

# A READING OF *LAUDATO SI'*

## *Understanding Pope Francis on Our Common Home*



### ENCOUNTERING *LAUDATO SI'*

*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.*

*-Laudato Si', 15-*

Since he first walked onto the balcony following his election, unencumbered by the ermine cape of his predecessors and seeking to receive the blessing of the people gathered in the square before he gave them his own, Jorge Bergoglio—Pope Francis—has sought to blow into a flame the ember of the Church; to show that the Catholic faith and tradition, carried through two millennia, is not an artifact for a museum but a living body, that still has much to say to the world. Through his tenderness and accessibility, his humor and his hospitality, his scuffed black shoes and his tendency to phone those who seek his counsel, Francis has put a decidedly human face and voice on the institution of the Church. He has, intentionally and powerfully, opened the

doors of the Church to let the air of the world flow in and the faith of Christ flow out. For Francis, the Church is not a citadel of truth, but a home and hospital, where the poor of the world and the God who loves them encounter one another to find a path of healing and hope.

With the publication of his first independent encyclical, *Laudato Si'—On Care for Our Common Home*, Francis takes his most important step thus far in guiding the Catholic Church out of the fortress of dogmatic defensiveness and into the city square. An encyclical is one of the highest forms of Church teaching—surpassed only by the documents of an Ecumenical Council or by a dogmatic declaration spoken *ex cathedra*—and it entails an obligation on the part of all the Catholic faithful to study and reflect. In the

recent history of the Church, encyclicals have often had profound affects on the development of the Church and its intersection with civil society—e.g. *Rerum Novarum*, by

Leo XIII, which spoke of the rights of labor in the 19th century; *Pacem in Terris*, by John XXIII, which decried nuclear proliferation and the danger of war in the 1960's; and *Populorum Progressio*, by Paul VI, which supported the aspirations of the poor in developing countries. In choosing this forum to speak of “integral ecology” (as he calls it), Francis indicates the importance of the subject for the faith and formation of all Catholics, and indeed, for the life of all people.

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Addressed not just to the bishops of the world, nor to Catholic faithful alone, but to all the peoples of the earth, *Laudato Si'* intends to apply reason, as well as Scripture and Tradition to what Francis sees as the crucial issue of our day: environmental exploitation and degradation, and its affects upon the poor. *Laudato Si'* (the name comes from a hymn of St. Francis of Assisi) brings the rich heritage of the Church into dialogue with scientists and sociologists, with humanists and atheists, with those of other religious traditions and those who profess only the human desire to end suffering or protect the planet on which we live. Like the Incarnation itself, this document determines not to shelter the mystery of God from the problems and passions of human life, but rather sees our God in the midst of Creation, and proclaims that God cares intimately about the choices and actions we make as members of this Creation.

Because of its concern for the realities of human existence, *Laudato Si'* has already been accused of lacking a spiritual focus and of sanctifying a partisan political agenda rather than proclaiming the profound truths of the Catholic tradition. Asserting that Francis meddles in areas not consistent with papal authority or expertise—e.g., with economics and global warming, with matter of science and financial policy—some critics have, even before the publication of the document, called for the Pope to keep quiet, or have denied the teaching authority of this encyclical. Indeed, tales of intrigue, worthy of a Dan Brown novel, have surrounded leaks and rumors coming from within the Vatican itself and reported in the media, as opponents of Francis' teaching have sought to dull the power of this letter before it came out. Even within the hierarchy, some have attempted to mollify critics by smoothing the sharp edges of the Pope's analyses, suggesting that the letter

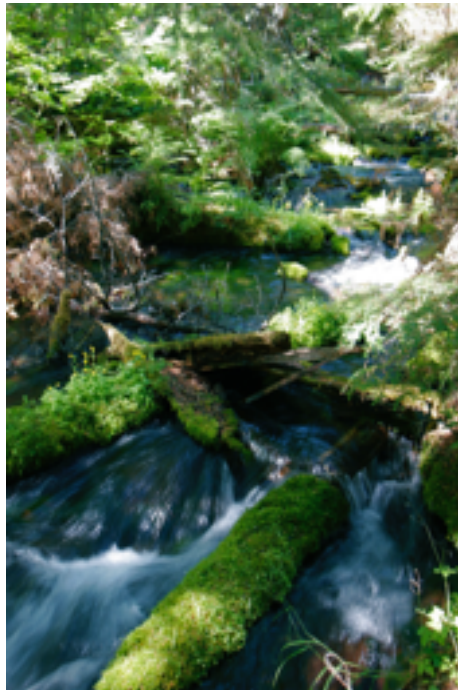
offers nothing new or that it can be easily ignored. Yet, in the end the encyclical speaks for itself, and will stand or fall as a teaching instrument to the degree it expresses the faith of the People of God and helps the Church to come to know the God in whom "*we live and move and have our being.*"

Though it is a long document (246 paragraphs) and covers a wide swath of topics—from addictive consumption to biodiversity, from *Genesis* to the rights of property v. the right of the common good—it is vital that we engage *Laudato Si'* and prayerfully discern its teachings

and its call. In often beautiful and passionate prose, Francis summons us to reflect not on abstract moral precepts, but on a dynamic moral vision which will affect how we live our lives, care for our neighbors, renew our earth, and form our government. If taken seriously, this letter will change us as individuals and as a community of faith: change the way we gather and the way we pray; the way we share with the poor and the way we educate our young; the way we reach out to our partners in the Church and our partners of other faiths; it will change us in our understanding of the mystery of God, played out in the richness of God's Creation.

But first, we must commit ourselves to reading the document, and reflecting upon it!

What follows in these pages aims to help in that reading by offering some reflections and explication. This will not be a definitive or scholarly interpretation of the document, but a chance to read it well and, I hope, to spark the conversations we will be having in the coming months as members of the Church. I hope all will be able to read this important gift of Pope Francis, and so prepare for what is to come, through God's grace and the power of the Spirit, alive in the People of God.





