home

A dialogue guide for *Laudato Si'*

Written by Janet Somerville and William F. Ryan sj
with Anne O'Brien gsic and Anne-Marie Jackson


Jesuit Forum
for Social Faith and Justice



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CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS
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Table of Contents

Foreword	iii
Using this resource	iv
SESSION 1 Overview	1
SESSION 2 What is happening to our common home? (Part One)	3
SESSION 3 What is happening to our common home? (Part Two)	11
SESSION 4 The gospel of Creation	17
SESSION 5 Are you part of the bold cultural revolution we need?	21
SESSION 6 You are definitely not alone!	29
SESSION 7 One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part One)	35
SESSION 8 One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part Two)	41
SESSION 9 Ecological education and spirituality	47
Additional resources	56
What is the Jesuit Forum?	57

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We want to thank, as ever, all of you who support the work of the Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice.

From Words to Action

The *Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice* encourages people to discuss – to talk to one another about things that matter. In this publication, *On care for our common home – A dialogue guide for Laudato Si'*, the Forum facilitates a thorough study of the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, *On care for our common home*. When people talk to one another, they listen to what others think and they speak about what they understand and believe. Minds and hearts are opened – the world is made a better place.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis encourages this kind of conversation. He wants us to know that something serious is happening to “our common home”, and he hopes we will consider what we might do to make a difference.

The first step in this process is an open heart – open to hear the concerns, open to understand the possibilities, open to make a change in one’s own life and to encourage a similar change in the communities and groups to which we belong. This kind of openness leads to the “bold revolution” that Pope Francis says is necessary.

The dialogue promoted in this valuable resource helps us to do just that – to open our hearts by listening together, thinking together, and talking together. Every voice is important. Every voice, even the small voice, must be heard. That is the best way to be aware of the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who is always the motivating force behind such change.

But, talking is not enough. Pope Francis challenges us to move from words to action. Part two of this publication, helps us to take the courageous steps that will assure change – for the common good. It outlines principles that might guide our decision-making. We learn that we must move forward together, and that we must make choices that benefit not only “me”, but “us all”.

Such change can be scary; moving into an unknown future can be unsettling. We do so, not alone, but as people of faith – believing that the Lord walks with us every step of the way.

Thanks to the Jesuit Forum for preparing a resource that focuses our thoughts and guides our response. If *Laudato Si'* has any lasting value, it will be because people have reflected on its importance for “our common home” and on its impact on our lives, individually and collectively.

May this resource assist parish groups, social action groups, faith discipleship groups, prayer groups, and discussion groups, to deepen their understanding and their commitment to a better future.

Bishop Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

Tips on using the dialogue guide

This is not just for reading

It is really a self-contained kit for any group to use. Comprising reflections, carefully-chosen quotes from *Laudato Si'*, stories, photos and cartoons, its aim is to help explore the rich text and clear themes of this encyclical of Pope Francis.

This resource is designed for small (5-8) group discussion. We encourage its use in families, parishes, justice and peace committees, universities, high schools, unions, community groups, religious communities, work places and anywhere people can come together for dialogue.

Let's have a dialogue

The group process is not an intellectual exercise – it's much more about getting to know each other and sharing what we're each thinking and feeling about the key issues of climate and poverty, which affect us all. The reflections for each session build on the quotes from *Laudato Si'*. It is the participants who will flesh out the content and bring their own experience to the group.

The process of listening to each other deeply and exchanging ideas will foster creativity and possibilities for ways forward. Our cultural tendency is to debate and seek solutions. Our process is not debate. It is about entering into dialogue which opens us up to new ideas and hope.



It's easy to start a group!

People will come, if you invite them! If you are interested in delving into the themes in *Laudato Si'*, talk to a couple of others and together you'll find a small group. You only need 5-8 people. If you're in a parish or school, ask your pastor or principal for their support and blessing. They may well identify one or two participants too. Decide on a date and place for the first session and make sure to offer coffee, tea and snacks – if you feed them, they will come!

The group can decide together on the best date and time for the on-going meetings. Try to have at least one of your sessions outside in a back-yard, garden, park or other open space.

Simple process for your session

- ▶ Participants will arrive at the session having read the specific reflection.
- ▶ The leader welcomes everyone and opens with a short prayer.
- ▶ Begin the first session by asking each person to take a couple of minutes to introduce who they are. The emphasis should be on personal stories, rather than on what they do. It helps to ask people to include an event that has marked their life.
- ▶ The leader provides a brief summary of the reflection. They could also use one of the quotes, stories or images in the session to help set the context for the sharing.
- ▶ Use the questions at the end of the session to guide conversation. Allow each person to share their thinking for two to three minutes.
- ▶ Everyone has something to share, regardless of experience, education or position.
- ▶ Listening is key to dialogue. Limiting each participant's sharing to a few minutes keeps the momentum going. We recommend sharing in rounds, each taking a turn. For the first part of your meeting, it's best to listen to each other first and to move to open discussion later.
- ▶ Before each round, you could take a moment or two of silence to allow people to gather their thoughts. This will encourage reflective sharing rather than debate.
- ▶ Close with a quote from the encyclical or a short prayer. Agree on the date and time for the next session.

Preparing for the session

- ▶ The reflections in the dialogue guide are meant to be read by all participants before each session.
- ▶ The leader's role is important for the success of the sessions. He or she should be especially familiar with the reflections for each session and be prepared to give a short overview to help the group get started.
- ▶ Allow about an hour and a half for your meeting, with a break in the middle.
- ▶ It's a good idea to ask someone to be responsible for writing up the key ideas from the sharing to assure continuity for the next session. This is not minutes or note-taking, but rather recalling key points or ideas from the dialogue.
- ▶ The leader ensures the discussion begins and ends on time, reads the questions and ensures maximum participation.

Copies of the Encyclical, *Laudato Si' - On care for our common home* are available from CCCB Publications at:
www.cccbpublications.ca

Free download of the text is available here
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes, arranged in two columns.



Overview

An integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. (11)

With *Laudato Si', mi' Signore* (Praise be to you, My Lord), Pope Francis has given us a compelling, new kind of social encyclical on *Care for our Common Home* – the Earth. The title is inspired by St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures* which “reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.” (1)

What is the purpose of our life in this world?

What is the goal of our work and all our efforts?

Pope Francis adds: “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 had endowed her. ... We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth (cf *Genesis 2:7*); our very bodies are made of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshments from her waters.” (2)

Francis will not have us treat the urgent issue of the environment in isolation or piecemeal, as he puts it. He wants us to ask ourselves the more poignant question: “What kind of a world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”

This question, he points out, leads us to deeper questions: “What need does the Earth have of us?” He adds: “Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results.” (160)

He makes a strong appeal for us to adopt a very difficult “change of direction,” indeed, “an ecological conversion” – but not without hope, always convinced that “humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.” Though at times Pope Francis addresses Catholics, Christians and believers directly, he wishes to address every person on the planet. He wants to enter into dialogue with all people.

He begins by quoting from Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, expressing their concerns for care of the Earth. Pope Francis speaks of the striking example of the teaching of his friend Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: “To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.”

Patriarch Bartholomew is regarded as the spiritual leader of some 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide. He calls us “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,” he adds, “that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.” (8-9)

The pope also firmly establishes himself in the Church’s social teaching tradition while recognizing the work of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups. He regularly credits various bishops’ conferences around the world to confirm points he is making in his text.

Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

Pope Francis returns to St. Francis to help us see how, “an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology and take us to the heart of what it is to be human.”

He calls on us to approach nature with awe and wonder – refusing to turn reality into something to be used and controlled. “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.” (11-12)

While he gives full credit to what the universal ecological movement has accomplished in spite of powerful opposition, Pope Francis now calls for a new dialogue requiring a new and universal solidarity. He concludes his overview by listing the content of each chapter and important recurring themes. Here they are in his own words:

It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face. (15)

I will point to the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.

These questions will not be dealt with once and for all, but reframed and enriched again and again. (16)

We suggest you watch this excellent 35-minute video: *Laudato Si' A Canadian Response* by Kevin Moynihan, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bti86O_Tw5A. It presents a helpful overview with interviews of various Canadians, including David Suzuki, Maude Barlow, Silver Donald Cameron and Gregor Robertson as they reflect on the Encyclical.

Questions for dialogue

- 1) What strikes you as surprising about Pope Francis addressing nature as our 'sister' and 'mother' with whom we share life and who open their arms to embrace us?
- 2) Do you, like the pope, consider environmental issues to be ethical, moral and even spiritual problems and challenges?
- 3) Have you heard priests, bishops or popes, before Pope Francis, speaking about concerns for pollution and climate change as an essential part of Catholic social teaching?
- 4) What do you think about Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew's statement: "To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God"? How does this connect with other beliefs you may have about sin?



“What is happening to our common home?” (Part One)

Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. (42)

Let’s explore the unique, many-levelled way in which Pope Francis takes ecology seriously. We haven’t often seen, in Catholic history, a papal encyclical that starts out by giving a clear, respectful summary of current scientific conclusions and questions on a topic of urgent public interest. Chapter 1 of *Laudato Si’* does just that.

Of course, not every pope in our long history studied chemistry and worked as a chemist prior to entering the seminary. For Pope Francis, science was one of his ways of contemplating the splendour of our Creator God.

After changing his career goals, Jorge Mario Bergoglio moved into theology, was ordained and went into active ministry as a Jesuit priest. Faced with the reality of the agonizing gap between rich and poor in Argentina – and in the world as a whole – a deep thirst for social justice grew in him. That thirst fused with his passion to know God and to do God’s will. But the careful work of reason in science, and also in the thoughtful analysis of human culture (sometimes called “social science”) stayed with him and nourished both his faith and his ministry.

All through *Laudato Si’* you will notice the gift of seeing the whole through its many parts, which is characteristic of the mind of Pope Francis. He continually brings together different sources of knowledge and of experience: faith nourished by study as well as prayer, science, cultural awareness, appreciation of nature and of beauty, and the burning desire for justice that comes from close and caring contact with the victims of this world’s injustices.

One way of asking “What is happening to our common home?” is to ask what is happening in human culture, especially in the dominant culture that tends to set the agenda for the media, for big business, for universities and research. In fact, that is how this chapter begins.

Your grandparents could tell you about one thing that has happened: things have speeded up. “Rapidification” is what Pope Francis calls it. Rapidification puts accelerated human activity in tension with “the naturally slow pace of biological evolution.”

Many people feel anxiety in the face of this rushing, human-imposed change. In our society, the need to protect nature and nature’s rhythms is growing. But instead of merely watching the build-up of this momentum, Pope Francis wants us to care until it hurts – “to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it.” (19)

The industrial revolution has left our society with an enormous capacity to mass-produce and move to market almost any product you could name as quickly and cheaply as possible. Factories churn out merchandise in vast quantities, presuming that we will consume more and more.





