

LAUDATO SI'

STUDY GUIDE FOR PARISHES AND STUDY GROUPS

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The Carmelite NGO is a non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations and affiliated with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Department of Public Information (DPI) of the United Nations. The Carmelite NGO is comprised of the men and women from around the world who are members of the Carmelite Order or its affiliated Congregations, Institutes and ministries with the Catholic Church.

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Laudato Si

“Praise be unto you, my Lord, for our sister and mother earth,” says St. Francis of Assisi in his beautiful prayer entitled *Laudato Si* in Italian in which he praises God for the gift of the whole creation. These are also the first words of Pope Francis in the letter, which he writes on caring for our common home.

The Holy Father has gathered resources from local churches in many parts of the world so that he can write a letter to all people of good will whether they be Christians or not.

He wants to encourage us to care for our common home, this earth where we move and have our being. It is referred to as an “encyclical” because it is a letter written by the Holy Father for all people.

Mother earth groans in pain from the damage we have done to her and from the abuse we have committed against the good things that God has given us: land, water, air and all living creatures.

Although it is the first time in history that a pope has written an encyclical on the care and protection of the environment, it is not the first time that popes have called our attention to the plight of the poor and the earth: Pope John the XXIII wrote about peace in the world; Pope Paul VI had written on the development of peoples; and St. John Paul II wrote two encyclicals on human labor.

Other Christian leaders have also made statements on the important theme of protecting the planet. For example, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church has spoken for the need of each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet for these are sins and crimes against nature and against our very being.

The pope began the encyclical with the words of St. Francis of Assisi because this saint has suggested that we read the book of Creation with the same seriousness and dignity we read the revelation of the Bible. More than a problem to be resolved, Creation is a joyful mystery, which we need to contemplate with a joyful appreciation.

We can all work together in the mission of repairing the damage we have caused our common home. The pope has expressed deep gratitude to people who have devoted themselves for the good of the whole creation and all of the human family. The young people ask us and plead with us to help them create a better future.

Pope Francis invites us all to a dialogue because many attempts to find solutions have failed not so much from the opposition of those who have power but from our lack of collective interest on the matter. We need a new universal solidarity.

We have prepared this popular edition so that in our parishes, colleges, and base communities we may better understand the message of Pope Francis, know the problem and its root causes, and motivate us all to work together in this great mission of caring for our common home.

We have written it in this format so that it may be read aloud in groups. You may take all the time you need to study and understand its content.

We suggest that you do not read more than a chapter each time you gather. You need to have ample time for small group conversations and encourage yourselves to respond creatively to this great challenge.

We begin right now with a question: Have we experienced in our own daily lives the damage we have done to our Mother Earth? How?

“If anyone looks at our planet from the outside, s/he would be astonished at the sight of a behavior that, at times, appear like suicide.”



Pope Francis



Chapter 1: What is happening to our common home?

In this chapter, Pope Francis discusses some of the problems that are currently affecting the environment. This chapter has to do with seeing—a way of seeing, judging, and acting—guided by the social teachings of the church.

In order to write this analysis of the problems, the pope has consulted many scientists, theologians, grassroots movements, and what he says is consistent with the conclusions of the vast majority of them.

We have not written this edition
to satisfy your curiosity but to seek your
active involvement in helping alleviate
the suffering of a great number of people.
We want to learn what we can contribute
and what commitments we can make
in our search for solutions.

Pollution and climate change

What is happening to this earth
which is our common home?
Pope Francis emphatically says that
we have transformed our beautiful earth
into an immense pile of filth, and that the main cause
of the pollution problem is our “throw-away culture,”
which means our habit of throwing away everything we no longer use.
The great majority of the research on this issue

agrees that currently the warming of the earth
has reached dangerous levels.

This global warming produces a greenhouse effect,
which is the accumulation of gases in the atmosphere
that does not permit the heat of the sun to escape.