## PREFACE

*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.*

*-Laudato Si', 15-*

It is a longstanding tradition of Church documents that their title is taken from the first words of the introduction. Consequently, authors choose first words carefully, knowing they will be used to frame the meaning of the entire document. Thus, in beginning his encyclical with the words of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis seeks to do more than acknowledge his patron: he seeks to enlist the popularity of Francis, among both Catholics and non-Catholics, for the sake of ecological action among both secular and religious people. Indeed, by the end of the Preface, St. Francis has become an icon for the entire encyclical, manifesting in his person and life both the interreligious attitude of the letter, and the “*integral ecology*” that Pope Francis hopes will harmonize “*concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace*” (10). Francis—who went from affluence to chosen poverty; who spoke to the animals as sisters and brothers; who called together women and men of many social classes, and went out among the Moslems in dialogue; who lived a life of prayer and reflection in simplicity—becomes for the Pope a model of what is needed, if we are

to solve the challenges that threaten the planet, and the men and women who live on it.

The goal of the Preface, however, involves more than enlisting St. Francis as the image of “*integral ecology*”; for Pope Francis also wants to provide the context in which he approaches this controversial subject, by noting the encyclical's continuity with previous papal and Church proclamations. Using the teachings of every pope since John XXIII (except for the short-lived John Paul I) and the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, of the Orthodox Church, Francis justifies both the scope and substance of his letter by placing it within the context of ecclesial history. Thus, John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*—which dealt with the international politics of nuclear disarmament, and was the first encyclical to ever address not just bishops but “*all men and women of good will*” (3)—sets a precedent for Francis' address to “*every living person on this planet*” (3), and for his teaching on the politically volatile issue of global environmental degradation. Likewise, the writings of each subsequent Pope, ground Francis' critique of consumption and the exploitation of resources: i.e., Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI all argue that environmental issues have moral implications which are proper matter for the teaching office of the Church, as does the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

As a side-note, it is significant, and indicative of the profound healing Francis seeks, that Bartholomew is included in this list, placed in a position of authority, adjacent to the popes. To give the Patriarch such a position in an encyclical—the highest expression of papal teaching authority short of a dogmatic definition or a document of a council—suggests a parity between the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Roman pontiff. Reaching out to Bartholomew, “*with whom we share the hope of ecclesial communion*” (7) Francis is using this letter as a means to unite the divided Church, as well as a way to unite those within with those outside the Church. In citing the writings of the Ecumenical Patriarch—who calls us “*to replace consumption*



with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a sharing, an asceticism ‘entails learning to give, and not simply to give up’” (9)—Francis not

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only bolsters his own position with interreligious support, he models the unity needed in society, and creates a connection between the teaching of the popes and that of the Patriarch. He then reinforces this ecumenical

outreach by referring to himself as “*Bishop of Rome*” [10], a title acceptable to the Orthodox Church in a way that “*Pope*” is not.

The Preface, therefore, positions *Laudato Si’* within the tradition of modern papal teaching; it invokes the spirit of St. Francis; and it reaches out across the ecumenical divide—all of which is just a start. In preparing the reader for the body of the document, the Preface also affords Francis the opportunity to explain the challenge which he sees (i.e., “to protect our common home” [13]), and to make the appeal which he hopes will move us (i.e., “for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” [14]). The Preface then provides the process by which we might have this dialogue effectively, and so better face the challenge we are given. The Preface ends with an outline of the method and themes of the coming chapters—a method reminiscent of the Ignatian discernment in which Pope Francis was formed, and themes which will appear again and again in the encyclical (as they have already appeared in other writings of Francis).

To better understand the method of discernment used in *Laudato Si’*, we might do well to recall the Ignatian paradigm, which speaks of the dialogue of context and experience, leading to reflection and action, and ending in evaluation and on-going discernment—a paradigm roughly

followed in *Laudato Si’*. Chapters One and Two provide a context for our discernment: laying out what is happening in “our common home” and then reminding us of Scripture’s teaching on Creation and our place in it. Chapter Three goes further: identifying the crucial experiences of our day—including technological growth, globalization, and social breakdown—which have brought to a head the issues covered by this encyclical. Only at this point, having given us context and experience, does Francis call us to the profound reflection needed for cultural transformation. In Chapter Four, the Pope introduces the notion of “*integral ecology*,” which seeks to unite the various themes of social and environmental degradation, and then bring to bear on them the humanistic and theological principles previously discussed. Next, in Chapter Five, the Pope offers “*Lines of Approach and Action*,” in which he calls all people to implement categories of change—political, social, and environmental—while leaving many of the specifics to those personally involved in the issues. Finally, in Chapter Six, *Laudato Si’* calls each of us to the personal conversion essential for true social renewal. In this summation, he presents an inspirational vision of on-going conversion and continuous discernment by all the children of God. In the vision of Francis, we are clearly called to take up the work of this discernment—to search for the Spirit of God moving in the world, activating us for the purpose of the Kingdom. The great sin, then, is not to err, but to fail to try, to fail to unite ourselves with the insights given us by St. Francis and by the Church: insights of a world redeemed and yet wounded, endangered yet accompanied always by the love of her Creator.





## CHAPTER ONE - WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR COMMON HOME

*In those days John the Baptist appeared,  
preaching in the desert of Judea and saying,  
“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”*

*At that time, Jerusalem, all Judea, and the  
whole region around the Jordan were going out  
to him and were being baptized by him in the  
Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.*

*-Matthew 3: 1-2, 5-6-*

*As often occurs in periods of deep crisis which  
require bold decisions, we are tempted to think  
that what is happening is not entirely clear. . .  
Such evasiveness serves as a license to carry on  
with our present lifestyles and models 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.*

*-Laudato Si', 59-*

While the Prologue of *Laudato Si'* establishes its historical continuity with prior Church teachings, and outlines the method to be employed, it is only in Chapter One—*What is Happening to Our Common Home*—that one begins to see why this encyclical might make some readers uncomfortable. Framed not as a question but as

declarative statement, the title of this chapter indicates the Pope's intention: to describe the current ecological and sociological conditions of the world, for the sake of engaging our common humanity. In other words, as in all discernment, the Pope intends to use empirical data—here taken from the best scientific research available,—to provide himself (and all people of good will) with a context for effective action. As he says, *“Our goal is not to amass information to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, 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).