Photo: © Erica Siegel

A report from Health Canada reveals that the recent mass deaths of bees is caused by corn grown from seeds soaked in a “neonic” insecticide.

The bee population is in real danger – which means we are too: we need bees for their role in pollinating many food crops on which we depend.

Bees are responsible for about 70% of the pollination that the majority of flowering plants require to reproduce.¹

¹ *Evaluation of Canadian Bee Mortalities in 2013 Related to Neonicotinoid Pesticides - Interim Report*, September 26, 2013, at http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pubs/pest/_fact-fiche/bee_mortality-mortalite_abeille-eng.php

See also “Large-scale government initiatives and policy are essential to addressing the global bee crisis” by Stephen Bede Scharper in the *Toronto Star*, August 17, 2015.

Pope Francis laments that this cycle, driven by the profit motive and without restraints and limits, produces a throwaway culture which makes all of us careless of what we use even while mountains of garbage accumulate. He is a sharp critic of the modes of production we rely on without concern for the consequences.

Furthermore, the tools and chemicals we use in producing our abundance are often lethal. Fungicides, herbicides and agrottoxins may achieve their intended purpose, but also have destructive side-effects, even killing life-supports we scarcely realize that we need. Nature works in slower cycles in which one life-form needs and uses the “by-products” of another. Pope Francis says: let’s learn to be as careful and as connected as those natural cycles! He puts it this way:

Our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and re-use waste and by-products. We have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, re-using and recycling them. (22)

Fossil fuels and climate change

Currently, the most talked-about problem in the world’s dominant style of production is the intensive use of fossil fuels. Here is where we meet the problem of global warming, or climate change. *Laudato Si’* carefully sums up the current scientific consensus on the causes and effects of burning fossil fuels and presents the many levels of the problem.

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events. ...

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. ... It is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life.

“What is happening to our common home?” (Part One)



Photo: © Garth Lenz

“Tar sands production is one of the world’s most environmentally damaging activities. It wrecks vast areas of boreal forest through surface mining and subsurface production. It sucks up huge quantities of water from local rivers, turns it into toxic waste and dumps the contaminated water into tailing ponds that now cover nearly 70 square miles.”

▶ Thomas Homer Dixon, author and professor in the Centre for Environment and Business at the University of Waterloo.

Humanity is called to recognize 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. It is true that there are other factors ... 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. As these gases build up in the atmosphere, they hamper the escape of heat produced by sunlight at the Earth’s surface.

The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes. (23)

After a paragraph listing several environmental effects of climate change, Pope Francis begins to speak about the human suffering that comes in its wake:

Exposure to atmospheric pollutants produces a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and causes millions of premature deaths. ... There is also pollution that affects everyone, caused by transport, industrial fumes, substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water, fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides and agrotoxins in general. (20)

Climate change is a global problem with grave implications. ... Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected ... (where) their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystem services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which could enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited. ...

There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without any legal protection whatsoever.

Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout the world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded. (25)

You see why Pope Francis wants us “to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” (19) For him, the wounds borne by nature in our days matter intensely because they are so closely connected with wounds inflicted on poor people.

Water: an indispensable resource for life

One of those global wounds is thirst – thirst for clean, drinkable water that will not spread disease and will not kill our children. Some parts of the world are terribly afflicted by “water poverty,” while other parts of the world continue to waste water and to pollute lakes and rivers and seas with detergents, chemicals and other waste products.

Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.

This debt can be paid partly by an increase in funding to provide clean water and sanitary services among the poor. But water continues to be wasted, not only in the developed world but also in developing countries which possess it in abundance. This shows that the problem of water is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behaviour within a context of great inequality. (30)

Canada is – or has been – magnificently rich in fresh water. Yet some of our industries have ruined whole rivers and threatened entire watersheds. For example, between 1962 and 1970, the Dryden Chemical Company in northern Ontario discharged an estimated 9,000 kg of mercury into the Wabigoon-English river system. The company was producing sodium hydroxide and chlorine to bleach paper at the nearby pulp and paper mill, owned by the same multinational. The mercury contaminated the fish and poisoned residents of two First Nations communities in the area. This led to people suffering from Minimata disease, a neurological condition named after a similar tragedy in Minimata, Japan.

Scientists have been recording an alarming increase in retreating glaciers worldwide. Glaciers, such as the Athabasca Glacier that forms part of the Columbia Icefield in Jasper National Park, feed many Canadian rivers. In 2006, David Schindler (a Rhodes scholar and currently Killam Memorial professor of ecology at the University of Alberta) studied decades of records for Alberta rivers.²

He and his colleague discovered that the annual flow volume – especially for the South Saskatchewan River which supplies about 70% of the water used for irrigation in Western Canada – had shrunk by more than half throughout the years studied. Schindler has also raised the alarm over the effects of the development of the Alberta oil sands on the Athabasca River.³

² See “An impending water crisis in Canada’s western prairie provinces” at ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1564278/

³ See “Climate and Water Issues in the Athabasca River Basin” at aurora.icaap.org/index.php/aurora/article/view/4/4%20%20%20

“What is happening to our common home?” (Part One)



Inuit children of the Taqqaugaq family in caribou skin clothing.
Baffin Island, Nunavut, Canada

Photo: © B&C Alexander

I believe strongly that understanding the connectivity (of all things) will bring the world to a place of “mutual ground”. When we see that as the Arctic melts, the Small Island Developing States sink, we see clearly how the planet is one. . . . We must also see the connections as well as the lack of balance between unsustainable economic policies adopted by some countries, and how these policies are leading to the destruction of the entire way of life of a people, the people of the Arctic.

Our hunting culture is based on the cold, being frozen with lots of snow and ice, we thrive on it. We are, in essence fighting for our right to be cold.

► Sheila Watt-Cloutier OC, former chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Council and author of *The Right to Be Cold*.

However, a sign of hope for Canadians is the growing popularity of The Blue Communities Project movement that recognizes water as a human right; promotes publicly owned and operated water services; and bans the sale of bottled water. Already several municipalities have accepted these conditions of membership and a number of municipalities and campuses now ban bottled water.⁴

Looking at the global level, Pope Francis points out that “an acute water shortage may occur within a few decades unless urgent action is taken. The environmental repercussions could affect billions of people; it is also conceivable that the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century.” (31)

⁴ Maude Barlow, *Blue Future: Protecting Water for People and the Planet*, Anansi Press Inc. 2013, p 129

Weakening the web of life

Pope Francis also warns us that short-sighted approaches to production often result in a serious loss of biodiversity. For example, destructive fishing methods, combined with pollution of the oceans, have devastated coral reefs in tropical and sub-tropical seas. *Laudato Si'* quotes the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines who ask: "Who turned the wonder world of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?" (41)

Something similar happens to the ecosystems of tropical forests when they are burned down or levelled to create cropland. Countless species are lost – not only plants and animals, but many less visible but crucial forms of life:

The good functioning of ecosystems also requires fungi, algae, worms, insects, reptiles and an innumerable variety of micro-organisms. Some less numerous species, although generally unseen, nonetheless play a critical role in maintaining the equilibrium of a particular place. ...



Diagonal-banded Sweetlips fish, Great Barrier Reef

Photo: © redbrickstock.com / Alamy Stock Photo

"99 percent of the planet's living space is in the global ocean."

"Carbon dioxide we are putting into the air by burning fossil fuels is being absorbed by the ocean. That reverts it to a state it has not been in for millions of years: more acid, warmer and more prone to vast oxygen-deprived dead zones. At risk is the very structure of life in the ocean and therefore, on the planet as a whole."

► Alanna Mitchell, Canadian journalist and author of the award-winning book, *Sea Sick*.

“What is happening to our common home?” (Part One)

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 grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something we have created ourselves.” (34)

Every intervention in nature can have consequences which are not immediately evident, and certain ways of exploiting resources prove costly in terms of degradation which ultimately reaches the ocean bed itself. (41)

Greater investment needs to be made in research aimed at understanding more fully the functioning of ecosystems. ... Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. Each area is responsible for the care of this (ecological) family. This will require ... programmes and strategies of protection with particular care for safeguarding species heading towards extinction. (42)

“Who turned the wonder world of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?”(41)

Questions for dialogue

- 1) What struck you most in this session?
- 2) What do you think about Pope Francis stating, “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another”? (42)
- 3) Pope Francis wants us “to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it.” (19) Have you ever experienced damage to nature to such a degree that it caused you personal suffering? What caused you to feel that way?
- 4) Do you know of tragedies that have been caused by industrial pollution of water? How can we change public priorities so that water comes first on the list of shared goods that must be protected and preserved?
- 5) The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work, which might be called ‘rapidification.’ (18) What examples can you think of where our way of life conflicts with what Francis describes as “the naturally slow pace of biological evolution”? How can we change?

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes, arranged in two columns.



“What is happening to our common home?” (Part Two)

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. (49)

The next section of Chapter One of *Laudato Si'* carries the subtitle *Decline in the Quality of Human Life and the Breakdown of Society*. In it, Pope Francis moves on from his summary of what is happening to nature to focus on what is happening to people – especially to people who are not connected to centres of power and influence.

His main concern is that the flood of brilliant new technologies tends to be one-sided and selective. They are focused on power, speed and convenience, and on a breathtaking accumulation of wealth – but only for a few. In our fascination with this kind of progress, we seem to have assumed that some people have to be written off. It's a triumphal march forward, and we can't avoid some “collateral damage.” People have become disposable and excluded. Pope Francis suspects that these sidelined people “are the majority of the planet's population – billions of people.” (49)

“Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.”