And here are the consequences: polar ice caps have melted, toxic gasses have been
released into the air and water, the levels of the seas have risen, and coastal populations
have experienced flooding.

The main cause of global warming is human activity.

It happens above all because of the use of carbon
and natural gasses to satisfy our energy needs.

And the only definitive solution to this crisis
is to radically change our behavior
and seek renewable sources of energy.

The poor are the most affected by the damage
we have done to the earth
because they have no other places to go.

Often they have to immigrate to other places
and become a new class of refugees.

The issue of water

The Pope reminds us that access to drinkable water is a basic human right because it is essential to human survival. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water because they are denied the right that is consistent with their God-given dignity. When they have no access to clean water, the consequences are disease and death.

The loss of biodiversity

The loss of jungles and forests, which are cleared for economic purposes, also mean the loss of many species of plants and animals which could be used for nourishment and natural medicine. Every creature is God's work and, as such, possesses inherent worth. Because of our neglect and plundering ways, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God and

will no longer be able to convey the divine meaning and message embedded in them by our loving Creator.

We certainly have a right to access resources found in nature but the problem happens when this access is motivated by our rapacious economic and consumerist addictions, and each time this happens the beauty and richness of nature considerably diminish.

Let us pay close attention to Pope Francis' own words:

“Since all creatures and the entire created world are interconnected, every single creature must be valued with deep affection and admiration for every single one of us needs each other.”

Decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society

We need to be aware of how human lives are affected by the pollution of our environment through the model of development currently used in our throwaway culture.

We need to further understand the negative side of our technological advances.

Many changes in technology are positive and can serve our common good,

And so we cannot ignore these advances.

However, we are paying a high price for them.

The employment opportunities of many people are not any better:

there is more social exclusion, and the unjust distribution of basic services

has led to the degradation of our collective spirit and has ruptured our social communion.

Questions for reflection

Having understood the effects of environmental pollution on our water, air, and land, ecosystems, various animal and plant species, Let us reflect on the impact of these effects on our neighborhood or community.

What are our personal and cultural habits that have contributed to the pollution of our environment, the degradation of our collective spirit, and the rupture of our social communion.

Have we made attempts at changing these habits?

What rationalizations have been used to keep us from seeing the damage we have done?

Have these attempts improved or have they made the problem worse?

Global inequality

Although the poor are the vast majority of the people on the planet, there is very little awareness of the serious problems that affect them.

Political leaders are aware of the problems environmental pollution brings, but many of them view the problems affecting the poor as an after-thought or as a collateral damage that can be easily dismissed.

Global inequality affects individuals as well as whole nations. There is a real

“ecological debt” owed by the global north to the south, which has to do with economic imbalances affecting the environment. The disproportionate use of natural resources by a few countries that has lasted for over a long period of time means that they have done more damage to the environment. “The developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programs leading to sustainable development models.”

Some blame our environmental problem on over population. But if we only put the onus for this crisis on the redistribution of people, and we do not control our addictive consumerist behavior, we will not arrive at a viable solution.

Weak responses

There is an increasing number of people
who have become aware of our environmental problem.

There is as well an increasing number of countries
who are willing to seek solutions to this problem.

Although we do not yet have a sufficient number of initiatives on this matter,
our attempts affirm the truth that
human beings are gifted by God with intelligence

in order that they may seek positive solutions,
and to do so with generosity, solidarity, and compassion.

The problem is that we do not yet have
the commitment to create the type of culture
required in order for us to confront this crisis.

We lack urgency in our attitude towards
the environmental problem that plague our planet.

We have not changed the behaviors
that have caused damage to our ecosystem.

If someone from another planet comes to visit us
s/he would see that we, the dwellers of this earth,
are slowly killing ourselves!

But our inaction is not the only cause of the problem.

Many multi-national corporations make positive gestures
but yet act as if the problem is really not serious
but simply a romanticized affliction of some people
who get in the way of their business objectives.

