

LAUDATO SI'

REFLECTIONS ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING, ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION,
TECHNOLOGY AND THE MARKET ECONOMY
(translation from the Spanish original summary)

Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation
Madrid Local Group

2018-2019



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By Jonathan Amos
BBC Science Correspondent

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Introduction and Methodology

As in previous reports produced by the Madrid Chapter of the Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice Foundation, work on the *Laudato si'* Encyclical took the form of a series of sessions introduced by a member of the group or a guest. The present document is a summary of the full report and includes a series of questions and answers which offer a synthesis of the debate. They reflect our concerns as professionals and business executives and, above all, as Christians, when reading through the magisterial document.

¿Why did Pope Francis decide to write on ecology and thus to expose his writings to the risk of political instrumentalization in public debate?

- The theme follows the lead of *Evangelii Gaudium* where the Pope already touched upon the “technocratic paradigm”, the “throwaway culture” and “an economy of exclusion and inequity”. This continues teachings by John Paul II and Benedict XVI against a rift between ethics and the economy and an ownership system with no concern for solidarity.
- The choice of the name Francis already announced the Pontificate’s evangelizing message. The well known Canticle by Saint Francis sings “Be praised my Lord, through all you creatures”. “Care for the common house” is one of the themes indicated by Pope Francis since his election as suggested, for example, by the nard flower in his coat of arms.
- LS starts from a dramatic diagnosis: a planet “being squeezed dry beyond every limit” (LS 106)
- Starting also from a spiritual and faithful standpoint, the Pope proposes himself as mediator to overcome denial, indifference, resignation or “a blind confidence in technical solutions” (LS 14).

Why does LS state that there is an intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet?

- The relationship between poverty and environmental fragility is not self-evident: they appear as independent factors. But there is a factual link: possible consequences of climate change, like higher sea levels or desertification would affect vulnerable populations more than others.
- The “throwaway culture” is real, but does not explain the lack of inclusive institutions and of entrepreneurial capacity which are typical of under-development.
- In order to escape their condition, the poor must be able to be agents of their own destiny; help is useful to “teach fishing”, not for redistribution.
- In the short term and with current technology, it appears that it may be impossible to extend the present living and consumption standards of rich countries to the whole planet. Rather than putting a brake on initiative and growth, it seems to us that the answer to this challenge will be found through new technological solutions and by supporting environmentally and socially sustainable impact Investment. This requires a long-term vision which includes the whole world population and future generations.

Does the description of the environmental crisis in LS have magisterial authority?

- The Encyclical admits a diversity of opinions concerning the environmental crisis.
- Concern for the care of creation is a necessary condition for Christians, but the answers can be of different types.
- The relational dimension, dialogue and group work have value in themselves: “my” own view will always be partial. Cristian vocation should lead us to start walking in a long lasting approach towards good. LS calls for a dialogue with other religions and with scientific and political institutions. We find it necessary to underline the need to extend dialogue also to economic leadership.

Does the commandment from Genesis to “fill the earth and subdue it” go against ecological theses?

- The true meaning of the biblical text is precisely “to take care of the common house”.
- Nature should not be divinized. The aim is to construct a dignified habitat for all with the means available.
- The role of the good caretaker directly leads to the profile of a Business leader who enlarges his view to the social and environmental impact of the company’s activity and finds new business opportunities therein and thus contributes to the common good.

What is the meaning of a “technocratic paradigm”? Does the Church entertain a certain anti-technical defeatism?

- *A priori* technology doesn't appear to be good or bad. It all depends on its use.
- By “technocratic paradigm” LS perhaps refers to the ideology which underpins developments in artificial intelligence and ‘big data’. This ideology pretends to be centrally at the service of the human person, but it does so from a concept of human aspirations and happiness which are very far from the Christian tradition of openness to others and brotherly communion.
- The fantasy of a new superman with technological implants does not come for free; it supports and industry which ambitions total control of information. In this sense it is possible to understand why the Pope describes the “technocratic paradigm” as benefitting economic interests.
- The new economy breaks traditional production and distribution models. This opens two fronts on which we have an active role to play as Christians :
 - To renew the tools used by the social market economy to deal with monopolistic threats, and to transfer social protection from jobs to the working person and continued education.
 - To change priorities in education, away from a deviated anthropocentrism, and moving towards solidarity, collaboration and gratuitous gift.



What can Business do to effectively influence society towards care of the common house?

- Climate change is already driving substantial evolution in business. For example:
 - In the energy sector, companies feel compelled, not only to ensure their own sustainability, to plan in terms of renewable sources.
 - In the financial sector, some entities are taking SDG and the United Nations 2030 Agenda as public commitments.
- Every business can improve its way of operating within its own area of activity through using resources, processes, products and marketing techniques which include environment and social sustainability objectives.
- Discernment is always necessary within the framework of integral ecology. Each option has positive and negative aspects among which it is necessary to choose.
- Entrepreneurial creativity is key if one wants to see new initiatives having environment protection in their genes



¿Is the market economy able to reorient itself ecologically?

- For the market economy to use its capacity of adapting it is necessary that, in addition to imposed rules, the price system sends correct signals which take into account real ecological cost.
- In order to avoid unjust “socialization” of ecological cost or their hidden transfer to following generations, substantial change must be brought to accounting and tax rules. This implies difficult practical problems: indiscriminate measures of the kind can be punishing for the poor population.
- A methodological and political consensus on these questions requires deep commitment from governments and business organizations.

What does “ecological conversión” mean for us?

- The splendor of nature is a motive for meditation in faith: “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise” (LS 12).
- Conversion should lead us to repentance, and to “a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption” (LS 222).
- This doesn’t mean only conversion at personal and family levels. It entails a necessary collective dimension which expresses itself in political, social and economic terms.
- This dimension is complex because there are opposing opinions and interests and sometimes emotive enthusiasm leads to confrontation instead of consensus.
- Unavoidable struggle should “never take away the joy of our hope” (LS 244).