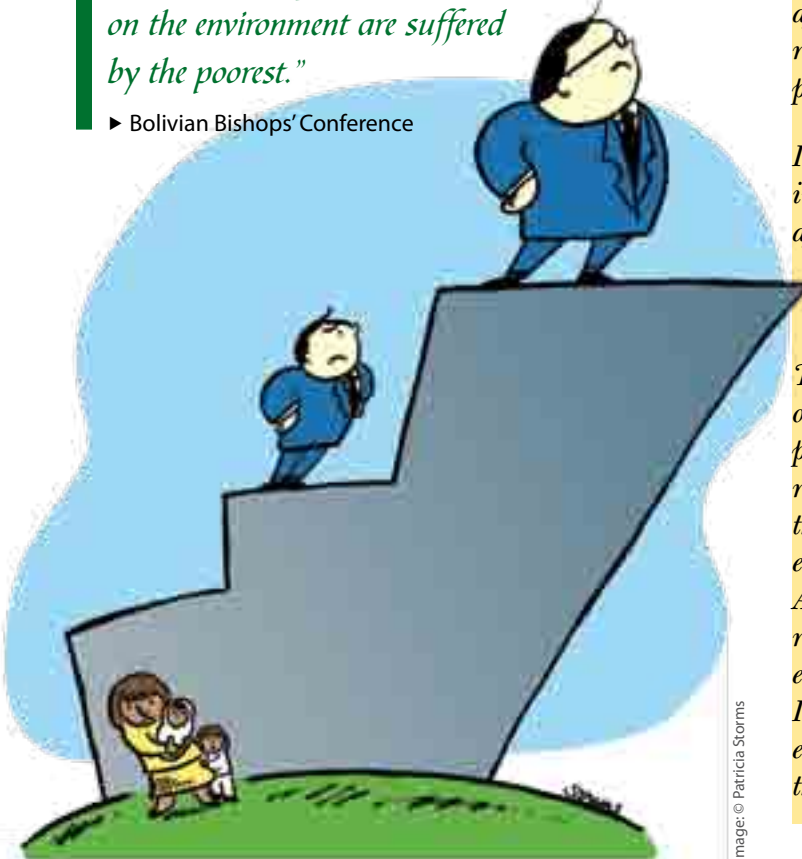
► Bolivian Bishops' Conference

Human beings are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity. So we cannot fail to consider the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development, and the throw-away culture. (43)

The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: “Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.” (Bolivian Bishops' Conference) For example, the depletion of fishing reserves especially hurts small fishing communities without the means to replace those resources; water pollution particularly affects the poor who cannot buy bottled water; and rises in the sea level mainly affect impoverished coastal populations who have nowhere else to go. (48)

It needs to be said that, generally speaking, there is little in the way of clear awareness of problems which especially affect the excluded. ... One often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought ... if not treated merely as collateral damage.

This is due partly to the fact that many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. ... This lack of physical contact and encounter ... can lead to a numbing of conscience. ... At times this attitude exists side by side with a “green” rhetoric. 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. (49)



THE REST AND THE RICH

Image: © Patricia Storms

Unequal distribution of the population and resources

Laudato Si' briefly tackles the thorny problem of birth control – even government-mandated birth control – which many experts see as a necessary tool in easing the pressure of poverty, and/or the human pressure on the natural environment. Pope Francis does not agree with them. He quotes the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

“While it is true that an unequal distribution of the population and of available resources creates obstacles to development and a sustainable use of the environment, it must nonetheless be recognized that demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development. ...”

To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way that can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption. (50)

This issue can be a challenging one to discuss, since so many sincere and well-informed people are convinced that the world faces a problem of overpopulation, and that the responsible thing to do is to use technology to curb population growth as quickly as possible. But *Laudato Si'* does not use the term overpopulation. In the quotation above, the problem is described instead as “an unequal distribution of the population and of available resources.”

Ecological debt: Who owes? And why?

Pope Francis is passionate about global inequality. Francis is the first pope from the global South. His anger at the behaviour of some Northern-based governments and multinational corporations in poor countries puts us in the North in touch with the judgments being made by many thinking people in the global South.

Here is a sample:

The warming (of the climate) caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming. There is also the damage caused by the export of solid waste and toxic liquids to developing countries, and by the pollution produced by companies which operate in less developed countries in ways they could never do at home, in the countries in which they raise their capital.



Excavators and drillers at work in an open pit at Tenke Fungurume, a copper and cobalt mine, northwest of Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The mine is part-owned by Lundin Mining, based in Toronto.

“What is happening to our common home?” (Part Two)

“We note that often the businesses which operate this way are multinationals. They do here what they would never do... in the so-called first world. Generally, after ceasing their activity and withdrawing, they leave behind great human and environmental liabilities such as unemployment, abandoned towns, the depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, the impoverishment of agriculture and local stock breeding, open pits, riven hills, polluted rivers and a handful of social works which are no longer sustainable.” Bishops of the Patagonia-Comahue region of Argentina, 2009 Christmas message. (51)

Exporting pollution

“About 50 container vans of mixed waste from Canada was discovered in Manila’s port in June 2013. More container vans of waste have since been discovered in the ports of Manila and scenic Subic as well as near a new landfill site in Central Luzon, just north of the capital. ... Canada’s Foreign Affairs Department is claiming that it cannot legally force the shipper of the waste to return it to Canada.”

- ▶ Tracy Glynn. “Canada illegally dumping waste in the Philippines.” *Prairie Messenger*. Sept. 16, 2015. www.prairiemessenger.ca/15_09_16/Glynn_15_09_16.html

We are used to the fact that many poor countries are deeply in debt to international agencies like the World Bank, or to private banks which operate world-wide, and to other creditors of various kinds, even though it is clear these “debts” are highly questionable. But Pope Francis emphasizes the ecological debt that runs in the opposite direction: it is owed by highly developed countries to countries in the global South.

The developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programs of sustainable development. ... We must continue to be aware that, regarding climate change, there are differentiated responsibilities.

As the United States bishops have said, greater attention must be given to “the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests.” We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference. (52)

The closing paragraphs of Chapter One carefully list a number of ways in which big, high-tech economic projects continually receive approval, even when they are clearly dangerous to the environment. Market thinking wins out over long-term and inclusive thinking.



Pope Francis calls that kind of gung-ho planning “the techno-economic paradigm,” and laments that “the alliance between the economy and technology ends up sidelining anything unrelated to its immediate interests.” (54)

Then – as if Pope Francis was exhorting all the leaders of nations who would attend the crucial United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015 – comes this passionate paragraph:

These situations have caused our sister Earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. ... The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations.

The establishment of a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems has become indispensable; otherwise, the new power structures based on the techno-economic paradigm may overwhelm not only our politics but also freedom and justice. (53)

This is followed by a grim warning about how the depletion of natural resources can “set the scene for wars,” followed by grateful praise for communities and countries that have already begun to rebuild their natural environment, carefully and locally. This is followed by another warning: to not let the remaining beauty and health of nature around us tempt us to say things are not that bad. No, says Pope Francis:

Such evasiveness serves as a licence to carrying on with our present lifestyles and modes of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen. (59)

Pope Francis is urging us to decide, together, to address and implement deep and wide changes. In this great effort, everyone’s gifts are needed:

- ▶ not only engineers and technicians who can plan and design a more respectful technology;
- ▶ not only lawmakers who can frame the new limits which we will need to observe;
- ▶ not only teachers and adult educators who can open the eyes of young people to the challenges and opportunities ahead;
- ▶ not only singers and poets who can give these new depths words and sounds that touch our hearts;
- ▶ not only priests and lay leaders who can link all of these vocational possibilities to the faith and prayer life of believers;
- ▶ not only (but especially) mothers and fathers who can plant deep in the hearts of children a love and respect for the things of nature, and for the rights and potential of vulnerable people;
- ▶ not only contemplatives who can humbly walk deep into the mind of God and then refresh those who have ears to hear with a new vision of how everything can come together in love.

Not only all of them. Quite simply: all of us. Where, in all of this, do you fit in?

Chapter One ends with a plea for a truly global dialogue, respecting divergent views but facing the fact that things are now reaching a breaking point. It is time to be ready to reconsider everything – from small careless personal behaviours, to the terrible fog of unawareness or indifference that keeps so many hearts in North America closed to the suffering of the poor.

We need big and daring solutions: cultural change, internationally binding new legislation, genuine spiritual and moral conversion. Pope Francis quotes the Brazilian bishops: “If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God’s expectations.” (61)

“What is happening to our common home?” (Part Two)



Questions for dialogue

- 1) What struck you most in this session?
- 2) “Never have we hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. ... The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis.” (53) How do you feel in the face of such a serious presentation of the linked evils that are degrading our common home? What gives you hope?
- 3) Pope Francis believes that one of the factors in the lack of awareness of excluded people is that so many of us, especially decision-makers, live “far removed from the poor.” Is this true for you? How does this reality make it easier for us to believe that things are not that bad?
- 4) “Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.” (48) What implications do you see in this statement for public policy in Canada? Should the Canadian government and courts have the right to penalize Canadian companies for violations of human or environmental rights committed outside our borders?
- 5) Do you agree that we in Canada and other countries of the developed North owe an ecological debt to the global South? How can Canada repay its share of this ecological debt?

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes, arranged in two columns.



The gospel of Creation

These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from friendship, justice, and faithfulness to others. (70)

Chapter 2 of *Laudato Si'* will not be news to you if your soul-view of the world has already taken in the promises and warnings in the Bible about creation and social justice. But since many people have not had an opportunity to think much about this theme in scripture, some of the teaching in this chapter might sound new and startling.

You could sum up one of the two major convictions expressed in Chapter 2 in this way: Don't expect the Earth to respond generously to your need of its gifts if you have been failing to treat your fellow human beings – especially those who are weaker than you are – with care, respect, justice, and compassion.

In the Genesis account of Cain and Abel, God makes this point thunderously clear to Farmer Cain who has just murdered Rancher Abel, his younger brother. God says: “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength.” (Gen. 4: 10-12)

Pope Francis quotes this famous story, and comments:

In the story of Cain and Abel, we see how envy led Cain to commit the ultimate injustice against his brother, which in turn ruptured the relationship between Cain and God, and between Cain and the Earth from which he was banished. ... Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour ... ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the Earth.

When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered. We see this in the story of Noah, where God threatens to do away with humanity because of its constant failure to fulfill the requirements of justice and peace: “I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the Earth is filled with violence through them.” (Gen. 6: 13)

These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from friendship, justice, and faithfulness to others. (70)

Inseparable. Interconnected. We can't love the Earth without loving our neighbour. We can't heal the Earth if we ignore or despise other people. If we experience slower or weaker or less technology-oriented human beings as obstacles, slowing us down in our drive to find efficient ways to maximize production and expand markets, it's a sure bet that the efficiencies we invent will end up violating the delicate web of soil-water-air-animal-human relationships that keeps everyone alive.

- ◀ Human-induced climate change affects the poorest people first. Here people are fleeing their homes in the Philippines flooded by Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. In one morning, around 7,000 people died and a million were displaced.



Photo: © AP Photo/Bullit Marquez

The “covenant economy,” described especially in the Books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, shows us a vision for a society where loving care of the land is intimately linked to generosity and care for “the poor of the land.” One example: the commandment to let the land itself rest every seven years – an admirable element of soil conservation – ends up being joined in law to the commandment about forgiving the debts of the poor. (See Ex. 23: 10 and Dt. 15: 1-11.) The land needs its rest from the pressures of crop-bearing. Similarly, the poor need to be able to rest from the pressure of debt, so that they can experience a “fresh start.” Care for the land, concern for the poor – *inseparable, interconnected!*

Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the Earth is essentially a shared inheritance whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. (93)

Yes. And the conviction that the Earth is for everyone, that no one should be squeezed out or forced to feel useless and excluded, is what Catholic social teaching has been saying all along.

