

**International Conference of the Foundation *Centesimus Annus – Pro Pontifice* on  
“*Laudato Si*”: transformation of an ideal into reality.**

**The hard route towards integral ecology”**

*Vatican, 8 June 2019 – 11.00 am*

Madam President,  
Dear Friends,

I am delighted to be with you, at the conclusion of this major International Conference of the *Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice* Foundation, to share together some reflections on the Encyclical *Laudato si*’, the document the Holy Father wished to dedicate to the care of our common home. Today I would like to dwell on some aspects that can be considered central to this Encyclical. We recently celebrated its fourth anniversary, but it is worth remembering that it continues to be highly relevance and is continually the subject of extensive debates in numerous international and interdisciplinary forums. Proof of this is found in the many reflections aimed at studying the scientific, economic, political, social and ethical implications and applications that make evident the richness of the document.

All this discussion on the issues raised by *Laudato si*’, four years after its publication, gives us cause to reflect on how it might be considered “prophetic”, able to “read the signs of the times” and address the decisive challenges of our time, just like other great Encyclicals of the Papal Magisterium. Just to give a couple of examples, I am thinking of *Rerum novarum* published by Leo XIII in 1891, or of Pope Saint Paul VI’s *Populorum progressio* published in 1967.

The aspects of *Laudato si*’ that I would like to highlight are four: (1) **integral ecology**, (2) **dialogue**, (3) **relatedness** and (4) **the implementation of change** repeatedly requested by Pope Francis in the Encyclical, as well as in the course of his Pontificate.

We are well aware that it is reductive to consider *Laudato si*’ as an Encyclical solely on the “environment”. It is an Encyclical addressing a much broader concept: “**integral ecology**”. This is a complex and multifaceted notion, which – with great foresight – has been at the centre of your reflection over these three days. With the intuition of integral ecology, Pope Francis intends to indicate a new vision of the world; a vision that must simultaneously take into consideration many “aspects”; a vision that we could consider “multi-form”.

Indeed, on the one hand, it recalls “*just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace*” (*Laudato si'*, 10); on the other hand, it is aimed at recovering “*the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God*” (*Laudato si'*, 210) .

In both cases, what emerges is the importance of *raising the awareness of the responsibility* of the human being, of each of us, towards ourselves, towards our neighbour, towards creation and towards the Creator. Even these three days of reflection can contribute to what we could call an “ascent of conscience” towards that intuition which Lévinas articulated in these terms: “*the subject is responsible for the responsibility of the other person*”<sup>1</sup>. A responsibility that therefore opens up a reciprocity, a virtuous circle in relation to one another.

This means that this process of accountability must occur by adopting a “dialogical” method, one which focuses on **dialogue**. And dialogue, as you well know, is one of the aspects on which *Laudato si'* most insists.

Pope Francis, at the beginning of his Encyclical, proposes “*enter[ing] into dialogue with all people about our common home*” (*Laudato si'*, 3), addressing an urgent “*appeal [...] for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet*” (*Laudato si'*, 14).

It is essential to recover the art of dialogue! An art that in many places seems to be forgotten and undervalued, as is the art of listening, the starting point for any process of dialogue. Dialogue and listening encourage the process of accountability and “awareness” with a view to an integral ecology.

And you, dear friends, in the course of your meeting, have chosen to “implement” this process of dialogue and listening, acting on the “Look-Judge-Act” axiom, typical of many analyses of the Church’s social doctrine, as *Mater et magistra* of Pope Saint John XXIII teaches us;<sup>2</sup> in this way you have been able to outline the question of integral ecology in a broad and stimulating manner.

On other hand, Pope Francis himself warns us that on account of integral ecology “*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). This is a

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<sup>1</sup> LÉVINAS, E. (1971), *Totality and Infinity: Essay on Exteriority*; original in French: *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'Extériorité*.

<sup>2</sup> POPE SAINT JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et magistra*, No. 217, 15 May 1961.

challenge to which the social doctrine of the Church is called to respond; a doctrine you are called to serve through the deepening of your understanding. It is a doctrine aimed at reflecting – in light of Revelation, of natural law and Christian theological anthropology – on the complex realities of human existence in its environment and in its entirety; aimed at promoting careful discernment about a world that has transformed itself and that is continually transformed. Bearing in mind that the object of the Church’s social doctrine is the human being in its entirety in relation to the other, the cosmos and society.

And here, in addition to dialogue, is another central dimension of integral ecology: relationship and **relatedness**, an indispensable component of the essence of humanity.

How great is the need to appreciate this aspect of relatedness, in a world increasingly threatened by dangerous trends that lead in differing ways to isolationism, indifference and even loneliness!

Here it is a question of adopting an adequate anthropological model; a model in which the human being is placed at the centre, yes, but with the mandate to “cultivate and guard” (Cf. Gen. 2:15) relationships with the self, the other, society, creation and God.

It is in this perspective that the so-called “ecological crisis” should be analysed, given that, as Saint John Paul II pointed out, its roots are in the deep moral and cultural crisis that permeates our society,<sup>3</sup> which is essentially linked to an exacerbated individualist anthropocentrism – something Pope Francis repeatedly condemns in *Laudato si’*. To address seriously the causes of this crisis there is a need for a real “**change of course**”, one based on the awareness that “everything is intimately related”. A careful analysis of the ecological crisis, therefore, leads to it becoming a stimulus for conversion and for the taking of concrete decisions that can no longer be postponed, with an awareness that there are many forces opposing this change, forces which place their own particular and immediate interests first, frequently making them prevail over the common good, and even manipulating information in order to propagate a culture of indifference, of comfortable resignation, or blind trust in technical solutions (cf. *Laudato si’*, 14 & 54).

