

WHY EDUCATION IN
"INTEGRAL ECOLOGY" IS A MAJOR OBJECTIVE OF ECONOMIC, ETHICAL AND
SPIRITUAL CONVERSION FOR THE YEARS TO COME?

Pedagogical" proposals, in the light of Laudato Si'

Address by His Eminence Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

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Madam President of the Centesimus Annus Foundation, Members of the Scientific Committee, Distinguished Members of the Foundation and participants in this virtual conference: First of all, thank you for the invitation to participate in this event, and for the honor of speaking at the beginning of the proceedings.

The call for "integral ecology" requires all economic, political, cultural and religious stakeholders and decision-makers to "seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. 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." (L.S. n° 139)

In the time available, I would like to underline some (5) major statements that express the dynamics of the text, Laudato si', and then follow with other (7) reflections about Education in Integral Ecology.

FOUR MAJOR STATEMENTS ABOUT THE DYNAMICS
OF THE ENCYCLICAL "LAUDATO SI".

1. *The urgency of thinking and committing oneself to an "integral ecology" is not separated from a reflection on "human dignity and social justice. In fact, it renews the relevance of the social thought inspired by biblical memory and the Gospel of Christ. It is therefore the same spiritual, theological and ethical objective that is present in the link between "human dignity, social justice and ecology".*

"A number of themes which will reappear as the Encyclical unfolds (...) the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology... the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle... These questions (are) reframed and enriched again and again. » (n°16)

2. *The need for a critical analysis of our contemporary model of development, placed under the double sign of an intensification of the rhythms of life and of a technology, "which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems ... and so sometimes (it) solves one problem only to create others" (no. 20). This analysis must take into consideration "the throwaway culture" (n°22), "the climate as a common good" (n°23), the depletion of natural resources and, in particular, water (n°27 to 31) and the loss of biodiversity (n°35 to 42).*

"The praiseworthy efforts being made by of scientists and engineers dedicated to finding solutions to man-made problems. But a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful... even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. » (n°34)

3. Returning to the Source: "The Gospel of Creation".

- *The biblical accounts of creation "suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself. » (n°66). These relationships have been broken (sin) by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. It is necessary to speak of a communion between living beings sharing the fruits of the earth.*

"The sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for all our fellow human beings. » (n°91)

- *An authentically open heart makes universal communion among all creatures possible, while mistreatment, violence and cruelty towards fellow creatures always end up hurting other human beings.*

"Every act of cruelty towards any creature "is contrary to human dignity. We can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality: "Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism" (no. 92).

"The earth is essentially a "shared inheritance" whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone (n°93).

- *This implies the subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods. At the same time, we must speak of the right of everyone to their use, as the "first principle of the whole ethical and social order" (no. 93).*
- *The gaze of Jesus invites us to recognize the paternal relationship of God with all (his) creatures and reminds us that each of them is important in God's eyes. Jesus lives in full harmony with creation in which Christ is present "from the beginning" (Cf. Prologue to the Gospel of St. John) (Cf. no. 99).*
- *The Word of God is creative, but the Word "became flesh": it reaches every creature by mysteriously holding them in the power of resurrection and directing them "towards fullness as their end" (no. 100).*

4. An Integral ecology

Ecology studies the relationships between living organisms and the environment in which they develop (n°138). It is essential...to consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems (ecosystems and complementarities between beings) (n°140).

- *We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge "in the service of a more integral and integrating vision". "The analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves..." (n°141)*
- *"Social ecology is necessarily institutional and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities" (n°142).*

- **Ecology is also cultural:** "it involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity"; it is opposed to "the consumerist vision of the human beings... which has a levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity" (no. 144).
- **It is necessary to acknowledge creativity and generosity:** in conditions of extreme poverty, many people are "able to weave bonds of belonging and togetherness which convert overcrowding into an experience of community in which the walls of the ego are torn down and the barriers of selfishness overcome" (no. 149).
- **Taking care of common areas...** to increase our sense of "feeling at home" within the city which includes us and bring us together. (n°151)
- **Human ecology implies the relationship of human life with the moral law inscribed in its own nature,** "a relationship necessary to be able to create a more dignified environment"... "the acceptance of one's own body as a gift from God is necessary to welcome and accept the whole world as a gift from the Father and a common home; while a logic of domination over one's own body becomes a logic, sometimes subtle, of domination over creation. » (n°155)
- **Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good:** "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively through and ready access to their own fulfilment " (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* no. 26) (no. 156).
- **Respect for the common good is respect for the human person as such,** endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development. It has also to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups, applying the principle of subsidiarity. (n°157)
- **We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity...** since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? (n°159 - 160)
- **The question of the future of the world leads us to inexorably ask other pointed questions:** "What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? (n° 161)
- Our inability to think seriously about future generations is linked to our inability to broaden the scope of our present interests and to give consideration to those who remain excluded from development...". In addition to a fairer sense of intergenerational solidarity, there is also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of intragenerational solidarity." (Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace 2010) (no. 162).