Everything is related

But Pope Francis has another dimension he wants to emphasize. It is not only the human family God cares about: God’s care extends to the animals, the birds, the plants – the whole interconnected web of the universe.

We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. Every act of cruelty towards any creature is contrary to human dignity. (92)

Here we are getting in touch with the second major conviction of Chapter 2:



The gospel of Creation

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother Earth. (92)

Joyful, consequential reverence for non-human creation makes *Laudato Si'* a “groundbreaker.” Pope Francis (like St. Francis before him) insists on a dimension that the official teaching of the Catholic Church has not said much about in the past. *Laudato Si'* wants us to savour – and to share – God’s delight in *every* creature, and God’s respect for *every* strand in nature’s web.

As *Laudato Si'* points out, the Bible has always been aware of the love affair between God and all of creation – even if we haven’t always noticed.

The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help. ... If you chance to come upon a bird’s nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young” (Dt. 22: 4, 6).

Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also “so that your ox and your donkey may have rest” (Ex. 23: 12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures. (68)

The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things.

Both the biblical vision and *Laudato Si'* are addressing something far more than compassion for the suffering of other creatures, or anger at human cruelty or indifference. There is also something mysterious going on – some way in which the whole of creation is hungering and thirsting, along with us, for the full gift of justice, justice so complete that only God can establish it. This is how Psalm 96 puts it:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the Earth rejoice!

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it!

Let the field exult, and everything growing in it!

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

before the Lord, for he is coming ...

*He will judge the world with justice,
and the peoples with his truth.*

Psalm 96 is exultant over a fulfillment that we are waiting for, even if we cannot describe it within our everyday, rational thought patterns. We are not only waiting for it; if we are servants of God and lovers of fairness and inclusiveness, we are helping to bring about this fulfillment. It is not only about us humans. It involves the whole of creation, together, in a kind of respectful partnership.

The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things. Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures.

The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator. (83)

And this is how Pope Francis puts it at the conclusion of Chapter 2:

In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ's creative work as the Divine Word (Logos). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word "became flesh."

One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole. (99)

The New Testament ... also shows (Jesus) risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship. ... This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that "God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor. 15: 28).

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. (100)

Questions for dialogue

- 1) What struck you most in this session?
- 2) Can you think of a modern version of the Cain and Abel story – for example in a land dispute wherein a person destroys the relationship with their neighbour, with other neighbours, with God and with the land?
- 3) What do you think of the pope's statement that because God created the world for everyone, "every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged"? (93)
- 4) Do you resonate with the joy of Psalm 96: "Let the heavens be glad, and let the Earth rejoice!"?
- 5) "In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning." (99) If you are a preacher (or if you wish you could preach just once in a while!), which biblical stories would you suggest in order to help your listeners "rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment" and between "rich" (or moderately successful) and poor people?



Are you part of the “bold cultural revolution” we need?

Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely... (104)

At the beginning of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis addresses this letter to “every person living on this planet.” He explains why: “Faced as we are with global environmental deterioration ... I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.”

“All people” means of course all of us who, together, face the future of humanity and of planet Earth in our time.

In Chapter 3, Pope Francis rarely uses Christian or doctrinal language: he is trying to open up a dialogue with everyone, non-believers included. In contrast with Chapter 2, which draws on biblical faith, Chapter 3 is more philosophical than theological. It offers a rational presentation of a truly human crisis: we have damaged the Earth, our common home, and we have hurt and excluded billions of human beings: how can we come to understand what has gone so deeply wrong?

Although Chapter 3 is philosophical and rational, it is also deeply personal. Here we encounter Jorge Bergoglio’s conviction, born of his own experience, his own study and his own prayer, about the nature of the distortion that has put the Earth and the human family in the serious danger we are now facing.

Pope Francis uses the phrase “the dominant technocratic paradigm” to describe the mind-set that has brought us so many solutions and advantages, but which has increasingly led us into a dangerous state of fascination with power and efficiency.

Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads.



Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads. We are the beneficiaries of two centuries of enormous waves of change: steam engines, railways, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles, airplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies.

It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open before us, for “science and technology are wonderful products of a God-given human creativity”(John Paul II) ... Technology has remedied countless evils which used to harm and limit human beings. How can we not feel gratitude and appreciation for this progress, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications? (102)

Yet it must also be recognized that nuclear power, biotechnology, information technology, knowledge of our DNA and many other abilities which we have acquired, have given us tremendous power. More precisely, they have given those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world. (104)

But, asks Pope Francis, what if “our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience”? What if we have failed to develop “a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint”? What if our focus on power has begun to blind us to deeper truths? What if we now “stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it”? (105)

Corporate power

Perhaps the most aggressive and dangerous corporate behaviour at present is the takeover of government functions and removal of basic citizen protection through so-called free trade treaties... (For example) the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), presently being negotiated between the U.S. and the EU, would, if ratified ... grant unprecedented powers to transnational corporations to bring legal charges against governments in private arbitration tribunals if its present or future profits are threatened by a government decision.

► Susan George. *Shadow Sovereigns – How Global Corporations are Seizing Power*. Polity Press, UK, 2015.

Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely Think of the nuclear bombs dropped in the middle of the twentieth century, or the array of technology which Nazism, Communism and other totalitarian regimes have employed to kill millions of

people, to say nothing of the increasingly deadly arsenal of weapons available for modern warfare. In whose hands does all this power lie, or will it eventually end up? It is extremely risky for a small part of humanity to have it. (104)



Are you part of the “bold cultural revolution” we need?

Discovering truth and wisdom

An idea that appears often in *Laudato Si'* is the danger of reductionism – that is, imposing one line of thought, or one ambition, on all of human action and on all forms of wisdom, as if we only need that one key to understanding.

For example: this pope has a real respect for science – remember, he was trained as a chemist. However, if we think that the scientific method is the only way to get truthful and objective insights into nature and human society, we are choosing a kind of selective blindness. We need science, but we also need good philosophy, and the intuition of artists, and social ethics.

When it comes to the care of our common home, we are living at a critical moment of history. We still have time to make the change needed to bring about a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.

► Pope Francis at the White House, September 2015

Pope Francis is adamant about our desperate need for that wisdom of the heart which enables us to see the dignity, the preciousness, and the suffering of every other living thing, especially (but not exclusively) of our fellow human beings. And we need to be continually open to transcendence – ultimately, to our God who is beyond and within us.

Another kind of reductionism that Pope Francis fears is the kind that has lurked like an infection within the system of capitalism since its beginnings: the idea that the market alone will solve everything. All we have to do is concentrate on expansion and maximizing profits and assume that eventually the rising tide will lift all boats. In so many ways, our astonishing technology is harnessed to that dangerous conception of progress and success.

The technocratic paradigm ... tends to dominate economic and political life. The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings. Finance overwhelms the real economy. The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration.

Some circles maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems, and argue, in popular and non-technical terms, that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth. They ... (show) no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough. Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion.

At the same time, we have “a sort of ‘superdevelopment’ of a wasteful and consumerist kind, which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation” (Benedict XVI), while we are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources. (109)



The Matterhorn, Switzerland

Photo: © Bettina Rüter / iStockphoto.com

The pope is deeply concerned that large privileged corporations presently have too much unaccountable power. Because they have the technological knowledge and resources to wield that power through massive advertising and communications, as well as substantial control of markets, financial institutions, data banks, property, and especially money, they are able to reshape our laws and educational systems and even our culture in their own narrow interests and ways of thinking.

“In whose hands does all this power lie?... It is extremely risky for a small part of humanity to have it” (104)

The question we might ask is, are we stuck with the way things are, until some awful catastrophe ends our period of civilization altogether? Pope Francis insists that we can change, non-violently and globally. Signs of hopeful change are everywhere, if we have eyes to see them.

An authentic humanity, calling for a new synthesis, seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door. ... (112)

There is a growing awareness that scientific and technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of humanity and of history, a growing sense that the way to a better future lies elsewhere. This is not to reject the possibilities which technology continues to offer us. ... (113)

We can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral. (112)

Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur. (114)

For people and the planet: the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of goals, targets and indicators that United Nation member states will be expected to use as they frame economic and political policies over the next 15 years. One hundred and ninety-three countries signed on in September 2015. It is significant that this is the first time that climate change has been so directly named in this context.

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals. For the first time, they explicitly include global warming and climate change. Others aim for ending poverty “in all its forms, everywhere”; improving food security and nutrition; ensuring access to quality medical treatment at affordable costs; broadening everyone’s access to education; empowering women and girls; and providing clean water and sanitation to every community.

The SDGs also commit governments to work towards providing affordable, sustainable energy to their people, along with urgent action to combat climate change. They commit to “full and productive employment and decent work for all.” They agree to work towards reducing inequality within and among countries; to promote peaceful and inclusive societies; and to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

A constant theme of these new Sustainable Development Goals is that everyone on the planet – ordinary citizens, businesses, non-governmental organizations as well as governments – must cooperate if the world-transforming hope expressed by the SDGs is to become reality. The SDGs come into effect in January 2016 with a 2030 deadline. For more details, visit www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals

Are you part of the “bold cultural revolution” we need?

Shrinking job opportunities frustrate young workers

The future of work, in a world where technology increasingly replaces jobs by automation and robots of various kinds, is a challenge that has almost everyone worried.

The problem often hits families as it is much harder for younger people (ages 15 to 24) to get a good start in the working world than it used to be. That's easily understood when we consider that youth unemployment in Ontario ranges from 17 to 20%.

In Europe, Greece has 52% and Spain has 53.2 % youth unemployment and in Africa the rates are explosive with countries like Kenya having a rate of 67% youth unemployment.



Photo: © CP Photo/Paul Chiasson

Pope Francis thinks that what we need is nothing short of a bold cultural revolution, which can set humane, caring, contemplative limits on our rush towards power and efficiency. It is already happening, he says, when people make conscious, careful choices and then follow up those choices by working and living differently:

For example, when cooperatives of small producers adopt less polluting means of production, and opt for a non-consumerist model of life, recreation and community. Or when technology is directed primarily to resolving people's concrete problems, truly helping them to live with more dignity and less suffering. (112)

How much of the blame does the Judeo-Christian tradition have to take for the very delusions of grandeur that Pope Francis laments in our civilization? Isn't it a fact that our Scriptures, from Genesis onwards, portray human beings as the pinnacle of God's creation, the natural rulers of the Earth, free to name and to tame all the lesser beings in creation? If domination rather than reverent stewardship was the understanding of Scripture while the Western world got rich, it was a distortion, argues Pope Francis.

Such an attitude seemed to come from Christian sources, but it was “a wrong understanding of the relationship between human beings and the world. Often, what was handed on... gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about.” (116)

That misunderstanding of the responsibility of humanity for the world has distracted us badly, turning our eyes away from precious, fragile and vulnerable forms of reality which we have no right to “master” but which we have a responsibility to respect, preserve, and love.