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<sup>3</sup> Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace: *Peace with God the Creator, peace with all of creation*, 1 January 1990.

Dear friends,

“*We require a new and universal solidarity*” (*Laudato si'*, 14) open to an interdisciplinary and effective dialogue at all levels, from the most local to the international. We live in an historic moment full of urgent challenges, but one that gives stimulus for the building of a new civilization. Pope Francis is well aware that “*we have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral*” (*Laudato si'*, 112 ).

In this perspective, continuous work is required for the detailed study and implementation of *Laudato si'* and of the ways to **make real the change of course** hoped for in the Encyclical. This is a work that is transcendent in nature, before being social or political, because it recalls the importance of letting “*the effects of [the] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [the] relationship with the world*” (*Laudato si'*, 217).

There are many ways and means of promoting this change of course, just as there is no shortage of challenges and obstacles, as has been made abundantly clear by you during the three days of your Assembly.

For its part, the Holy See and the Catholic Church are trying to favour these paths, giving emphasis both to the economic and technological aspects of integral ecology and also and above all to the ethical-social aspects involved in this concept.

There is no shortage of initiatives already underway – and yet to be undertaken – aimed at channelling the different realities and resources of the Christian community, as well as of all people of good will, to bring them into line with the Holy Father’s intuition regarding integral ecology. This begins from a personal sensitivity, but above all starts with the demands of the defence of our common home and of those who, living here, find themselves in more disadvantaged and vulnerable situations.

On a practical level, the various structures of the Holy See and of the local Churches show a consistent response to *Laudato si'* through educative and training initiatives in integral ecology; differentiated collection and disposal of waste; the use of less-polluting means of transport; critical and circular consumption; ethical investment; *plastic free* events organized by ecclesiastical institutions; and the care of green spaces within each ecclesial structure. All these are areas in which the

Catholic Church can contribute, not just symbolically, through its different institutions: parishes, schools, universities, hospitals...

Within the Vatican City State a number of well-organized environmental management projects have been planned and/or instigated in order to implement the directives of *Laudato si'*.

As regards the *protection of the environment*, various initiatives have been undertaken in the Vatican City in the field of differentiated waste collection in order to increase the value of waste as an economic resource deriving from its re-use; a similar fight against waste is made in the protection of water resources, through the modernization of the water network and the recycling of water for fountains. As for the care of the green areas of Vatican City, we are working towards a progressive reduction of harmful phytosanitary products in favour of the development of a complex, integrated pest management system that contributes to safeguarding the existing ecosystem. There has also been a series of interventions aimed at reducing the *consumption of energy resources* and the emission of carbon dioxide through the installation of different types of solar panels, lighting systems with LED equipment and twilight illumination sensors.

However, “*we cannot be limited solely to the economic and technological dimension: technical solutions are necessary but not sufficient; it is essential and appropriate to also take into careful consideration the ethical and social aspects and impacts of the new paradigm of development and progress in the short, medium and long term.*”<sup>4</sup>

In this direction, the awareness-raising activities carried out by the Holy See are manifold. Consider, for example, the *World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*, celebrated on 1<sup>st</sup> September each year, or think of the numerous activities, which promote integral ecology in the centres of education and formation of the Catholic Church throughout the world. Material is also being prepared to present some operational proposals for the implementation of *Laudato si'*.

The social doctrine of the Church clearly indicates the urgent need “*‘to convert’ the model of global development*”<sup>5</sup>, taking it in a direction more respectful towards creation and an integral human development of all peoples, both now and in the future. Rethinking a single world and a common project is a complex undertaking, one which requires a clear call for an honest and coherent dialogue

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<sup>4</sup> Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to 23rd session of the Conference of the Parties (COP23) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Bonn, 7 November 2017.

<sup>5</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Angelus*, 12 Novembre 2006.

on the *common good*, seeking to avoid the numerous dangers of political and economic exploitation and the snares set by those who oppose this project. We face a formidable challenge, as made clear by numerous wide-ranging multilateral documents, the implementation of which is a shared commitment and responsibility for all States; I am thinking, for example, of two important documents consensually adopted in 2015 by the entire family of nations: the Paris Agreement on climate change and the 2030 Agenda, which defines 17 goals for sustainable development and 169 targets. In this regard, it is worth noting that the Holy See clearly presented its own reservations concerning some of the goals of this Agenda, as well as some of its formulations.<sup>6</sup>

Multilateral cooperation between States is, however, necessary but not sufficient to respond adequately to the great and inspiring challenge that our age has before it. Recalling the principle of subsidiarity<sup>7</sup> in a tangible way, the responsibility to defend our common home is everyone's, paying special attention to our neighbour, near or far in space and time, in keeping with the biblical mandate to "cultivate and guard". Like any call to conversion, the ecological one is also addressed to each one of us and requires a discernment and change of lifestyle.

Dear friends,

I would like to conclude with a quotation from Pope Francis: "*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.*" (*Laudato si'*, 217). Being the guardian of God's work recalls the title of your Conference: "*Laudato si': the transformation of an ideal into reality. The hard route towards integral ecology*". That integral ecology founded on dialogue and relatedness, in order to function, requires that the change of course becomes a reality, something we can define as a "transition", a "change of epoch", which is what we are currently experiencing, and in the face of which the social doctrine of the Church can show us a clear sense of direction.

I convey to you my best wishes so that the fruits of this Conference and the future work of the Foundation may actively work towards developing that horizon of meaning that comes with the change of direction that we so badly need!

Thank you!

@ Pietro Card. Parolin

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<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Position Statement of the Holy See on the Outcome document of the United Nations Summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda "*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*".

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo anno*, 80, 15 May 1931.