5. **An appeal on how to live and what to do**

- **To radically question the "technocratic paradigm":** to move from the "lie of an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being "squeezed dry" beyond every limit" (No. 106), to another type of progress, "one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral" (No. 112).
- **To think in terms of "integral ecology":** "comprehensive solutions" to the social and environmental crisis "which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems" (No. 139). This integral approach aims to "combating poverty restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature" (no. 139).

- **To live the spirituality of creation:** "Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little" (n°222) It is a question of "inner peace" related to the care for ecology and for the common good (n°225).
- **To dare to educate and transmit:** we must move from awareness and prevention of environmental risks to "an education that tends to include a critique of the myths of modernity (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)...". (no. 210) aiming at an "ecological citizenship" (no. 211) and an "ecological conversion" inherent in the encounter with Jesus Christ: encounter and care for our fellow brothers and sisters in their fragility; protection of the work of God and reconciliation among us (216).

EDUCATION IN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY:

Education in "integral ecology" - which we consider a condition and a primary objective for "ecological conversion" - cannot be limited to a discipline that is taught in schools and universities.

1. *Education in "integral ecology" finds its essential inspiration in the memory of ancestral and popular practices through which past generations and the poorest human communities have learned to interact with natural resources: **water, the seasons, plant and animal species ...** There is therefore a strong link between integral ecology and cultural memory. **Nature is and remains the first school for mankind.** Its rhythms, its sources, its evolutions, its changes and its fragilities speak to those who observe and study it. Education in integral ecology needs educators who transmit their discoveries and knowledge based on their experience of biological and climate data.*
2. *Education in "integral ecology" presupposes that we highlight the difference between a natural approach to the resources and rhythms of Creation as the "sources" of life and their technical reduction to mere "instruments" at the service of production processes. This calls for philosophical reflection - and an appeal to wisdom - about the relationship between man (homo faber: man who makes) and natural resources. Surprisingly, children have a particular sensitivity to the natural elements, the seasons, plants and animals, from which **an authentic pedagogy of dialogue with the earth and with all living creatures can be built.***
3. *Education for "integral ecology" draws from the need of the common good, whose three essential components are: **life (received, given and shared), the earth (received, tilled and inhabited) and relationship (to other fellows, to oneself and to God).** It is important, therefore, to think of a reciprocal call between "common good" and "education for integral ecology. Here we understand the "common good" as the good for the human community and the bond of solidarity among its members. Education for "integral ecology" is based on contemporary reflection on the "common". **This inspires a reflection on "what we have received", "what we are called to share" and "what we must transmit".** This trilogy between "received," "shared" and "transmitted" is not unrelated to the way St. Paul defines the mission of the apostles and the memory of Christ, for everyone: "I have transmitted to you what I myself have received: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-24).*

4. **Contemporary reflection on "what humans have in common" amplifies and actualizes "the ethical principle of the common good": goods shared in the community; good of the community; essential good of communion and love amongst the living** (Cf. Gaston Fessard, S.J. , "Authority and the common good"). Initiation into the "common good of humanity" (land, climate, human rights, culture and solidarity) (Cf. *Laudato si* § 157) questions and limits any sense of appropriation. Teaching young people as well as economic and political leaders to identify and care for the "common good of humanity" is at the heart of the mission of the apostles: it is a question of revealing to every person the love of the Creator.
5. **All forms of cultural expression can participate in this education in integral ecology:** language, knowledge and know-how, poetry, music, dance, theater, painting, cinema, sculpture, gardening, cooking, the arts of medicine and care. For each of these artistic approaches contributes to shed light on **the relationship of giving and receiving** which is at the heart of the link between man, the natural environment and the relationship with society, understood as a relationship of exchange. Education in integral ecology brings into the dialogue: the knowledge of life (biodiversity; complementarity between species; health conditions), cultural expressions (and especially common memory) that celebrate, each in its own way, life, in its beauty and fragility, and the spiritual emotion (meditation and contemplation) that connects every man to God-Source of life.
6. **Christian Tradition, from the earliest centuries of apostolic witness, and especially in the encounter of Mediterranean cultures, has jointly affirmed the capacity of every human being to discover in himself and herself the gentle power of the creative Word (Logos) and to make a path of reconciliation with God, with other living beings and with themselves.** It is appropriate to think of education in integral ecology as a path of reconciliation, forgiveness, care and unity of being. This education, which joins certain ancestral religious rites in their caring for Mother Earth, trees and water, as well as practices of mutual hospitality and sharing, is **an education in the simple happiness of discovery and encounter.**
7. **Education in "integral ecology", in its didactic, economic and artistic form, must lead all the inhabitants of the planet to become messengers for the protection of the common home.**

This will be translated in particular by

- **consulting activities in integral ecology",** with all stakeholders, producers and decision-makers;
- **Proposals for paths of wisdom and care",** initiated by a spiritual ecology.
- **intergenerational dialogues",** within schools, universities and associations.
- **Celebrations of giving",** sharing, seasonal highlights, fraternal and intergenerational hospitality.

The relationship with the earth: a habitat shared by all living beings, the relationship with others (brother and stranger who has become a brother) as well as the relationship with oneself (body, breath and desire) needs the Word, so that the seeds of life, deposited by the Creator in "a creation that groans in travail" (Rom. 8:22), may be fulfilled.

Education in integral ecology is a path of hope and peace.