There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself.

When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, or a human embryo, or a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble. (117)

Seeds of Survival

Through *Seeds of Survival*, the Unitarian Service Committee Canada works with farming communities in 11 countries around the world.

USC Canada promotes vibrant family farms, strong rural communities and healthy ecosystems by focusing on activities that build food and livelihood security for small-scale farmers and preserve agricultural biodiversity.

The first objective of Seeds of Survival is to ensure a secure source of food and livelihood for small-scale farmers without losing the resource base essential for sustaining it. The second and equally important goal is to promote crop diversity.

Seeds of Survival stresses the importance of building on small-scale farmers' time-tested local knowledge

and practices, limiting the need for external farming methods that are often incompatible with local growing conditions.

Since the program's start 25 years ago in Ethiopia, Seeds of Survival has allowed USC Canada and the farmers, scientists and practitioners build a solid base of knowledge and expertise about "agroecology" and its application in various cultural and ecological contexts, including harsh and remote landscapes where people have little access to external resources.

In 2013, USC Canada partnered with Seeds of Diversity to bring the Seeds of Survival approach to support farming communities in Canada. For more information, visit usc-canada.org/what-we-do/seeds-of-survival.

There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. . . . If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships. . . .

Our openness to others, each of whom is a "thou" capable of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue, remains the source of our nobility as human persons. A correct relationship with the created world demands that we not weaken this social dimension of openness to others, much less the transcendent dimension of our openness to the "Thou" of God. Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God. (118-119)

Another danger that worries Pope Francis a great deal is the issue of what will happen to human work – and everyone's right to work – if we keep on allowing the technological paradigm to limitlessly replace human work with machines in order to make more profit. We were created with a vocation to work. People cannot develop their full moral, social and spiritual resources without the experience of steady, worthy work:



Photo: © Mike Smith

Are you part of the “bold cultural revolution” we need?

Any approach to an integral ecology ... needs to take account of the value of labour... The goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this Earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. ... Yet the orientation of the economy has favoured a kind of technological progress in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines. ... To stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society. (124-129)

Like many environmental thinkers and people in the movement for organic, sustainable and local food, Pope Francis points out that diversified, small-scale food production is likely to be far healthier for the Earth, and to provide many more people with a satisfying life of work.



In order to continue providing employment, it is imperative to promote an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity. For example, there is a great variety of small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world's peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste, be it in small agricultural parcels, in orchards and gardens, hunting and wild harvesting or local fishing. ... Civil authorities have the right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production. (129)

The last point that Pope Francis makes before concluding Chapter Three is the need to bring ethical considerations to bear on the use of biological technologies, such as those used in genetic modification of plants. He concentrates on their impact on human society, culture and environment. Here are his thoughts on these issues:

While human intervention on plants and animals is permissible when it pertains to the necessities of human life, ... recall the balanced position of Saint John Paul II, who stressed the benefits of scientific and technological progress as evidence of “the nobility of the human vocation to participate responsibly in God’s creative action,” while also noting that “we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention to the consequences of such interference in other areas.”... We need constantly to rethink the goals, effects, overall context and ethical limits of this human activity, which is a form of power involving considerable risks. (130-131)

Although no conclusive proof exists that GM cereals may be harmful to human beings ... there remain a number of significant difficulties which should not be underestimated. In many places ... productive land is concentrated in the hands of a few owners due to “the progressive disappearance of small producers, who, as a consequence of the loss of the exploited lands, are obliged to withdraw from direct production” (Episcopal Commission of Pastoral Concerns, Argentina).

- ◀ Ignatius Farm in Guelph, Ontario, is a model for organic farming methods, community shared agriculture and mentoring others. Bridging urban and rural, it welcomes the involvement of the local community. (www.ignatiusguelph.ca)

The most vulnerable of these become temporary labourers, and many rural workers end up moving to poverty-stricken urban areas. The expansion of these crops has the effect of destroying the complex network of ecosystems, diminishing the diversity of production and affecting regional economies, now and in the future. (134)

Questions for dialogue

- 1) What struck you most in this session?
- 2) When Pope Francis calls for a bold cultural revolution, do you feel helpless? Or are you conscious of ways in which you, your family and friends – as parents, neighbours, teachers, consumers, or as parish-based activists – are already agents of cultural change? “Much can be done,” as Pope Francis insists!
- 3) Are there moments in your life – perhaps when stuck in a serious traffic jam – when you find yourself wondering how we got to this point? Do you sometimes feel that private time, family time, and prayer time are diminished by our fast-paced life and excessive technology? How can you set wise limits?
- 4) Reuben George explains the opposition of Tsleil-Waututh First Nation in British Columbia to the Trans Mountain pipeline project: “Our laws establish a sacred trust, a responsibility to care for our lands, air and waters.”⁵ Are you sympathetic to First Nations communities who strongly resist the arrival of powerful technologies such as pipelines, even though they could become very wealthy by exploiting the resources on their lands?
- 5) Do you worry about unemployment reaching crisis proportions – especially among youth – if corporations continue to replace human labour with robots, drones or computers that can cut costs? Can you think of some ethical, social, environmental values that our society could call on for clear principles as to when it is socially, humanly helpful to replace human work with machines, and when it should be limited or not allowed?

⁵ See Sacred Trust Initiative at <http://twnsacredtrust.ca/>

Notes

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Photo: © Mike Smith

▲ A friendly Painted Turtle nesting in the garlic at Ignatius Farm in Guelph, Ontario.

You are definitely not alone!

Others will then no longer be seen as strangers, but as part of a 'we' which all of us are working to create. (151)

Pope Francis used to be the hands-on archbishop of a very big city: Buenos Aires, the second largest city in South America. Although the city itself has about three million people, the metropolitan area that is wrapped around it includes some 13 million, and growing. Given this perspective, it is no surprise that *Laudato Si'* puts a focus on cities and on concern for their needs.

Pope Francis promotes preserving rather than destroying, “common areas, visual landmarks and urban landscapes which increase our sense of belonging, of rootedness, of ‘feeling at home’ within a city which includes us and brings us together.”

He emphasizes the importance of thinking of the city as a whole, rather than encouraging people to care only about their own neighbourhood “and failing to see the larger city as a space which they share with others ... a coherent and meaningful framework for their lives.”

His overarching framework and approach can be found in a few simple words, the essence of Chapter 4, and indeed of the whole encyclical. *“Others will then no longer be seen as strangers, but as part of a ‘we’ which all of us are working to create.” (151)*

What a profound life-work for the whole heart! It embraces the well-educated and well-cared-for citizens of the desirable neighbourhoods; the newly-arrived who don't yet identify with any neighbourhood; and especially the people pushed out to the edges or crowded into dangerous tenements and into neighbourhoods where some people might be afraid to walk.

This life-work approach embraces the trees for shade and oxygen, the sources of clean water and even the squirrels. We are all part of the community which God sees as one family, and which Pope Francis is urging each of us to commit to as “us.”

We see how important it is that urban planning always take into consideration the view of those who will live in these areas.

If we consider ourselves part of that family, then it is obvious that we have to work to make life better for the members of the family who are suffering, who are deprived, who are left out, who are in danger. But, warns Pope Francis, remember that those family members also have their own wisdom and sense of responsibility. So don't “impose” improvement on their lives: consult and work with them.



Hong Kong

The extreme poverty experienced in areas lacking harmony, open spaces or potential for integration, can lead to incidents of brutality and to exploitation by criminal organizations. In the unstable neighbourhoods of mega-cities, the daily experience of overcrowding and social anonymity can create a sense of uprootedness which spawns antisocial behaviour and violence.

Nonetheless, I wish to insist that love always proves more powerful. Many people in these conditions are able to weave bonds of belonging and togetherness which convert overcrowding into an experience of community in which the walls of the ego are torn down and the barriers of selfishness overcome. (149)

Given the interrelationship between living space and human behaviour, those who design buildings, public spaces and cities, ought to draw on the various disciplines which help us to understand people's thought processes, symbolic language and ways of acting.

It is not enough to seek beauty of design. More precious still is the service we offer to another kind of beauty: people's quality of life, their adaptation to the environment, encounter and mutual assistance. Here too, we see how important it is that urban planning always take into consideration the view of those who will live in these areas. (150)

Treasuring the diversity of cultures

Pope Francis, of course, is concerned not only with cities, but with the misuse of power all over the world, and the resulting suffering of people. When human power hardens into domination, it stops listening, it stops respecting the less powerful, it loses wisdom and become machine-like. Among other distortions, domination stamps out diversity. *Laudato Si'* considers diversity – in nature, in human culture, and in ways of working and producing economic results – to be very important.

Culture is more than what we have inherited from the past. It is also, and above all, a living, dynamic and participatory present reality, which cannot be excluded as we rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment. (143)

A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today's globalized economy, has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity. Attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical interventions can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community.



You are definitely not alone!

New processes taking shape cannot always fit into frameworks imported from outside; they need to be based in the local culture itself. As life and the world are dynamic realities, so our care for the world must also be flexible and dynamic. Merely technical solutions run the risk of addressing symptoms and not the more serious underlying problems.



Cross Lake Indian Residential School Manitoba, 1940.

Photo: Reuters/Canada

There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes an historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture. Nor can the notion of quality of life be imposed from without, for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each human group. (144)

At this point, Canadian ears might begin to burn. Pope Francis is taking culture very seriously – taking it as a reality which is an integral dimension of justice for human beings, and which must not be ignored or scorned when decisions are being made by the power-holders in any society.

We in Canada have been learning over the past few years how massively our leaders ignored, even scorned “*the rights of peoples and of cultures*” when those leaders were setting up institutions like the Indian Residential Schools. The phrase “cultural genocide” has been used to describe the unrelenting, one-sided insistence on how the children should grow up to conform to the way of life, and the economy, of the triumphant settlers who colonized Canada.

In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada began its work, with a mandate to inform

all Canadians about what happened in those schools.⁶ The three commissioners travelled across the country listening to the experiences of Aboriginal families whose children were taken away from them. They became convinced that the damage to Indigenous family life and self-understanding had caused wounds that are still doing harm, not only to the parents and children originally involved with Indian Residential Schools, but also to future generations and to whole Indigenous communities.

This very public Canadian examination of conscience has been taken to heart by some Canadian churches, and by several provincial governments.

Within the past 10 years, the Prime Minister of Canada, church leaders, several religious congregations and many others have made public their sorrow over what happened in those schools and their intention to walk with Aboriginal communities towards reconciliation and repairing what can be repaired.⁷

⁶ Visit the Truth and Reconciliation Commission website at www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890 for the summary of the Final Report and the Calls to Action.