In setting this goal, the Pope makes no claim to special knowledge or infallibility about scientific matters (as some of his critics assert); but instead demonstrates that an incarnational faith must always look to the reality of the world as a starting point for determining the moral actions of real human beings. Catholicism is not a religion of disembodied principles, but seeks to unite moral norms with the world as it is, since the world is a revelation of God (a notion taken up more fully in the following chapter). When speaking about ecological issues, science provides a critical—albeit

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not exclusive—part of the context for any moral discernment. Further, when united with the principles inherent in natural law (e.g., the common good), this scientific knowledge offers us insights that can be understood by the whole human family, even those who might deny the truths of revelation. In his desire to find common ground among all people of good will, Francis, therefore, begins *Laudato Si'* with an explication of the scientific and social realities of the world.

The first scientific issue addressed by Francis is pollution and climate change. Though vigorously denied by some or mitigated by others, Francis accepts that a *“very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system”* (23), and points out that presuming a human role in such warming is reasonable given the tendencies of our *“throwaway culture”* (22). Because our use of resources does not mirror the natural processes by which all things grow, die, return to the earth, and then form the beginning of a new generation, we are left with mounds of waste—containing everything from unused styrofoam to airborne pollutants such as carbon dioxide and methane—which must, reasonably, disorder the world. With science establishes, reason concurs: we cannot simply continue a pattern of consumption and waste without endangering the earth—and,

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consequently, those who depend upon the earth. For, as Francis notes, the change in climate, coming so quickly, will not allow animals and plants to adapt, nor allow people to remain in the

places where the environment is becoming increasingly hostile. This creates social, as well as environmental challenges, which harm not only the place where the damage originates but the whole world and its people. Indeed, anyone in the U.S. who recalls the acid rain of the 1980’s—which was caused by the smokestacks of eastern industrial cities and led to the death of huge swaths of forest in Canada and the midwest—can understand the Pope’s point: *“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods”* (25).

The Pope then moves from air and climate, to water—which is equally endangered through activities of consumption, pollution, and waste.

Yet, in speaking of water, Francis notes the additional issue of privatization of resources. Unlike air, water can be controlled and restricted, relatively easily, within a market environment, leading to potential waste on the part of those who control the resource and suffering on the



part of those who do not. On the west coast of the United States, in the middle of a drought, it is not hard to see this conflict already being lived out, as wealthy landowners in southern California claim that they should be able to use any amount of water they want, if they can pay for it; while poorer neighbors suffer with increased levels of salt and other minerals coming from their tap. As Francis notes throughout this section, the right to clean air and sufficient water is a natural right, which emerges from our identity as human beings. To dispossess people from such a right, simply because they are poor, in order to protect the property rights of a few, simply because they are rich, is contrary to the natural law, and creates a conflict that society must resolve—a conflict already causing bloodshed in Africa and the Middle East.

In speaking of a third issue of concern, the loss of biodiversity, Pope Francis mourns the unknown varieties of life lost when regions such as the Amazon or Congo basins are burned down for fuel or plowed under for farmland. Yet, he mourns them not just as lost resources, but because destruction of these species, by human action, is unjust. Each species has an inherent



dignity apart from its status as a “resource.” Opposing the self-centered attitude created by unbridled consumerism, Francis appeals to the great tradition of natural law, which notes that living things have their own reason for being, and do not exist simply for our use. We are not the center of the universe, but are part of a community that extends across borders and through time, across species and systems. As Francis says: “*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). For a person to assume that he can consume and then discard everything that exists, simply because he had the good fortune to get to the trough first, undermines any notion of natural justice, impoverishes our children, and makes all but the individual into a mere object of consumption—which leads to Francis’ next point.

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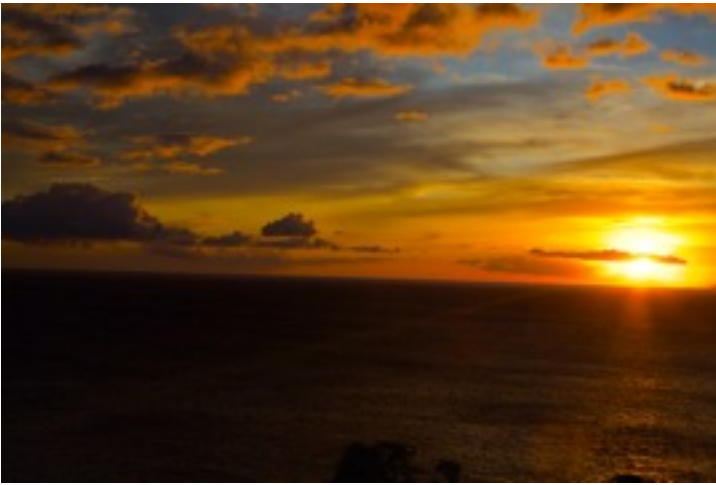
In the final sections of Chapter One, we move from an explication of environmental science to a look at the sociological effects of our “throwaway culture.” In sections IV and V of this Chapter—*Decline in the Quality of Human Life* and *Breakdown of Society and Global Inequality*—the Pope points out that “*Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity*” (43). Rejecting an environmental posture which sees human beings merely as the enemy of nature, and in which privatization is used as a method to keep the vast majority of people away from the world of which they are a part, Francis asserts that “*The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together*” (48). In Francis’ analysis, the excessive consumption by the developed nations—and the recognition that such levels of consumption, if they became universal, would be catastrophic—often leads to the repression of the poor, rather than a reduction of consumption by the well-off. This is why

Francis says the issue is not birth rates, but the distribution of goods: “*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).

For Francis, then, what has happened to our common “home” begins with the denial of commonality, so prevalent among those comfortable in their inordinate levels of consumption. Laying the groundwork for the reflection and action that will come later in

the encyclical, the Pope calls for “*differentiated responsibilities*” (52), which demand that the wealthy live in communion with the poor, rather than in opposition. Only through such differentiated responsibilities can the world develop the comprehensive solutions incumbent on all of us as human beings, and even more so, as children of a loving God.