A variety of opinions

There are two extreme positions on the environmental problem:

On one side, there are those

who believe that all our problems can be solved

by using new and better applications of advanced technology.

On the other side, are those who believe

that human beings are completely responsible

for all of our environmental problems.

And the majority of them believe

that the only effective solution

is to reduce the number of humans who call this planet home.

Between these two extreme positions,

we like to believe that it is possible to come together

in dialogue and search for possible roads that can lead to solutions.

Pope Francis concludes this first chapter recalling that the Church does not have the only solution. However, he is also clear that the problem exists and that real solutions require changes in our attitudes and behaviors.

Questions for reflection

Although we have not accomplished much up to this point, are we open to making attempts at doing something at this time? Are we willing to sacrifice our time to make this great dialogue happen? How can we begin to change our habits of buying and consuming?



Chapter 2: The gospel of creation

The light offered by faith

One does not have to be a believing or practicing person to be concerned about caring for our land.

But if we are Christians, should we not feel a special obligation to do so?

Let us see what the bible says in this chapter.

The wisdom of biblical stories

When God created the world, s/he saw that it was good,

said the book of Genesis (Gen 1, 31).

Every human being is created by love and for love:

this is the principle undergirding human dignity,

that we are not simply something but we are somebody.

According to biblical accounts, this harmony was broken when we pretended to take

the place of God. This arrogant attitude transformed the original harmonious

relationship of humans with God and nature into one into a conflictive one.

Many generations of believers have interpreted the words from Genesis 1, 28

“dominate the earth” as an excuse to claim lordship and dominion over all of

creation. This is also truly an original sin because it is a negation of God

and a denial of the dignity God has bestowed on every being.

Pope Francis speaks about the error of tyrannical anthropocentrism:

this is a perspective where human beings view themselves

as the center of all creation and behave

as if they are the only important creatures in the whole of creation.

God has given us the gift of intelligence.

This means we are the conscience of the universe

and, as responsible stewards, we need to understand

and respect the laws of nature,

and protect the harmony among all creatures.

This is the message all through the Bible:

For example, the prophets of the Old Testament tell us

that the “God who liberates and saves is also the One who created the universe.”

Questions for reflection

How can we repent from the temptation of ignoring our relationship with God and others?

If we believe in the Word of God (Matthew 21,26) “whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”

What does this imply in our relationships with other living beings?

The mystery of the universe

We usually interpret nature

to be something out there and to be analyzed.

However, we should interpret nature

as a gift that comes from God’s hand.

This is the reason why God created the world.

Each creature is an object of God the Father's tenderness,

that is given a place in the world.

When we collect goods,

our freedom brings us to injustice and violence.

We have no right to think

that other living beings

are simply objects for us to use.

The message of each creature in the harmony of everything that was created

The human being is made in the image of God,

but all creatures have their function

and none are made in excess.

Because all things reflect his divinity,

it is necessary that we take time

to contemplate His creation,

because in it we will find divine messages.

Nature does not replace the written revelation,

but surely complements it.

There we too can learn to recognize ourselves

In relation with other living creatures.

If we take time to meditate on things,

we will feel a need to worship God

and we will have a similar experience

to that of Francis of Assisi when he sang:

Glory be to my God, for all creatures are his.

A universal communion

All creatures on Earth have a Creator.

It is for this reason that we are all united through invisible ties

and thus make each of us a part of a universal family.

Just like any family mourns over a loss,

we also weep over the extinction of any species.

We must make sure that other creatures

are treated responsibly and with respect,

while at the same time serving people,
especially those who suffer from poverty and violence.

Peace, justice and the conservation of creation
are three topics that absolutely go hand in hand.
If we love all of our brothers and sisters
and we live in the love of God,
we too will relate to one another with love
with our brother sun,
our sister moon and our mother earth.