⁷ See the text of some of these apologies at these websites: www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649; www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/files/2630-apology-on-residential-schools-by-the-catholic-church; www.anglican.ca/tr/apology/english/; www.united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/apologies; www.itk.ca/historical-event/presbyterian-church-canadas-residential-schools-apology; www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/oblate_apology_english.pdf



Attawapiskat, Ontario

Here are some of Pope Francis' thoughts on how cultural domination – along with its twin, economic domination – can be a serious injustice:

Many intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community.

Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future

The legacy from the schools and the political and legal policies and mechanisms surrounding their history continue to this day. This is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians. It is reflected in the intense racism some people harbour against Aboriginal people and in the systemic and other forms of discrimination Aboriginal people regularly experience in this country. ...

Current conditions such as the disproportionate apprehension of Aboriginal children by child-welfare agencies and the disproportionate imprisonment and victimization of Aboriginal people can be explained in part as a result or legacy of the way that Aboriginal children were treated in residential schools and were denied an environment of positive parenting, worthy community leaders, and a positive sense of identity and self-worth. ...

The impacts of the legacy of residential schools have not ended with those who attended the schools. They affected the survivors' partners, their children, their grandchildren, their extended families, and their communities.

- ▶ Summary of the Final Report of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems. (145)

In this sense, it is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.

When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture. (146)

It is essential to show special care for Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others. They should be the principal dialogue partners.

You are definitely not alone!

There are 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the majority addressed to the federal government. However, some are directed to educational institutions and professional associations and several directly to the churches. The Calls to Action are challenging reading, as Canada faces a profound conversion in its relationship with Aboriginal Peoples. Some churches have set up special programs, in cooperation with Aboriginal leaders in their area, to help church members grow in understanding of the issues and in respectful, supportive mutual relationships with First Nations in Canada.⁸



Photo: © Robin Rowland/The Canadian Press

Many people find it difficult to feel an obligation to act on issues flowing from the wrong direction Canada took in the Indian Residential Schools because the problem is in the past. But the results of such colonial domination continue in the present, and without responsible action, they will continue into the future. The legacy of the schools is a major on-going challenge for Canadians.

⁸ Visit the Truth and Reconciliation Commission website at www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=890 for the summary of the Final Report and the Calls to Action.

'One complex crisis that is both social and environmental'

Pope Francis speaks about intergenerational solidarity in *Laudato Si'*. He is speaking particularly about solidarity with future generations, but the concept also makes us think about our responsibility for problems, difficulties – and blessings and values and institutions – that we have inherited from our ancestors in our own society. Here is some of what Pope Francis says as he looks to the future:

The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity.

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. ... Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but is rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. ... (159)

Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn. (160)

Pope Francis believes that “everything is closely related” and that “today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis.” (137) Although he deals with many issues in this chapter – the urgent problems of poor people in big cities, “cultural ecology” and the injustices that have damaged life for generations of First Nations communities, the moral obligation of handing on to future generations “an inhabitable planet” – for Pope Francis, these issues are absolutely inseparable:

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. ...

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. (139)

We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. (141)

Questions for dialogue

- 1) What struck you most in this session?
- 2) Do you know a congregation or parish that has created the kind of open, active, concerned community that made a real difference in the neighbourhood? Could your church or parish accomplish something like that?
- 3) What are some of the impacts of advertising that become a kind of cultural domination that make it hard to protect and pass on values that are important to you?
- 4) Is there something your parish, school or community could do that would help its members experience a "cultural conversion" in mutual understanding with Aboriginal Canadians?
- 5) What kind of world do you want to leave to your children and grandchildren? How can we get there?

Notes

One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part One)

The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. (175)

International governance is a very tricky undertaking. Successive empires have tried it over the centuries. But most faded away after a few generations, or imploded, or got pushed aside by newer emerging patterns of power. Often the end came with a great deal of bloodshed – not to mention the blood that was shed while the empire grew.

In historical terms, the United Nations, coming to birth in the battle-scarred years after the Second World War, is a recent experiment. It is less than a century old. The UN is an exception in the world's long history of efforts towards international governance in that its power is not based on military or economic might, but on a persistent effort to keep its members talking to each other until they can agree on a way forward. In other words, this form of international governance depends on dialogue.

11 January 2016 – Marking the 70th anniversary of the first meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today said the body has truly become the “Parliament for all people.”

“The resolutions adopted by the General Assembly may not all be acted on right away. Yet they stand as our common position on the most pressing issues of our times,” Mr. Ban told UN officials and delegates attending the commemoration.

“These resolutions tell the story of our resolve. They reflect our conviction that the countries of the world coming together can do far more collectively than they ever could alone. Each delegate who speaks, each vote

that is cast, every gavel that opens a new meeting adds a little more hope to the world,” said the Secretary-General.

They decided to choose the only genuine path to achieve global peace, security, justice, human rights and social advancement,” he declared. “And in the General Assembly, they created the one true space in which ‘We the peoples’ – voices both big and small – would be heard.”

Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, president of the UN's 70th Session, recalled that today, with 193 members representing 99.5 per cent of the world's population, the General Assembly has become the “single most representative, deliberative body in the world.”



Given the world's ages-long habit of depending on war and/or wealth as the basis of power, choosing to depend on dialogue can seem – well, fragile, at best. But the hope that was embodied in the new-born United Nations Organization was strongly affirmed by Pope Pius XII, and by every pope since. This history of papal affirmation of international governance now emphatically includes Pope Francis.

He made sure that *Laudato Si'* was published on time to become part of the dialogue in preparation for the UN's Climate Change Conference in Paris, November 30 to December 11 2015. He writes:

Even as this encyclical was being prepared, the debate was intensifying. We believers cannot fail to ask God for a positive outcome to the present discussions, so that future generations will not have to suffer the effects of our ill-advised delays. (169)

Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan.

While the choice of dialogue to bring about global change gets strong support from Pope Francis, he clearly understands that real change requires more than talk, more than ideas, more than good intentions. He begins Chapter 5 of *Laudato Si'* with an enthusiastic word about humanity's need to learn to govern itself globally.

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 interest of a few countries.

Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan. Yet the same ingenuity which has brought about enormous technological progress has so far proved incapable of finding effective ways of dealing with grave environmental and social problems worldwide.

A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water. (164)

Rio Earth Summit 1992



Learning global governance

Pope Francis offers a concise sketch of international efforts to deal with the ecological crisis that the world has begun to face, and to design actions to counteract its symptoms. (167-169) He names, approvingly, some of the principles which were first articulated by international conferences in the late 20th century. Three of those principles were established at the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a culture of care and an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and, at the same time, protecting nature.

► Pope Francis addressing the U.S. Congress
September 24 2015

One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part One)

The first is that international cooperation is essential in humanity's urgent task of caring for the ecosystem of the entire Earth. Pope Francis observes:

Enforceable international agreements are urgently needed, since local authorities are not always capable of effective intervention. Relations between states must be respectful of each other's sovereignty, but must also lay down mutually agreed means of averting regional disasters which would eventually affect everyone. Global regulatory norms are needed to impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions. (173)

A second principle is that those who have caused pollution are obliged to bear the costs of repairing the harm done. Pope Francis quotes the bishops of Bolivia: "The countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems they have caused." (170)

Finally, the environmental impact of a proposed project must be studied before it is approved by any government. Pope Francis adds:

Environmental impact assessment ... should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent, and free of all economic or political pressure. It should be linked to a study of working conditions and possible effects on people's physical and mental health, on the local economy and on public safety. ...

The local population should have a special place at the table; they are concerned about their own future and that of their children, and can consider goals transcending immediate economic interests. (183)

In any discussion about (the risks and costs) of a proposed venture ... some questions must have higher priority. For example, we know that water is a scarce and indispensable resource and a fundamental right which conditions the exercise of other human rights. This indisputable fact overrides any other assessment of environmental impact on a region. (185)

Pope Francis praises and highlights some of the key protocols and conventions decided at international meetings. A few have proved quite effective: for example, the Vienna Convention for the protection of the ozone layer and its implementation through the Montreal Protocol. Other agreements looked very good on paper, but have proved, to use his word, ineffectual. Pope Francis warmly encourages the intentions and the thinking involved. But, he says, the entire effort needs a lot more support from powerful countries, and the international laws and agreements that result from this effort need to be made enforceable.

Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most. The Conference of the United Nations on Sustainable Development, “Rio+20” (Rio de Janeiro 2012), issued a wide-ranging but ineffectual outcome document. International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. (169)

In 2011, Canada withdrew from one such “outcome document” – the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. Kyoto was the first binding international agreement on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The David Suzuki Foundation comments on Canada’s withdrawal: “Rather than working together with other nations to negotiate a more effective, follow-up agreement, Canada elected to abandon the process. The government instead adopted a GHG reduction target of 17% below 2005 levels by 2020. This (was) much weaker than Canada’s previous Kyoto commitment and (sent) the unfortunate message to the rest of the world that one of the top ten global climate change producers had pulled back from its efforts to reduce emissions.”⁹

Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which ... have polluted the most.

However, with a change in government in October 2015, Canada played a constructive role at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December and, along with 194 other nations, endorsed the critically important “outcome document.” In doing so, Canada is committed to the goal of keeping global temperatures “well below” 20 Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit it to 1.50 Celsius; to review progress every five years; and to contribute its share of \$100 billion a year in climate financing for developing countries, with a commitment to further funds in the future.

A frank dialogue in the service of life

Although Pope Francis is intensely conscious of the need to break out of our massive reliance on fossil fuels because of their impact on climate change, that is certainly not the only transformation he urgently wants to see in the world.

Always foremost in his mind and heart is the scandal of stark, painful poverty, co-existing in a world with excessive consumption and a “throw-away culture.” Whether the contrast is between wealthy countries and poor countries, or between wealthy groups of people and the poor majority within some countries, Pope Francis is urging us to see and feel the rich-poor gap as unjust, intolerable and, in the long run, ruinous for the world.

The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution, and the development of poorer countries and regions. (175)

⁹ See the David Suzuki Foundation at <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/climate-change/science/canada-climate-change/canada-and-kyoto/>.

One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part One)



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For poor countries, the priorities must be to eliminate extreme poverty and to promote the social development of their people. At the same time, they need to acknowledge the scandalous level of consumption in some privileged sectors of their population, and to combat corruption more effectively. They are likewise bound to develop less polluting forms of energy production, but to do so they require the help of countries which have experienced great growth at the cost of the ongoing pollution of the planet. (172)

Yes, *Laudato Si'* is proposing radical decisions, transformative change, a global vision based on social justice, respect for people and for nature. Obsession with short-term gains, profits or technocracy will not give anyone the wisdom to find a humane and effective way forward.

Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life. Saving banks at any cost, making the public pay the price, foregoing a firm commitment to renewing and reforming the entire system, only reaffirms the absolute power of a financial system, a power which has no future and will only give rise to new crises after a slow, costly and only apparent recovery.

The financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world. (189)

One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part Two)

A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress. (194)

A great deal of Chapter Five describes problems, distortions and customs that are world-wide, deeply entrenched, and interwoven with financial and political systems that we depend on in many ways. Most of us find it hard even to imagine how we could help to bring about serious change on such a broad scale.

However, the last thing Pope Francis wants is for people to feel helpless or despairing. He is eager for us to recognize that there are a great many things we can do to respond to “the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor” right in our own neighbourhoods, urban or rural. Indeed, without our own action in our own communities, there cannot be an effective global movement to break out of what Pope Francis calls “the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us.” (163)

Small is beautiful



You may be acquainted with the enduring book, *Small is Beautiful, Economics as if People Mattered* by E. F. Schumacher. Born in Germany, Schumacher studied at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar in the 1930s. He was interned as an enemy alien during the war, but later spent most of his working life as the Chief Economic Advisor with the National Coal Board.

First published in 1973, *Small is Beautiful* was translated into a number of languages. It became highly influential in the 1970s as a critique of the ever-growing scale of businesses, cities, mass media

– what he called “gigantism.” This, he believed, led to a dehumanisation of people and the economic systems that ordered their lives. “What Schumacher wanted was a people-centred economics because that would ... enable environmental and human sustainability.”

Here are two examples of how Schumacher’s ideas are being realized in the alternative energy sector. Bullfrog Power, an energy retailer with both residential and commercial customers in centres across Canada, commits to those who buy electricity through them to produce and put on the grid a corresponding number of kilowatts of power from a pollution-free, renewable source.¹⁰

In Germany, the world leader in renewable energy, 52% of the installed renewable energy is owned by small business and individuals, while the giant utilities own merely 7% of green energy production.¹¹

Pope Francis also offers some institutional change ideas that could work well in a neighbourhood-sized setting.

Other species are our relatives

“The Encyclical is brilliant science. Other species provide us with the very things that we need to survive- clean air, clean water, clean soil, and food and clean energy... And so long as we regard them as just resources, then we will exploit them without a second thought. But regarding them as our relatives, as beings that have every right to exist on this planet means that we treat them in a very different way.”

► David Suzuki, quoted in the film, *Laudato Si’ A Canadian Response*, www.kmproductions.ca

¹⁰ See <http://www.bullfrogpower.com> for information on how Bullfrog Power works, including stories of places across Canada where it is involved with local communities on “green” energy projects.

¹¹ Jeremy Rifkin. *The Zero Marginal Cost Society*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. 2014.

In some places, cooperatives are being developed to exploit renewable sources of energy which ensure local self-sufficiency and even the sale of surplus energy. This simple example shows that, while the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, 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. ...

Because the enforcement of laws is at times inadequate due to corruption, public pressure has to be exerted in order to bring about decisive political action. Society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment. Local legislation can be more effective, too, if agreements exist between neighbouring communities to support the same environmental policies. (179)

The gift of diversity

Laudato Si' often refers to something it calls “productive diversification.” If we encourage diversity in the ways in which goods are produced, we will move away from the dangers built into bigger and bigger mass-production runs. Mass production can indeed make products more cheaply – but it can also encourage waste, support a throw-away mentality, and lock us into a very narrow way of thinking about supply and demand. Mass production is too frequently accompanied by cheap labour and poor conditions for vulnerable workers overseas.

Some products are in abundant supply in our world because they are part of the marketing system of successful large corporations. But those huge profit-driven networks are the opposite of the diversity Pope Francis wants us to think about. He is inviting us to stay open to smaller, more creative and more careful ways of supplying what is truly needed.

People before profits: cooperatives and credit unions

Cooperatives represent a large and diverse heritage of people working together to build better communities based on cooperative principles. In Canada, many co-ops can trace their origins to Nova Scotia in the 1920s, with the work of Moses Coady and Jimmy Tompkins. These cousins, both priests, were greatly concerned for the people who faced very hard times after several decades of downturn in fishing, mining and agriculture.

They established a credit union, starting very small, and expanding as people’s confidence developed. Coady encouraged farmers, fishermen and many other economically distressed Nova Scotians to see the possibilities of cooperation built on mutual trust.

Study clubs flourished in which cooperative group action grew out of a process of questioning, debate and learning. The Antigonish Movement (as it became known) developed a brilliantly successful approach to adult education. Housing and other cooperatives followed. By the 1940s it became known around the world, and adult educators and social activists came to study the Antigonish model. In 1959, the Coady International Institute was established.

Over one-third of all the maple syrup consumed in the world is presently marketed by Quebec cooperatives.

Today, over 17,000,000 Canadians are cooperative members with 100,000 of them active as leaders on Boards and committees. There are many types of co-ops – worker, housing, food, child care. They employ over 150,000 Canadians and their credit unions and caisses populaires have some \$275 billion in assets. Their turnover globally amounts to more than US 2.3 trillion!

► To learn more, visit: <http://www.coopscanada.coop>

We need to grow in the conviction that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development. Efforts to promote sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term.

One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part Two)

If we look at the larger picture, we can see that more diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can be very profitable. It is a matter of openness to different possibilities which do not involve stifling human creativity ... but rather directing that energy along new channels. (191)

Productive diversification offers the fullest possibilities to human ingenuity to create and innovate, while at the same time protecting the environment and creating more sources of employment. Such creativity would be a worthy expression of our most noble human qualities, for we would be striving intelligently, boldly and responsibly to promote a sustainable and equitable development within a broader concept of quality of life. (192)

“A broader concept of quality of life” is part of the cultural revolution Pope Francis believes that we need. Most of us have heard all our lives that the measure of progress is how we keep the economy growing. We don’t often ask what the economy is producing, or who really needs it, or how fairly the products (or the

Agustina López is a rural subsistence farmer who lives in the heart of Guatemala’s Dry Corridor. It is a harsh, drought-prone area with punishing heat in the dry season. Precipitation in the rainy season has been more erratic the last three years than in the past. Crop losses have worsened to the point where families aren’t renting land to plant corn – the staple of their diet.

Now comes the miracle! In June 2015, Project Harvest started a three-year project based on an integrated horticultural system. With guidance of an agricultural promoter, Agustina and others in her community went to work chiselling terraces out of steep rocky slopes to create garden plots. Seeds were planted in soil enriched with manure. Building rain water catchment systems for dry season cultivation is beginning.

The next step is nurturing the organizational skills of the women. The goal is to move people from growing only corn and beans to maintaining their own vegetable garden. Despite their hardships, Agustina López and her *compañeras* are eating better this year.

profit) are distributed. We have been taught that the job of government is to promote growth, and that growth equals progress. Well, Pope Francis thinks that we need to “redefine our notion of progress.”

Given the insatiable and irresponsible growth produced over many decades, we need also think of containing growth by setting some reasonable limits and even retracing our steps before it is too late. We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth. (193)

If we look at the larger picture, we can see that more diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can be very profitable.



Photo: © Project Harvest - Guatemala

Thanks to their tenacity, adaptation, hard work and hope, they have a healthier and more balanced diet. Home-grown, nutritious vegetables are a life changing beginning.

► To learn more, visit www.projectharvest.org.

For new models of progress to arise, there is need to change models of global development. ... Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress. 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. (194)

Pope Francis is certainly not the first prophet to remind us that when business leaders are allowed to assume that the only rule that matters is the maximization of profits, we all suffer – even if our immediate needs as consumers are abundantly met. Government – political life as a whole – has the obligation to think first and foremost about the common good: the big picture of health, welfare and justice for everyone in society. That is why we expect governments to *regulate* business whenever production methods, or financial moves, hurt the common good. And that certainly is not an easy task for government!

The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society. ... What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis. ...

If politics ... remains caught up in inconsequential discussions, we will continue to avoid facing the major problems of humanity. A strategy for real change calls 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. A healthy politics needs to be able to take up this challenge. (196-197)

Politics and the economy tend to blame each other when it comes to poverty and environmental degradation. It is to be hoped that they can acknowledge their own mistakes and find forms of interaction directed to the common good.

While some are concerned only with financial gain, and others with holding on to or increasing their power, what we are left with are conflicts or spurious agreements where the last thing either party is concerned about is caring for the environment and protecting those who are most vulnerable. (198)

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

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis urges concern for the poor of the world and for the natural environment in a way that invites everyone into the discussion. He ends Chapter 5 with a reflection on the fact that humans need more than economics, more than science and technology, and more than politics: we need ethics, and we need religion. These closing thoughts are offered as a reasoned argument for non-believers, as well as believers, since he is writing this letter to “every person living on this planet.”

Any technical solution which science offers will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lost sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well.

Believers themselves must constantly feel challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith, and not to contradict it by their actions. They need to be encouraged to be ever open to God's grace and to draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace.

If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by doing so we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve. (200)

One world with a common plan: what does it take to get there? (Part Two)

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 community. Dialogue among the various sciences is also needed. ... An open and respectful dialogue is also needed between the various ecological movements, among which ideological conflicts are not infrequently encountered.

The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that "realities are greater than ideas." (201)

Do not strut arrogantly on the Earth.
You will never split the Earth apart
nor will you ever rival the mountains' stature.
Qur'an 17: 37

In the summer of 2015, seven leading American rabbis organized a "Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis" signed by more than 400 rabbis in the United States. The letter makes many of the points that are made in *Laudato Si'*.¹²

In Istanbul in August 2015, Islamic scholars from many countries issued an "Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change."¹³ There is also a Buddhist declaration on climate change, titled "The Time to Act is Now." It is signed by the Dalai Lama and by teachers from many strands of the Buddhist tradition.¹⁴

Pope Francis believes that the world will continue on "the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us" unless everyone works together to find solutions. This dialogue, he says, must occur on the local, national and international levels, and should include people from business, politics, science, religion and the environmental movements, as well as ordinary people whose lives are affected.



Photo: © Islamic Relief Worldwide

▲ Islamic scholars, experts and teachers from around the world united in a bold appeal for action on climate change. "We particularly call on the well-off nations and oil-producing states to lead the way in phasing out their greenhouse gas emissions..." The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change was signed after the draft had been widely circulated for consultation.

¹² See <https://theshalomcenter.org/RabbinicLetterClimate>

¹³ See islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change

¹⁴ See www.ecobuddhism.org/bcp/all_content/buddhist_declaration

Questions for dialogue

- 1) What struck you most in this session?
- 2) Pope Francis talks about "insatiable and irresponsible growth." Are there limits that you, your family, or your community could embrace?
- 3) Do you sometimes shop at smaller stores or markets because they offer locally grown foods or products that provide jobs?
- 4) Are you personally optimistic that the world can make the shift to non-polluting sources of energy in time to avert catastrophic climate change? Have you already begun to reduce your own use of fossil fuels?