## CHAPTER TWO - THE GOSPEL OF CREATION

*In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning. . .*

*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, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.*

*-Laudato Si', 99-*

Having addressed *Laudato Si'* to all the people of the world, Pope Francis begins by exploring the philosophical context of the environmental challenge in a way accessible to people of all spiritual traditions, as well as those who do not identify with any spirituality. Presenting those challenges identified by science—e.g., global climate change, the crisis of water resources, etc.—and utilizing moral concepts not dependent on divine revelation—e.g., distributive justice, the common good, differentiated responsibilities, etc.—Francis argues that the issue of environmental degradation transcends sectarian beliefs. Yet, at the same time, it may not be surprising that the head of the Roman Catholic Church also believes that faith and revelation can contribute something to the discussion. Indeed, religious

belief should, in Francis' view, reinforce the sense of responsibility that any human being might feel towards the environment, since science and faith ought to complement, not conflict, with one another.

In noting this complementarity of faith and reason, Francis is implicitly responding to those critics who accuse him of exceeding his spiritual authority by addressing matters of public policy. To those who maintain that the Pope should not speak about science or social structures (since his purview is spiritual matters), Francis presents the anti-fundamentalist vision characteristic of Catholic thought throughout history, noting that the Catholic tradition *"is open to dialogue with philosophical thought; this has enabled her to produce various synthesis between faith and reason. The development of the Church's social teaching represents such a synthesis"* (63). Far from the literalism of some Christian sects, Catholicism understands the Bible as a privileged revelation of God, but one that exists in concert with the revelation found in Creation—and each of these revelations offers something to the other. Thus, the Church must learn from science and philosophy, that she might better understand revelation; likewise, science and philosophy might be stronger when understood through the wisdom offered in the spiritual tradition of the Church. So it is that both science and Scripture are proper matter for the teaching office, since they exist best when in concert with one another.

Turning to a related issue, Francis also responds to those in his own tradition who see the world

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only as profane. It may seem odd, in a religion whose foundation is the Incarnation of God, that there is still a question about the sacred nature of the created world; yet, as Francis notes, *“philosophies which despised the body, matter, and the things of the world”* have been present throughout Christian history (98) in the form of dualisms that separate the spiritual from the material, the sacred from the profane, the earthly from the heavenly. While theologians at least as ancient as St. Paul have distinguished between *“flesh”* (i.e., the merely material) and *“body”* (i.e., the spiritually-infused, living being), other influences have often led theologians to posit the physical world as evil, and contrary to the purely spiritual truth of God. Such dualisms have contributed to many evils in the history of the Church—e.g., clericalism, sexism, etc. Indeed, even in the liturgical prayers of the Church such dualisms creep in, though they run counter to the notion of a Creator God, present in all that exists; and of an Incarnate God, who participates fully in the material world through his birth, life, and acceptance of death. One of the great graces of the Christian ecological movement is its reassertion of the *“theology of creation,”* so often lost in the other-worldly attitudes that have dominated in recent Catholic history.

Throughout Chapter Two of *Laudato Si’*, Francis employs both Scripture and tradition to establish a case for greater ecological and social responsibility on the part of all believers. Beginning with *Genesis*, and tracing the idea throughout the Old Testament, Francis argues that, throughout Scripture, the world comes from God and belongs to God. God creates the order of nature, and never withdraws from it. Rather, from Adam onward, God seeks to share the work of nature with human beings. The notion, so often held by those who would exploit the earth, that God has granted us absolute control over the earth is a misreading of Scripture. As Francis says, “We



*must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures . . . ‘The earth is the Lord’s’ (Ps. 24:1). . . Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: ‘The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me’ (Lev. 25:23)”* (67). Rather than seeing ourselves as absolute owners of the land, we are to see ourselves as in relationship with the created order and with the Creator, to whom we have responsibilities and for whom we must offer our reverence. Indeed, *relationship* is the key principle emerging from a biblical approach to Creation, since—from *Genesis* forward—

Scripture teaches that human existence is *“grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself”* (65).

This biblical vision of the world and our place in it opposes, in Francis’ words, a *“tyrannical anthropocentrism”* that exploits

both the earth and, ultimately, other people. Indeed, the biblical vision reinforces Chapter One’s philosophical argument regarding our duty to preserve such things as the diversity of species, since each species and individual gives glory to God in its own way. We cannot, Francis argues, reduce God’s Creation to something whose good is purely functional: *“By virtue of our unique*

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*dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for ‘the Lord by wisdom founded the earth’ (Prov. 3:19)” (69). The world is created with intentionality by God, out of love—a love that includes us, yet is not limited to us; extending, indeed, throughout Creation. We participate in this love through our interaction with the world. This does not mean that nature has priority over us, or that we must all become vegans and cease to use the things of the world. However, it does suggest that “the ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us” (83), and that, therefore, our relationship to other creatures must be respectful and humble.*

Bound up with this idea of God as Creator and owner of the world, is the unique place of human beings within the created order: a place that rests not on our possession of the earth, but on God’s intention for us: “We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason ‘each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary’” (65). Since all created things, including human beings, are part of God’s loving plan, finding their ultimate destiny in “the fullness of God” (83), we must be in communion with the earth and with one another, in order to fulfill our destiny. Francis rejects mere “*naturalism*” which values the earth to the disparagement of people, and uses Scripture to argue that a “*sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion, and concern for our fellow human beings*” (91). Invoking his namesake, St. Francis, the Pope proclaims that the message of the covenant is one

of unity and consistency: “*Everything is related, and we human being 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).