The common fate of goods

We all believe that earth is a common heritage
and its fruits are for the greater good of everyone.
Consequently, all ecological proposals
must incorporate a social perspective,
which would include the most basic rights
especially of those less fortunate.

Another recurring theme in our conversations
about the common fate of the goods of creations
are questions regarding private property.
we must always talk about property
within the context of the greater common good.

When only a privileged few make use of property
just for their exclusive benefit
and exclude large sectors of humanity,
they are committing a great injustice.

The environment is a collective good,
a patrimony of all of humanity
and the responsibility of all.

Consequently, the unfair distribution
of the goods of creation
is a sin against the 5th commandment:
Thou shall not kill.

The gaze of Jesus

Jesus invites us to see all of creation

as a reflection of the Creator.

He teaches us that his Father has a paternal relationship

with all of the creatures.

Jesus showed his power as the Son of God

over nature when he calms the wind and the sea.

He calls us all

to view and relate to nature, with love and respect.

Jesus Christ's life on this earth

was one of testimony to his love

for all creatures,

and his resurrection is a promise

that the universe will reach plenitude in Him.

Questions for reflection

If we are really Christians, must we not feel a special obligation to care for all of the creatures in our common home? Must we not feel that it is Jesus himself who places this obligation and mission in our hearts? What prevents us from following the “gaze of Jesus” as we look at the suffering of our brothers and sisters within the whole of creation?



Chapter 3: The root of the human ecological crisis

A great part of the ecological crisis is largely the result of our lifestyles and the way we conduct ourselves on this planet.

We allow ourselves to be guided by what Pope Francis calls the technocratic paradigm.

It refers to the way we see things and how we are affected by our technology-consumed culture.

We have become so accustomed to living surrounded by technology that it becomes hard to imagine living in a different way.

Technology: Creativity and power

We recognize the great advances of technology during the last couple of decades.

It has not only produced beautiful things, but has also expressed what is truly and profoundly human.

However, there is no guarantee that we will use its amazing power solely to create things that are good for us.

Our history is quite a sad one actually.

During the last century we have used technological power to kill millions of people.

We often become unaware of the dangers of its power.

This is often the result of us thinking only of our benefit and security and forgetting the serious responsibility that goes with it.

Globalization of the technocratic paradigm

When we assume this form of technology

we adopt a simplistic paradigm.

We believe that there are no boundaries

to what we can do or control.

We think, “There will always be more,”

or “the system will re-incorporate the waste.”

This is a lie.

We falsely believe that “**scientific technology**”

is the best way to comprehend and behave in the world.

We have become so accustomed to technology

that it becomes difficult to stray away from its resources

or to think in any other logical way.

We ignore that the objects of this technology

are not neutral; they often reflect the interests

of determined individuals in groups of power.

If we are in fact seeking integral solutions
for the great challenges in our world,
we must also seek a wider field of knowledge.
When we become fixated on a single perspective,
we randomly lose ourselves
and we suffer a loss for life's meaning.
To limit ourselves to technical remedies
results in the isolation of reality
where everything is interrelated.

Human freedom is the capacity to limit the technical
if we broaden our horizons and gaze into alternative types of progress:
One that is healthier, humane, more social
and integral.
This is all possible when we find a lifestyle
based on relationships and interaction rather than consumerism;
or when we use technology
to help other people,
instead of mainly seeking
economic enrichment.

We should not resign!

We must keep asking ourselves

about end goals and the meaning of life.

If we do not do this,

we doom ourselves to look

for new adventures just for the sake of avoiding boredom.

Neither should it be treated as a return to times in the caves.

It is an alternate way of looking at reality

the kind that brings back the positive and the sustainable

and revives the values that have been razed to the ground by

addictive consumerist habits.

We need a revolution!

Questions for reflection

Have we fallen prey to the belief that technology itself will resolve the very problems it has created? If so, how?

Have we allowed technology to alter the way we live?