Notes



Ecological education and spirituality

“The Earth Charter asked us to leave behind a period of self-destruction and make a new start, but we have not as yet developed a universal awareness needed to achieve this.” (207)

Preamble to the *Earth Charter* The Hague, June 29, 2000

We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future.

As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise.

To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.

Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

Laudato Si’ and the *Earth Charter* Rome, May 24, 2015

Here, I would echo that courageous challenge [from the Earth Charter]: “As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. ...

Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.” (207)

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 will demand that we set forth on the long path of renewal. (202)



The Earth Charter Initiative®

Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future



With continued energy, Pope Francis sails into a daring Chapter Six which is full of warning and full of hope.

On one level, Chapter Six is very practical. It describes multi-levelled ways in which modern human beings can change – and *need to change* – if we are to escape the catastrophe which threatens our world because of our coldness to the poor and our greedy carelessness with nature. Pope Francis offers a menu of suggestions on how such changes can begin in personal behaviour, family life and social arrangements.

But he is not talking about a small or an easy transition. The needed transformation can begin personally, but it must reach out to re-shape the cultural, legal and political-economic structures that govern our world.

This letter gave notice on its first page that it is addressed “to every person living on this planet.” (3) By the end of Chapter 6, it is clear that this pope is doing something astonishing – and radically Catholic. He is inviting the whole of contemporary humanity to set out on a path of repentance, transformation and discovery of God which is nothing short of a path to holiness. The destination of this journey is a joyful obedience to God as Creator which embraces the ancient commandment of loving one’s neighbour – “a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness” – as the norm for every law, every custom, every business enterprise, every relationship and every personal habit.

It is not only the human neighbour our hearts need to re-discover. This journey would enshrine in the heart of culture a delight in and respect for all of created nature – almost a family feeling of deep, affectionate respect for other creatures on planet Earth, our common home. Pope Francis calls this conviction “a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined with them in a splendid universal communion.”(220)

Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of ... rising above themselves, choosing again what is good ...

This delight and respect, if allowed to grow, would gradually replace the tension and anxiety of modern life with a much happier and more peaceful state of mind. At one point Pope Francis calls this new attitude a “happy sobriety.” Elsewhere he calls it a “responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment.” (214) It is “a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment, free of the obsession with consumption ... cherishing each thing and each moment.” (222)

If we can only overcome individualism

Here is some of what this pope means when he talks about “ecological conversion.” This chapter balances warning and hope in many ways. Here is an example:

The current global situation engenders a feeling of instability and uncertainty, which in turn becomes “a seedbed for collective selfishness” (in the words of Pope John Paul II). When people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. ...

So our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest. Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (204)

Yet all is not lost! Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom.

Ecological education and spirituality

No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to God's grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us. (205)

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 attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and decision on the world around us. If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society. (208)



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Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly affect the world around us.

Educating for the Covenant

In the next section, *Educating for the Covenant between Humanity and the Environment*, Pope Francis talks about the kinds of education that can help people grow in “solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.” He begins with very ordinary carefulness:

Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the (over-)use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse (for recycling), 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. (211)

We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often in ways we do not recognize, for they call forth a goodness which 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. (212)

Can ordinary carefulness like that really change the world? Pope Francis is urging those of us who advocate for such habits of carefulness to remember the heights and the depths of what is at stake.

Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care. ... Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment. (210-211)

It is not merely about taking care of things and learning to be frugal. Pope Francis is talking about a life of virtue which opens up to an experience of God (“making the leap towards the transcendent”) – God, lovingly present in every layer of creation; God, always beckoning us towards deeper love of our human neighbour, anywhere in the world.

Not surprisingly, Pope Francis insists that the best setting in which to learn how to care for people and the world is the family. He quotes Pope John Paul again in naming the family as “the heart of the culture of life.” He points out that the simplest kinds of family courtesy – like learning to say “thank you” – can teach us “to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings.” (213)

Later, Pope Francis reflects on the importance of another habit we can teach/learn in the family, namely grace before and after meals.

I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence upon God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their work provide us with these good things; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need. (227)

Purchasing is always a moral act, not simply an economic act.

► Benedict XVI

The depths of what Pope Francis means by “ecological education” and “ecological conversions” comes even clearer when he speaks about how it should be offered in seminaries:

All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world, in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment. ... (214)

The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity. ... (216)

Ecological conversion

Pope Francis re-emphasizes that what is needed is not only a transformation of individuals. The needed change will not happen without social, cultural, legal, political and economic change:

It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians ... tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an ecological conversion, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. (217)

Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. ... The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion. (219)

Community networks, as had been mentioned earlier, include actions like consumer boycotts.

Ecological education and spirituality



Photo: © m-gucci / istockphoto.com

They prove successful in changing the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and 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. “Purchasing is always a moral act, not simply an economic act.” (Benedict XVI) (206)

The concluding pages of Chapter 6 are a meditation on the personal graces we need in order to live out a genuine ecological conversion:

This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it includes gratitude ... a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate God’s generosity in self-sacrifice and good works. ...

It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from other creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. ... By developing our individual God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems (220)

Various convictions of our faith... can help us to enrich the meaning of this conversion. These include the awareness that each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us, and the security that Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, Christ is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light.

Then, too, there is the recognition that God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore. We read in the Gospel that Jesus says of the birds of the air that “not one of them is forgotten before God.” (Luke 12: 6) How then can we possibly mistreat them or cause them harm? I ask all Christians to recognize and to live fully this dimension of their conversions. ... In this way, we will help to nurture that sublime friendship with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied.” (221)

Along this path we “shed” the desire for things we do not need. We learn the truth of the saying “less is more.”

We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more.” A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. ... Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. ... (222)

It is a way of living life to the full ... of finding satisfaction in encounters of friendship, in service, in developing (our) gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, and in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many possibilities which life can offer. (223)

We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more.”

If we can live in our personal life with “healthy humility and happy sobriety,” we can help our whole civilization to discover how to live this way in our social life, our working life, our political life. And that will help us all to recover, every day, the transforming power of the great commandment which makes life in society a continuing invitation to spiritual fulfillment: the commandment that we love our neighbours as ourselves. It is that love that makes concern for the common good into a sacred and joyful passion.

Civic and political love

Pope Francis does not use the term social justice. He leaps to the expression “civic and political love.”

Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political. ... 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” (Benedict XVI) ... That is why the Church sets before the world the ideal of a “civilization of love.” (Paul VI) Social love is the key to authentic development. ...

In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage ‘a culture of care’ which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us. (231)

May our struggles and concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.

In the last paragraphs of Chapter Six, Pope Francis chooses to emphasize some of the ways in which life in the Church acts out the conviction that God is lovingly present within material creation.

The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise.

Ecological education and spirituality

The hand that blesses is an instrument of God's love and a reflection of the closeness of Jesus Christ. ... Water poured over the body of a child in Baptism is a sign of new life. Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature. ... (235)

It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. ... The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. Jesus comes not from above, but from within, that we might find him in this world of ours. ...

The Eucharist joins heaven and Earth: it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to God in blessed and undivided adoration. ... In the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator." (Benedict XVI) Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation. (236)

True to Catholic tradition, Pope Francis loves to consider how the Blessed Virgin Mary sums up the whole Gospel message, in her pain and in her joy:

Mary, the mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power. ... In her glorified body, together with the Risen Christ, part of creation has reached the fullness of its beauty. She treasures the entire life of Jesus in her heart (cf. Luke 2: 19, 51) and now understands the meaning of all things. Hence, we can ask her to enable us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom. (241)

As he closes his letter "to every person living on this planet," Pope Francis reminds us that "at the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God," and in that light, we will "be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe"—and so he counsels hope:

In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God. ... Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope. God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. (244, 245)

Pope Francis ends what he describes as "this lengthy reflection which has been both joyful and troubling" with two prayers. The first one could be offered by anyone who believes in God; the second one is explicitly Christian. On the next page is the first one.



A Prayer for our Earth

*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,
that we may protect life and beauty.*

*Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.*

*O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this Earth,
so precious in your eyes.*

*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.*

*Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the Earth.*

*Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature*

as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

*Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace. (246)*

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What is the Jesuit Forum?



Established in 2007, the Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice wants to make a difference. We engage people in deeper thinking and sharing on what's going on in our globalized world, starting with their own experience.

While we humans are social beings who depend on community, many of us experience isolation and a sense of powerlessness that leaves us disengaged in the face of a chaotic world. The daily headlines warn us of failing democracies, conflict and unpredictable environmental changes. This creates fear, often unexpressed, and a preoccupation with personal security. Social media compound this by replacing depth in communication with information overload that can overwhelm us.

To achieve its goal of building a better world, the Jesuit Forum brings together small groups of people, who want to – and can – make a difference, to reflect, share and speak openly and honestly on a range of issues. Through active listening and dialogue – two critical skills Jesuit Forum participants practise – these small groups work to build trust and foster effective decision-making in confronting injustices.

The hope is that this trust-building approach will counteract the growing privatization of peoples' faith and deepest convictions. Rather, it fosters friendship, energy, enthusiasm and a deeper understanding of the world in which we live. The Jesuit Forum helps to uncover creative solutions that are within us and direct them outward, helping us determine what we can do with others to build a better world.

In addition to facilitating small groups, the Jesuit Forum also produces materials that help groups discern the “signs of the times” and understand the complexities of the many social and ecological justice issues we face on a global level.

Two recent publications, grounded in Catholic social teaching, are *Living with Limits, Living Well! Hints for neighbours on an endangered planet* and an insightful workbook on Pope Francis' *The Joy of the Gospel*. These and other materials are available from our office (see details below). Visit our website to discover *Open Space*, our quarterly publication you can download in PDF format.



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We ask for your support.

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Bill Ryan is a Jesuit priest and has a PhD in economics from Harvard University. He was founding director of the Center of Concern in Washington, D.C. Bill has been provincial superior of the Jesuits in English Canada and general secretary of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. He is the author of numerous publications, particularly on Catholic social teaching, globalization and interfaith dialogue. He is the special advisor of the Jesuit Forum for Social Faith and Justice.

Anne O'Brien is an educator, working in both the elementary and secondary schools, in the classroom and in administration. She was the editor of *Catholic New Times* from 1990 to 1998. Since then she has been engaged in a number of areas ecumenical justice work. She was a member of the inaugural Board of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives. Currently, she is on the Board of Romero House and is a member of the Leadership Team of her religious community, the Grey Sisters of Pembroke.

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*I urgently appeal for a new dialogue about
how we are shaping the future of our planet.
We need a conversation which includes everyone,
since the environmental challenge we are undergoing,
and its human roots, concern and affect us all.*

- Pope Francis



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