Once a person of faith acknowledges the biblical principle that the world belongs to God, who shares it with humanity as an inheritance meant to serve human flourishing, a necessary corollary must follow: i.e., that private property, while useful at times, is not an absolute or inviolable right. The world is created as an expression of love, which includes every person, and the goods of the world are, therefore, ultimately intended to

serve the community, as a whole. As the Christian tradition has held, at least as far back as

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Augustine, private property may be a *legitimate* right, but is not an *absolute* one; it must be subordinated to the good of all, or as Francis says, quoting St. John Paul II, “*there is always a social mortgage on private property*” (93). Taken seriously, this biblical position—which raises the blood pressure of many *laissez faire* capitalists and free marketeers—suggests radical changes in the social order for many parts of the world, and calls into question the “*unjust habits of a part of humanity*” (93). If one begins with the equal dignity of all persons, and the equal right of all to the goods of God’s creation, then land and education, credit and housing, meaningful labor and moderated consumption all become not just societal goods (as they were in Chapter One) but, also, religious demands. Indeed, if we believe, as Scripture says, that the world is God’s, i.e., “*the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone*,” (95) then the excessive consumption of the few violates a divine law, since it robs the many of basic human goods.



By the end of Chapter Two, *Laudato Si'* has established, then that both reason and revelation oppose the current paradigm of consumption and control. Little wonder that those who prosper by this paradigm find this encyclical threatening.



### CHAPTER THREE - THE HUMAN ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL QUESTION

*Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us.*

*-Laudato Si', 106-*

When I was about 12 years old, my father and I refurbished an old wooden sail boat: sanding and caulking its hull, varnishing its mast and covers, and replacing or repairing its various hardware and rigging. My father had always loved to sail, since his boyhood days on Spot Pond in Massachusetts; and when he took me out he showed me how to read the air and the waves, how to tack against the wind or speed along with it. As one rarely considers in a big cabin cruiser, a sailboat uses nature to accomplish its goal. Though it employs resources—the wood of the hull and the lead in the keel, varnish and brass,

cotton or nylon for its sails—a traditional sailboat offers an example of a technology largely synchronized to its environment: i.e., it conquers the elements by taking account of them, utilizing the qualities of water and air to facilitate movement through them.

On the other hand, one might consider the technology of the dams and levees used to protect the city of New Orleans. As described in John McPhee's book, *The Control of Nature*, the natural order of the Mississippi involves shifting channels, where silt builds in each until it overflows and changes direction. Thus, the river naturally flows down one channel for many years, then gradually shifts direction and flows down another channel, thus forming the delta. Such a transient river challenges the building of a great city; so the Army Corps of Engineers, over the last century or so, constructed a series of levees to control the river's flow around the city—regardless of its natural course. Through this domination of nature, New Orleans has grown into a great city. Yet, at the same time the city has become lower and lower, relative to the waters that surround it. Today, the city is well below the level of the river, which explains its tendency to flood, and remain flooded, when storms come which damage the levee system.

Unlike sailing, where human beings gain dominion over nature through learning its ways, the technological paradigm behind these levees—i.e., the primary paradigm of the industrial and post-industrial era—involves not dominion but domination of nature. In this anthropocentric paradigm, the approach towards nature is one “of possession, mastery, and transformation” (106). Humans are the measure of all things, and nature is to be confronted and conformed to human demands, rather than harnessed and cultivated by human wisdom. Motivated by a market ideal of standardization (essential in any model of industrial production), and dependent upon a notion of virtually unlimited resources, this paradigm understands human progress as the growth of control and dominance over the natural world—a world which exists to be



exploited for the immediate benefit of those who control it as private property. In such a view, everything exists as a resource—either a material resource or a human resource—to be used, through technology, for the good of those people who control the technology. According to Pope Francis, in Chapter Three of *Laudato Si'*, it is this “*technocratic paradigm*” (109), which today dominates our entire economic and political life, and which, if not checked, will ultimately lead to the destruction of both our environmental and social order.

Throughout this chapter, Francis explores the ways in which technological power, combined with the market ideal of maximizing profits, create a consumerism that reduces—rather than increases—human freedom, and leads to a confrontation both with nature and within social institutions. In a region of the world where not having a cell phone or internet access seems inconceivable, we can easily comprehend what Francis means when he says, “*We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups*” (107). Things that are, at first, luxuries or oddities (e.g., digital cameras, smart phones, etc.) quickly become necessities in the minds of consumers, thus empowering producers. Soon, their use shapes our relationship to the world and to one another (e.g., through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat). And the sense of need they create in us seems to impel us to get the materials for their construction, regardless of the damage to the environment and social order of lands and peoples far away. So it is that an apparently neutral technology, used to master a particular social limitation, changes—often without our conscious choice—the whole structure of our society, and effects the balance of resources around the world.

**“We have to accept that technological products are not neutral, for they create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups” (107).**

For Francis, this technocratic paradigm, with its market-driven consumption, decrees a sense of inevitability that reduces our freedom, and, indeed, imperils our world.

Yet, human beings have the capacity to resist and choose otherwise: choose against the “*accumulation of constant novelties*” (113); against the “*spirit of globalized technology, where a constant flood of new products coexists with a tedious monotony*” (113). We can choose, instead, “*positive and sustainable progress*” (114); choose “*to recover the values and great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur*” (114). Using a term oddly reminiscent of Mao, Francis calls not for an abandonment of technology—he is not a Luddite—but for a “*bold cultural revolution*” (114) in which the choices that are made regarding technology emerge from the reality of interconnection and not the ideology of the market or of human domination.



Having laid out, in sections I and II, an overview of our contemporary technocratic experience, Francis then goes on to note many of the particular ways our “*modern anthropocentrism*” manifests itself within the culture: e.g., through distorted notions of individuality, that turn everything but one’s own self (and sometimes even that) into an object for sale and use; through relativism, that places one’s personal desires

(empowered by technology and wealth) above both the humanity of others and the structures of reality; through an idolatry of the market, which posits that unlimited consumption can eventually work everything out. Introducing for the first time the concept of *“integral ecology”* (124), the Pope responds to the various deficits implicit in anthropocentric technocracy with a vision grounded in Christian humanism, where living beings have an *intrinsic* and not just an *instrumental* value, and persons are seen as interdependent on the earth and on one another.

