



# GROWING TOGETHER IN FAITH "Living the Gospel Life"

A Reflection Guide

To

Pope Francis' Encyclical: *Laudato Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home

Contemplative Hike

Eno State Park – Cole Mill Rd. Picnic Area

Saturday, October 22, 2016, 9:00am

**RAIN DATE:** Saturday, October 29, 2016

September 22, 2016

Dear Hiker,

The Holy Cross Spirituality Committee would like to thank you for considering the Contemplative Hike in the beautiful Eno State Park on Saturday, October 22 at 9:00 am. Our hope is that your hike will be enhanced as the group stops at various points on the hike to reflect on Pope Francis's encyclical, Si Laudato: Care for Our Common Home.

The committee has pull together excerpts from the Pope's Encyclical and reflections questions. During the hike we will use some of the questions for discussion. If you would like to read the entire encyclical, you may download the document:

**[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/ encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_ enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_ enciclica-laudato-si.html)**

The prayer of the Spirituality Committee is that your experience on the hike will add immensely to your spiritual life. The hope is that you will become a member of the "culture of care" that Pope Francis encourages all of us to join.

Yours In Christ,

Member of the Holy Cross Spirituality Committee

## Introduction

The pope begins the encyclical by summarizing his presentation and citing earlier popes and other religious leaders who have spoken about the environment. He says Sister Earth “cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.”

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

**Question: Where have you seen harm inflicted on Sister Earth?**

***Nothing in this world is indifferent to us***

Paragraphs 4 - 6. In 1971, eight years after *Pacem in Terris*, Blessed Pope Paul VI referred to the ecological concern as “a tragic consequence” of unchecked human activity: “Due to an ill-considered exploitation of nature, humanity runs the risk of destroying it and becoming in turn a victim of this degradation”. He spoke in similar terms to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations about the potential for an “ecological catastrophe under the effective explosion of industrial civilization”, and stressed “the urgent need for a radical change in the conduct of humanity”, inasmuch as “the most extraordinary scientific advances, the most amazing technical abilities, the most astonishing economic growth, unless they are accompanied by authentic social and moral progress, will definitively turn against man”.

5. Saint John Paul II became increasingly concerned about this issue. In his first Encyclical he warned that human beings frequently seem “to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption”. Subsequently, he would call for a global ecological *conversion*. At the same time, he noted that little effort had been made to “safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic *human ecology*”. The destruction of the human environment is extremely

serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement. Every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in “lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies”. Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and “take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system”. Accordingly, our human ability to transform reality must proceed in line with God’s original gift of all that is.

6. My predecessor Benedict XVI likewise proposed “eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment”. He observed that the world cannot be analyzed by isolating only one of its aspects, since “the book of nature is one and indivisible”, and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations, and so forth. It follows that “the deterioration of nature is closely connected to the culture which shapes human coexistence”. Pope Benedict asked us to recognize that the natural environment has been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour. The social environment has also suffered damage. Both are ultimately due to the same evil: the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives, and hence human freedom is limitless. We have forgotten that “man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature”. With paternal concern, Benedict urged us to realize that creation is harmed “where we ourselves have the final word, where everything is simply our property and we use it for ourselves alone. The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves”.

**Question: Why do you think few people knew that Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI spoke out on environmental issues?**

***Saint Francis of Assisi***

10. I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

11. Francis helps us to see that 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. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song,

drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them "to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason". His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, "from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of 'brother' or 'sister'". Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

12. What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. "Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker" (*Wis* 13:5); indeed, "his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world" (*Rom* 1:20). For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty.<sup>[21]</sup> Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

**Question: St. Francis of Assisi has been called the patron saint of the environment. What is attractive about him?**

***My appeal***

13. The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.

14. I urgently appeal, then, 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. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the

establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges. Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity. As the bishops of Southern Africa have stated: "Everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation". All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.

15. It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face. I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows. I will then consider some principles drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition which can render our commitment to the environment more coherent. I will then attempt to get to the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes. This will help to provide an approach to ecology which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings. In light of this reflection, I will advance some broader proposals for dialogue and action which would involve each of us as individuals, and also affect international policy. Finally, convinced as I am that change is impossible without motivation and a process of education, I will offer some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience.

16. Although each chapter will have its own subject and specific approach, it will also take up and re-examine important questions previously dealt with. This is particularly the case with a number of themes which will reappear as the Encyclical unfolds. As examples, 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.

