

***LAUDATO SI'*: ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME**

EXTRACTS FROM HIS HOLINESS THE POPE'S ENCYCLICAL LETTER ON ECOLOGY AND CLIMATE (ST PAULS PUBLICATIONS, 2015)

This summary has been prepared to better understand the message from this enlightened leader of our time.

(Page number/Section number – refer to the original document.
Where *italics* are used they have been inserted for emphasis).

The Pope calls his encyclical, 'this lengthy reflection which has been both joyful and troubling' (188/246) and explains his aims in writing it, 'to promote *a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature*' (167/215). He makes it clear – 'I urgently appeal, for *a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet*' (19/14).

Theology

The work is refreshingly free from dogma, while naturally making occasional reference to the Bible, and to God and the teachings of Jesus:

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. The ideal is to *discover God in all things* (179/233). Jesus invited us to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air (175/226). 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?* (171/221).

He makes it clear that faith is a call to action:

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 (169/217).

He quotes the Australian Catholic Bishops' conference (2002) – 'we must acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's creation' (169/218), and says that Christians need '*an ecological conversion*' (169/217). 'An ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion' (170/219). And not only Christians - he makes it clear this is what we all need – *to create 'an ecological citizenship'* (164/211).

In pointing a way forward, His Holiness says, 'All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our (church) will provide an education in 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*' (166-7/214).

Ecology and environment destruction

His thinking is well-informed and holistic – ‘There is an interrelation between ecosystems and various spheres of social interaction, demonstrating yet again that the whole is greater than the part’ (116/141). Acknowledging ‘*the human origins of the ecological crisis*’ (84/101), he says, ‘The natural environment is a collective good, *the patrimony of all humanity* and the responsibility of everyone’ (81/95).

He reminds us that his predecessor was also concerned - ‘Pope Benedict asked us to recognise that the *natural environment has been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour* (13/6), and he, Pope Francis, advocates ‘*penalties for damage* inflicted on the environment’ (167/214). The Pope refers to ‘ever new ways of despoiling nature, purely for the sake of new consumer items and quick profit’ (151/192).

This destruction has led to a ‘*sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life*’ (9/2). ‘The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth’ (25/21). ‘The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded ... by market forces’ (149/190).

As an example of environment destruction His Holiness cites land clearing:

As long as the clearing of a forest increases production, no one calculates the losses entailed in the desertification of the land, the harm done to biodiversity or the increased pollution... businesses profit by paying only a fraction of the costs involved (153/195).

He concedes that, ‘There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a consensus’ (147/188), but, ‘If objective information suggests that serious and irreversible damage may result, *a project should be halted or modified, even in the absence of indisputable proof*’ (147/186):

This is especially the case when a project may lead to a greater use of natural resources, higher levels of emission or discharge, an increase in refuse, or significant changes to the landscape, the habitats of protected species or public spaces (145-6/184).

On climate change the Pope says:

... the advances have been regrettably few. Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most (135/169). *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* (132/165).

Politics

For the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis is worldly enough to recognise the need for a new approach to politics - 'Politics must pay greater attention to *foreseeing new conflicts and addressing the causes* which can lead to them. *But powerful financial interests prove most resistant to this effort*' (51/57). And, 'those really free are the minority who wield economic and financial power' (160/203). Despite these reservations about the political process, the Pope sets out an agenda for politics:

A strategy for real change calls for rethinking... 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 (155/197).

'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' (143/181).

He says, 'A global consensus is essential for... planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable energy and less polluting forms of energy (and) promoting a better management of marine and forest resources' (132/164).

As for policies which seek to wind back (limit) environment laws, with their supporters claiming they are designed to achieve a 'balance', His Holiness is again one step ahead in his thinking:

It is not enough to balance... the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the environment with progress. *Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress* (152/194).

More issues of our time

The Pope's call to redefine our notion of progress takes us into realms for which the present summary has insufficient capacity - globalisation, consumerism, waste, things we can do as individuals, and more. On the persistent ethos of growth, he says:

... *the idea of infinite or unlimited growth 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' (89/106). '... in the midst of economic growth... talk of sustainable growth usually becomes a way of distracting attention and offering excuses. It absorbs the language and values of ecology into the categories of finance and technocracy' (152-3/194).

One final extract will suffice for now, on inter-generational equity:

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 realise that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others* (128/159).

Conclusions

'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' (159/202).

'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' (158/201).

'A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal' (159/202).

This short summary paper, written in 2016, is dedicated to a spiritual, political and ecological awakening that we need to match the realities of the twenty-first century and define a course for the survival of all humankind.

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