In such an *“integral ecology,”* labor exists not simply to maximize the profit of owners, but as a human good, in which all persons have a share.

**Society has the “right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production” (129), and also to ensure that part of the goal of business is the creation of jobs for all members of society.**

While profit for investors may be part of the calculation, the well-being of the earth and those who occupy her should always be considered of primary value. Work

is one part of the overall social ecology, a *“path to growth, human development, and personal fulfillment”* (128) for all those involved. Thus, society has the *“right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production”* (129), and also to ensure that part of the goal of business is the creation of jobs for all members of society.

Similarly, scientific research cannot be pursued simply for the sake of idle curiosity, nor towards the end of concentrating power and control in the hands of a few; but must always be done with a sense of discernment towards the good of all persons and the long term good of the earth. Using biological research as a key example, Francis notes that *“any legitimate intervention will*

*act on nature only in order ‘to favor its development in its own line, that of creation, as intended by God’”* (132). Without drawing a conclusion on the specific benefits or dangers of genetic manipulation to the food supply, Francis sets out moral principles to challenge current social trends, principles essential to the integral



ecology that faith and reason demand: e.g., genetic manipulation must not destroy the diversity of species, nor the diversity represented by small producers. It is, Francis notes, immoral to concentrate food production in *“oligopolies”*—though, it is already beginning to happen, exacerbated by *“the production of infertile seeds”* (134), which places farmers under the thumb of seed manufacturers, since crops are modified to be intentionally barren.

For Francis, the danger to the earth and to society emerges less from intentional acts of evil than from a surrender to forces that seem independent and scientific. Whether one falls prey to the principles of capitalism or the lure of technology, if one removes the element of human ethics, one creates a monster that *“will not easily be able to limit its own power”* (136).

## CHAPTER FOUR - 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.*

*-Laudato Si', 139-*

Late in the evening, on the roof of the Jesuit residence in Rome, after a long day of writing letters or lobbying Cardinals, working among the poor or giving direction to distant brothers, Ignatius Loyola would often stand, gazing out at the stars. Long before light pollution had dimmed the view of city dwellers, the founder of the Society of Jesus would peer for hours into the vast sea of stars, spread like bits of silver across



the night sky. And standing there, he would weep, overwhelmed by the beauty of creation and by the love given to him at the hands of the Creator. To Ignatius, the brilliance of the stars and the smallness of his body, the vastness of creation and the gentle call of the Gospel, the movement of the human heart and the service of the poor were not separate items, to be sought in isolation, but were all wondrously bound together, united in the mystery of God's own being. Thus, truth overcomes division, as we "*seek God in all things, and all things in God.*"

Formed in the Ignatian tradition, Pope Francis maintains that any true ecology must include the varied elements that make up "*the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop*" (138); i.e., must include not

only environmental concerns but also the social, cultural, economic, and historical concerns of human beings. Conversely, any consideration of human justice must always consider the environmental conditions in which all humans exist, and of which humans are a part: "*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*" (139). In *Laudato Si'*, Francis seeks to present a model of "*integral ecology*"—an ecology which does not choose between environmental preservation and human flourishing, but recognizes that the two are mutually dependent: dimensions of a single ecological reality. Integral ecology proclaims a

common identity, endangered by the same source: a "*consumerist vision*" (144) that reduces both nature and persons to mere resources for exploitation.

For Francis, the work of the current age entails the development of a functioning integral ecology, in which environmental problems and social problems are approached with a unified sensibility and an awareness that "*everything is related*" (142). Such an ecology cannot be merely theoretical, or even legislative, but must be sustainable in the ordinary lives of people. Thus, Francis notes, it is not enough to outlaw the destruction of forests and wetlands, if the social structures to enforce such laws do not exist. Likewise, so long as the demand for drugs continues in the developed world, the cultivation of drugs—with all its corrosive effects—will continue among the poor of the developing world. Integral ecology requires sensitivity to both the environmental and human conditions that are at work, shaping people's choices,



conditioning their freedom. Integral ecology calls us to a holistic vision, which avoids reductionist ideology, whether from simplistic environmentalism or free-market capitalism. Indeed, for Francis, we must build an ecology in which the intrinsic value of life, and the intricacies of both natural systems and human society, are valued and preserved.

Throughout much of Chapter Four, Francis outlines how various dimensions of human and environmental ecology unite under the common threat of a *“consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s globalized economy”* (144). This unity may be seen in the similar way that culture and nature are endangered. For just as nature creates diverse species and sub-species, so human beings create a variety of cultures—cultures that express the relationship of a community to its environment through particular forms of art, music, literature, architecture, etc. Such cultures are dynamic and distinct—as are diverse eco-systems—and different cultures may even create alternative notions of *“quality of life”* (144). However, just as modern industrial farming often destroys diverse species for the sake of standardization, so, too, a globalized culture often destroys indigenous cultures through an imposition of processes and systems contrary to and often oppressive of those local cultures. In this way, minority cultures are homogenized and absorbed into a single world-culture of consumers and producers.

Furthermore, such consumption of culture is often joined to an exploitation of the natural environment—as when international corporations *“exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood”* and thus *“undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity”* (145). At St. Joseph, we need only consider the current struggle of our Sister Parish in El Salvador to recognize Francis’

point. In the region around Arcateo, where the local culture has struggled to maintain itself through a long and violent war, and now has made progress with a home-grown water system, international gold mining conglomerates endanger the very mountains on which the



people live. Through hydraulic mining, these foreign corporations threaten to poison the water so recently made available to the poor—a result of the run-off that comes with such mining. This is not merely an assault on the natural environment, but an assault on the entire way of life. In such a case, one sees the Pope’s point clearly: the damage to the social structure and to the environment exist in union with each other.