**Question: Pope Francis concludes his introduction with an appeal. What is your response?**

## **Chapter 1: What is happening to our common home**

Pope Francis is a firm believer in the need to gather the facts in order to understand a problem. Chapter 1 presents the scientific consensus on climate change along with a description of other threats to the environment, including threats to water supplies and biodiversity. He also looks at how environmental degradation has affected human life and society. Finally, he writes about the global inequality of the environmental crisis.

### **POLLUTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Paragraph 22. These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish. To cite one example, most of the paper we produce is thrown away and not recycled. It is hard for us to accept that the way natural ecosystems work is exemplary: plants synthesize nutrients which feed herbivores; these in turn become food for carnivores, which produce significant quantities of organic waste which give rise to new generations of plants. But our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse 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, reusing and recycling them. A serious consideration of this issue would be one way of counteracting the throwaway culture which affects the entire planet, but it must be said that only limited progress has been made in this regard.

Question: What does the pope mean by a "throwaway culture"? Do you agree with him? Why?

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

Paragraph 23. 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, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. 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 (such as volcanic activity, variations in the earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity. 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.

**Question: What does the pope mean when he says, "The climate is a common good"?**

## **GLOBAL INEQUALITY**

48. The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, 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". 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. The impact of present imbalances is also seen in the premature death of many of the poor, in conflicts sparked by the shortage of resources, and in any number of other problems which are insufficiently represented on global agendas.

**Question: Why does the pope believe "we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation"?**

## **WEAK RESPONSES**

Paragraph 53. These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. Yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness. 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.

**Question: Why does the pope think the response to the world's environmental crisis has been weak?**

## Chapter 2: The Gospel of creation

The pope argues that faith convictions can motivate Christians to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. He begins with the biblical account of creation and then meditates on the mystery of the universe, which he sees as a continuing revelation of the divine. "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." He concludes, "The earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone."

### THE WISDOM OF THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

Paragraph 66. The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), to "till it and keep it" (*Gen* 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. *Gen* 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.

**Question: According to Francis, the Bible teaches that the harmony between the creator, humanity, and creation was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. What does it mean to presume to take the place of God?**

Paragraph 71. Although "the wickedness of man was great in the earth" (*Gen* 6:5) and the Lord "was sorry that he had made man on the earth" (*Gen* 6:6), nonetheless, through Noah, who remained innocent and just, God decided to open a path of salvation. In this way he gave humanity the chance of a new beginning. All it takes is one good person to restore hope! The biblical tradition clearly shows that this renewal entails recovering and respecting the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the

Creator. We see this, for example, in the law of the Sabbath. On the seventh day, God rested from all his work. He commanded Israel to set aside each seventh day as a day of rest, a *Sabbath*, (cf. *Gen* 2:2-3; *Ex* 16:23; 20:10). Similarly, every seven years, a sabbatical year was set aside for Israel, a complete rest for the land (cf. *Lev* 25:1-4), when sowing was forbidden and one reaped only what was necessary to live on and to feed one's household (cf. *Lev* 25:4-6). Finally, after seven weeks of years, which is to say forty-nine years, the Jubilee was celebrated as a year of general forgiveness and "liberty throughout the land for all its inhabitants" (cf. *Lev* 25:10). This law came about as an attempt to ensure balance and fairness in their relationships with others and with the land on which they lived and worked. At the same time, it was an acknowledgment that the gift of the earth with its fruits belongs to everyone. Those who tilled and kept the land were obliged to share its fruits, especially with the poor, with widows, orphans and foreigners in their midst: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after the harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner" (*Lev* 19:9-10).

**Question: How does Francis use the Bible to support his view that the gift of the earth with its fruits belongs to everyone?**

## **THE MESSAGE OF EACH CREATURE IN THE HARMONY OF CREATION**

Paragraph 85. God has written a precious book, "whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe". The Canadian bishops rightly pointed out that no creature is excluded from this manifestation of God: "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine". The bishops of Japan, for their part, made a thought-provoking observation: "To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope". This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us, since "for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice". We can say that "alongside revelation properly so-called, contained in sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night". Paying attention to this manifestation, we learn to see ourselves in relation to all other creatures: "I express myself in expressing the world; in my effort to decipher the sacredness of the world, I explore my own".

**Question: Alongside revelation contained in Scripture, "there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night". How have you experienced God in creation?**

Paragraph 87. When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. This sentiment finds magnificent expression in the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
who is the day and through whom you give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;  
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather  
through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.  
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night,  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong”.

**Question: What is your reaction to the hymn of St. Francis of Assisi?**

### **Chapter 3: The human roots of the ecological crisis**

Although science and technology “can produce important means of improving the quality of human life,” they have also “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.” Francis says we are enthralled with a technocratic paradigm, which promises unlimited growth. But this paradigm “is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.” Those supporting this paradigm 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 behavior shows that for them maximizing profits is enough.”

