



## ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LAUDATO SI'* ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

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### WIDE RANGING VISION

- An encyclical is a teaching letter. This letter is addressed to “every person living on the planet.” It aims “to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home” (3).
- The Pope is speaking as a moral and spiritual guide, not as a scientist or a politician.
  - “On many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views. But we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair” (61).
  - “[O]ur immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience” (105).
- The encyclical is not primarily about public policy. It calls all persons to conversion.
  - “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself” (118).
- The encyclical is about hope:
  - “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” (13).
- The encyclical is about dialogue:
  - “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” (14).
  - “There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. Here I would state once more that the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (188).
- The encyclical is about facing reality:
  - “The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. ... 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” (23).

## **INTEGRAL ECOLOGY**

- The encyclical is about integral ecology:
  - “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).
- The encyclical is about the poor:
  - “The poorest areas and countries are less capable of adopting new models for reducing environmental impact because they lack the wherewithal to develop the necessary processes and to cover their costs” (52).
- The encyclical is about work:
  - “Helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work” (128). “In order to continue providing employment, it is imperative to promote an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity” (129).
- The encyclical is about the common good:
  - “Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good..., “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment” (156). “Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good” (157).
- The encyclical is about our children and grandchildren:
  - “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” (159).

## **CHALLENGES EVERYONE**

- The encyclical challenges both left and right:
  - “Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate. At times, developing countries face forms of international pressure which make economic assistance contingent on certain policies of “reproductive health”. ... To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues” (50).
  - “At times we see an obsession with denying any pre-eminence to the human person; more zeal is shown in protecting other species than in defending the dignity which all human beings share in equal measure” (90).
  - “It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted” (91).
  - “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry

of nature itself; everything is connected” (117). “Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion” (120).

- “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. ... Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (109).
- “Once more, we need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals. Is it realistic to hope that those who are obsessed with maximizing profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage which they will leave behind for future generations?” (190)
- “A path of productive development, which is more creative and better directed could correct the present disparity between excessive technological investment in consumption and insufficient investment in resolving urgent problems facing the human family. It could generate intelligent and profitable ways of reusing, revamping and recycling, and it could also improve the energy efficiency of cities” (192).
- “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 prove very profitable. (191).

### **TIME TO ACT**

➤ The encyclical is a call for a change in lifestyle and consumption:

- “Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change” (202).
- “When people become self-centred 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” (204).
- “‘The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.’ For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion” (217).

➤ The encyclical is a call to live life more fully:

- “Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption” (222).
- “Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full” (223).
- “Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them” (225).

➤ The encyclical is a call for international action:

- “We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay. Until greater progress is made in developing widely accessible sources of renewable energy, it is legitimate to choose the lesser of two evils or to find short-term solutions” (165).
- “Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most” (169).
- “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).

- The encyclical is a call for political action and courage:
  - “To take up these responsibilities and the costs they entail, politicians will inevitably clash with the mindset of short-term gain and results which dominates present-day economics and politics. But if they are courageous, they will attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility” (181).

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