**Francis also praises authentic community development, in which human ecology and natural ecology are raised together through respectful inclusion of all voices, as well as the appropriate use of the human sciences.**

While pointing to such threats, Francis also praises authentic community development, in which human ecology and natural ecology are raised together through respectful inclusion of all voices, as well as the appropriate use of the human sciences. Speaking of the need for an urban development built not on homogenization or selfishness, the Pope offers some key characteristics: e.g., the preservation of *“common areas, visual landmarks, and urban landscapes which increase our sense of belonging”* (151); the inclusion of housing for the poor and the integration of the poor into the life of the city—including its

## CHAPTER FIVE - LINES OF APPROACH AND ACTION

*Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities.*

-*Laudato Si'*, 165-

*Freedom is nothing but a chance to be better.*

-*Albert Camus*-

architecture; and the “need to give priority to public transportation” (153). These characteristics of good urban development rely not merely on market forces but on social action and the inclusion of all, and affirm the dignity of the person as a part of the natural order. They seek to respect nature—including human nature—as intrinsically valuable, and as part of the common good. We humans have worth not abstractly, not as mere consumers, but in our own bodies; thus, our bodies, like all nature, must be respected as “God’s gift. . .for welcoming and accepting the entire world” (155).

In the final sections of Chapter Four, Francis expands on the notion of common good, within the context of integral ecology: “An integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics” (156). Integral ecology entails respect for the person, as such: i.e., the person as an individual, as a member of society, and as a part of the natural order. Like the common good, integral ecology demands justice—especially distributive justice, so often overlooked in societies ruled by market economics. Further, the common good demands a long-view, which recognizes the inevitability of death and the duty one has to future generations. In other words, an integral ecology must evoke in us—as the night sky did for Ignatius—a sense of humility (not mastery) before the greatness of creation, and a sense of responsibility for all that is and all that has yet to be.



On Monday, 3 August 2015, the President of the United States declared, “We’re the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.” Demonstrating awareness of the critical moment discussed in *Laudato Si'*, this declaration offers hope that our nation may move beyond merely contemplating the “cracks in the planet as well as the profoundly human causes of environmental degradation” (163). Yet, in an age when partisan politics so often thwarts even modest moves towards an “integral ecology,” such intentions can ring hollow. For although President Obama’s words resonate with the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, what is needed is something more than words. What is needed is national and international action: a radical transformation of our disordered consumerist ways, a realignment of our national political structures, and a reordering and empowering of our international economic and political system. In the spirit of Ignatius, Francis proclaims that discernment is not merely an academic nor even a spiritual exercise: it requires the fulfillment that comes only through action. Thus, the success of *Laudato Si'* depends not on how well we contemplate the problems of “our common home,” but how faithfully we work to alleviate them.

Having outlined the environmental and social challenge of our age, Francis calls for the reordering of civil society through a series of substantive dialogues. In these dialogues, the Pope does not claim infallibility; but, rather,

offers the moral wisdom of the Church: a wisdom shaped by reason and Scripture, and guided by a humanism that includes both science and the “*ethical and spiritual treasures*” (200) available through faith. “*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*” (187). For Francis, the Church’s role is to assist the world’s discernment by uniting the best available science and sociology with principles of the common good (e.g., equality of treatment, distributive justice, transparency, etc.). And, fundamental to this assistance, the Church offers a voice to the poor and indigenous, so often left out of these dialogues.

For Francis, “*the major paths of dialogue which can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us*” (163) begin in the international community. Only a world community, acting together, can solve issues that transcend the artificial borders of political states. However, while many summits and conventions have been held on the environment, they “*were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements*” (166), primarily because of the lack of political will in member states, who “*place their national interests above the global common good*” (169). It is to preserve the common good that the Pope calls for reducing the power of nation states, in favor of binding international agreements and workable mechanisms of enforcement. For Francis, the sovereignty of states should not prevent the global community from “*averting regional disasters which would eventually effect everyone*” (173). Because of the often corruptive power of wealth, international economic and financial interests can overwhelm “*systems of government inherited from the past*” (175); thus, Francis calls for “*more efficiently organized international institutions . . . empowered to impose sanctions*” (175). Though anathema to nationalists in many countries, Pope Francis—in line with his predecessors—notes that the

ecological crisis only reinforces “*the need of a true world political authority*” (175), built on diplomacy, and empowered to act for the common good.

Implicit in Francis’ promotion of new international structures and agreements is a simultaneous call for the renovation of national and local politics. Supporting subsidiarity at every level, the Pope condemns money-driven “*power politics*,” summoning nations and localities to a long-view; one that avoids the corrosive effects of “*consumerist sectors of the population*” (178), where the drive for immediate profit prevents political leaders from pursuing long-term goods. Rather than allowing the so-called “*invisible hand*” of the market to determine or delay essential programs—e.g., use of water, extraction of fossil fuels, production of alternative energy—government, in consultation with all of society, must intentionally promote desired consequences and restrain harmful ones: “*A healthy politics is sorely needed, capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices and overcoming undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia*” (181).

**“A healthy politics is sorely needed, capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices and overcoming undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia” (181).**

At the heart of Francis’ critique of national and international political structures is the sense that economic power, geared only towards maximized profits, controls and corrodes the political power of the community. Such an economic system works against the principles of the common good and against healthy political development: encouraging consumption over cooperation, preferring the profit of the few over the interests of the many, and empowering the monied at the expense of the poor. For Francis, the inordinate power of money pressures those



with political power, resulting either in the obvious corruption of bribes and pay-offs, or in the kind of political influence that undermines the political rights of the vast majority of people; e.g., when donors shape the laws that give control of water to the few, despite the indispensable need of the many.

In *Laudato Si'*, the Pope rejects the “magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals” (190). Rather, because the actions that are necessary require medium or long term thinking, they require political and social will that may run counter to the consumption mentality of the market, i.e., require human principles that transcend any mere desire for wealth. The primary concern must not be maximized profits, but the common good—i.e., the good of reason, the good of all, including the poor. Thus, Francis calls us to a new way of thinking, where the possession of the latest technology or the biggest house may be secondary to the raising up of those in poverty and the protection of the earth’s resources for future generations. The Pope calls us to a freedom that comes from “redefining our notion of progress” (194), a freedom that takes into account not just the price of things, but their deeper value.