Paragraph 109. The technocratic paradigm also 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 are less concerned with certain economic theories which today scarcely anybody dares defend, than with their actual operation in the functioning of the economy. They may not affirm such theories with words, but nonetheless support them with their deeds by

showing 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", while we are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources. We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth.

**Question: How does Francis argue that "the technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life"?**

**Question: Francis says, "We are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources". What does he mean? Why does this happen?**

**Question: Francis asserts that "by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion". Why does he say this? Do you agree?**

#### **Chapter 4: Integral Ecology**

Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior, and the ways it grasps reality. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

Paragraph 139. When we speak of the "environment", what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.

Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to and a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis 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.

**Question: Why does Francis argue that “we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental”?**

**Question: What would it mean to have “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature”?**

Paragraph 159. 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. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: “The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next”. An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision.

**Question: What are the consequences of seeing the earth as a gift that we have freely received and must share with others and that also belongs to those who will follow us?**

## **Chapter 5: Lines of approach and action**

What is to be done? Francis calls for dialogue on environmental policy in the international, national and local communities. Dialogue must include transparent decision-making so that the politics serve human fulfillment and not just economic interests. It also involves dialogue between religions and science working together for the common good.

Paragraph 164. Beginning in the middle of the last century and overcoming many difficulties, there has been a growing conviction that our planet is a homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home. An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of

production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*. 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, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water.

**Question:** Francis speaks of the need for a global consensus for confronting problems. Why is it needed, and how is it going to be achieved?

Paragraph 199. It cannot be maintained that empirical science provides a complete explanation of life, the interplay of all creatures and the whole of reality. This would be to breach the limits imposed by its own methodology. If we reason only within the confines of the latter, little room would be left for aesthetic sensibility, poetry, or even reason's ability to grasp the ultimate meaning and purpose of things. I would add that "religious classics can prove meaningful in every age; they have an enduring power to open new horizons... Is it reasonable and enlightened to dismiss certain writings simply because they arose in the context of religious belief?" It would be quite simplistic to think that ethical principles present themselves purely in the abstract, detached from any context. Nor does the fact that they may be couched in religious language detract from their value in public debate. The ethical principles capable of being apprehended by reason can always reappear in different guise and find expression in a variety of languages, including religious language.

Paragraph 200. Any technical solution which science claims to offer will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well. Believers 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 so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve. Cultural limitations in different eras often affected the perception of these ethical and spiritual treasures, yet by constantly returning to their sources, religions will be better equipped to respond to today's needs.

Paragraph 201. The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. Dialogue among the various sciences is likewise needed, since each can tend to become enclosed in its own language, while specialization leads to a certain isolation and the absolutization of its own field of knowledge. This prevents us from confronting environmental problems effectively. 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 requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that "realities are greater than ideas".

**Question: What are the separate roles of religion and science, and how can they dialogue and work together (199-201)?**

## **Chapter 6: Ecological education and spirituality**

We need to change and develop new convictions, attitudes and forms of life, including a new lifestyle. This requires not only individual conversion, but also community networks to solve the complex situation facing our world today. Essential to this is a spirituality that can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. Christian spirituality proposes a growth and fulfillment marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. Love, shown with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.

Paragraph 204. The current global situation engenders a feeling of instability and uncertainty, which in turn becomes "a seedbed for collective selfishness". 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. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. As these attitudes become more widespread, social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs. So our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather

events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest. Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction.

**Question: Francis is critical of a consumerist lifestyle. Why? What would a new lifestyle look like?**

Paragraph 216. 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. Here, I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an "interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity". Admittedly, Christians have not always appropriated and developed the spiritual treasures bestowed by God upon the Church, where the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us.

**Question: What does Francis mean by an ecological spirituality, and how can it motivate us to a passionate concern for the protection of our world?**

Paragraph 220. This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (*Mt* 6:3-4). It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings. By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems and in offering ourselves to God "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable" (*Rom* 12:1). We do not understand our superiority as a reason for personal glory or irresponsible dominion, but rather as a different capacity which, in its turn, entails a serious responsibility stemming from our faith.

Paragraph 221. Various convictions of our faith, developed at the beginning of this Encyclical 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, 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" (*Lk* 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 conversion. May the power and the light of the grace we have received also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world.

**Question:** What are the attitudes that foster a spirit of generous care?

**Question:** Love must also be civic and political, according to Francis. "Social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a 'culture of care' which permeates all of society." How can we encourage civic and political love in the United States?