In this humanistic vision, economics includes the well-being of future generations; includes the suffering poor in the world; includes the recognition that all we do is part of a greater community, and all that we consume incurs a cost across time.

In its call to action, *Laudato Si'* invites the whole human family to assume the responsibility of freedom. It is not easy to do; yet, as individuals, as nations, and as a world, we are called to make this choice. As Pope Francis says: “*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).

## CHAPTER SIX - ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

*Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. . . .*

*A great cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.*

*-Laudato Si', 202-*

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”*

*-Matthew 7:21-*

After 200 paragraphs of social analysis and theological reflection, of critical dissection of the technocratic paradigm and consumerist mentality; after demonstrating the unity of social and environmental ecologies and the biblical demand for our care of the earth; after calling for fundamental change in the structures of international power-sharing and in the composition of the world economic order, Pope Francis turns back to the most difficult challenge of all: the need for personal conversion. In the sixth and final chapter of *Laudato Si'*, the Pope reminds us that all the structural changes in the world, all the revisions in law and the clarity of theories will mean nothing unless each person—each of us—begins the internal conversion and spiritual transformation upon which all lasting change depends. We may intellectually grasp the truth of our situation, may read and accept all the lessons of integral ecology, but unless we act upon our knowledge, break the bonds that hold

us, and allow our words to become flesh, no substantive change can occur.

For Francis, the transformation of our lives requires a depth of freedom not easily attained in contemporary society. We have become addicts of a consumerist and technocratic paradigm, a paradigm that *“leads people to believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume”* (203), but that actually enslaves us in materialistic desires that can never be satisfied. In such a world, *“those really free are the minority who wield economic and financial power”* (203), since it is they who both create the desires of the market and profit from them. Like all addicts, our ends can easily become the next fix,

the next new high, the next immediate (and undoubtedly short-lived) gratification. Looking at the lines outside the Apple store when new phones are released, or at the ratings for *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, or at the profits from pornography, one can easily see to what Francis refers:

we commodify the world, and then try to fill our emptiness with the objects our own addictions have created. This quest to satisfy our disordered desires leads to cut-throat competition and violence, either in obvious forms (e.g., physical abuse, human trafficking, militarism), or through the more subtle manifestations of racism and xenophobia, financial exploitation, and economic colonialism. Our addiction can be seen in a culture that glorifies wealth or idolizes weapons—both personal and national—and in the tendency to ravage the earth for short-lived profits or individual benefit. All these activities resound with the false freedom of distorted

autonomy, as we, like any addict, deceive ourselves into believing that we are in control, even as the realities of ecological and social decay undermine that assertion.

In the face of this challenge, Francis reminds us of the hope that exists within each person, hope that cannot be wholly crushed or overwhelmed, because it is in our human nature, in our destiny as women and men made in the image and likeness of God. As he says, *“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”* (205). The habits of violence and power, of narcissism and control,

of consumption and exploitation, which the social order sells to us through the manifold tools of manipulation, cannot conquer the human ability to *“take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths of authentic freedom”* (205). We can change our

lifestyle and our way of thinking; we can overcome the addiction of consumption by becoming conscious of the moral quality implicit in every act we take, in every use of water or resources. Because of a rationality that cannot be wholly overcome by the blindness of market forces, we can reject the supposedly inevitable lure of greater technology and more things, in favor of a different and more humane definition of human well-being. We can begin to see that we need not define ourselves as inevitable participants in some Hobbesian war with one another, where everything is dog-eat-dog; rather, we can overcome ideological individualism and



recognize a fundamental unity between ourselves and all reality. Such thinking, when expressed in new (or, perhaps, renewed) habits, can transform the world.

The need to create new habits, or to reclaim the habits of our ancestors, calls for a kind of education that goes deeper than mere laws or principles. For while knowledge is important, and laws and principles have some purpose, education, to be complete, must liberate our habits from the power of our distorted affections. Just as consumption and individualism have become habitual to us—causing us to fall into their patterns with little conscious thought—so the virtues of an integral ecology must likewise become part of our character, part of our habit of being in the world. The education we need is one which transforms our habits into virtues: where putting on a sweater is more normal than turning up the heat, where we take brief showers and separate our refuse as a matter of course, where we hardly think about it as we take the bus rather than the car, or turn off a light when we leave the room. Such a change in habit makes possible true “*ecological citizenship*” (211). For, as Pope Francis makes clear, while it is important to *know*, and even more important to *act*, it is most important of all to *become* women and men of “*selfless ecological commitment*” (211). The changes of structures and systems cannot last without personal transformation and conversion in each of us and all of us.

Such “*ecological conversion*” is not easy, especially when old habits are already in place. That is why Francis encourages us to take up the work of education in many settings—“*at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis, and elsewhere*” (213)—and why he places particular emphasis on the education of the young: “*Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life*” (213). Faced with a culture that still promotes the addiction of consumerism, we must start early and call into service the foundational elements of human life, including family life and spirituality, aesthetics and social psychology. We

must show the connection between ecological decay and the pain and despair from which so many suffer—“*The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast*” (217)—and offer the hope that comes from a world united and beloved. Finally, we must, according to Pope Francis, offer what Christianity has always offered: “*an alternative understanding of the quality of life, . . . a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption*” (222).

Francis sees Christianity offering much to the new way of life called for by an integral ecology: whether by reviving the custom of grace before meals or by adapting the St. Thérèse’s “*little way of love*” for the many interactions of civil society; through its vision of the Trinity or its sacramental understanding of the world. Yet, at the same time he respects that not all who come to this ecology will be Christian. Ending *Laudato Si’* with two prayers—one “*we can share with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitments to creations set before us in by the Gospel of Christ*” (246), the Pope returns to the theme with which he began: that the crisis we face is not a Catholic crisis nor a Christian crisis, but a human crisis. It calls for the conversion of each of us, for the communion of all of us, for the transformation of our structures and the restoration of our hearts. And whether we understand these changes as coming from our ethical core or from the Spirit of God within us matters little, compared to the disaster that looms if we fail to change.