Have we replaced our capacity to care for each other with the coldness and distance of some technology gadgets?

Can the call to the spiritual life still be heard within the loud noise of our consumerist addictions?

The crisis and effects of modern anthropocentrism

When we think of nature as simply a backdrop to our life and behavior

We weaken the value that is inherent in life itself.

If we fail to believe that the earth is God's gift we will also forget that each of us is a gift to each other.

It is a problem that has dragged on for centuries:

The mistaken view that humanity is autonomous

from the gifts of nature that sustain

and nurture us daily.

Christianity has at times supported the huge error
of some who think that humans are the lords of creation.
This is a mistake. Humans are not the lords of creation.
God IS the Lord of Creation
and humans are to be responsible stewards
of all of God's creation including being stewards of each
other.

We have lost the message nature
itself has engraved in its very structure.

When we fail to recognize
the value of the poor, a human embryo,
a handicapped individual,
we will likely become deaf to the very screams of nature.

This can lead us to a type of schizophrenia.

When we can't even recognize the value of other beings
we end up negating the special value of human beings.

There is no ecology without appropriate anthropology.

If we are just beings coexisting with one another
or a random product,
we lose awareness of our responsibility.

We can't pretend to heal
our relationship with nature and the environment
without first healing the basic relationships
that makes us human.

For us as Christians,
being human carries a special value,
and this should lead us to recognize as well
the value of other people.

What gives nobility and dignity to our human life
is the capacity to understand, know, communicate,
and love others.

In order to rescue nature
we do not have to weaken our social dimension
nor our openness to the transcendent.

It is for this reason that we oppose abortions.

It is a great error to conclude

that protecting nature justifies abortion,
if we are not able to care
for the weak beings that surround us,
or if we lose our personal and social sensibilities
in caring for a new human life,
how can we ever care
in saving the environment?

This is what the Pope calls **practical relativism**,
when human beings place themselves in the center,
everything else becomes circumstantial.

In other words, everything becomes related
to our selfishness and greed.

This leads us to think that *everything is irrelevant*
if it does not serve our immediate self interest.

Environmental degradation
also leads to social degradation;
to treat others solely as objects,
to enslave others,

to sexual abuse of children
and the abandonment of the elderly.

In this throw-away culture
laws are not enough to avoid crimes,
precisely because the very same culture promotes
criminality and corruption
and is incapable of seeing objective truth
or universal principles.

On the other hand, when we carefully intervene
in the environment,
we become God's instruments,
in helping to bring about the richness
that He himself has placed in things.

We perform truly human actions
that transform possibilities
into resources to serve human needs.

Vatican Council II's constitution,
"On the Church in the Modern World,"
reminds us that human beings are
the authors, center and end
of socio-economic life (63).

When we damage our capacity to meditate,
we also damage our purpose for work.
A consequence of the Christian vision for work
is to give priority to creating
access to work for everyone.
If technological progress
replaces human labor
something is seriously wrong,
because work is something
that gives meaning to our lives
and allows us to feel fulfilled.

When technological progress takes jobs away,
it creates situations that lead
to self-destructive activities.

The addiction to make profits
results in the harm and loss of human capital.

When we calculate economic costs,
we must also keep in mind human costs.

Another serious problem occurring in the field,
is the dominant presence of agro-industrial corporations
that threatens the existence of small farmers.

It is often the case that small farmers
use sustainable farming methods.

Government authorities have the responsibility
to take the necessary measures to protect
the small, local agricultural workers.

We are not against entrepreneurial activity.
Pope Francis calls it a noble profession,
as long as it is created in a region to respond to local needs,
to offer job opportunities for workers to support their families,

to promote the common good.

Another situation that we must examine are the reasons behind biological or genetic investigations.

Humans play a key factor in creation
and have the right to intervene
in agricultural and animal life,
when it is necessary for the maintenance of life.

But the Church teaches
that there must be reasonable limits,
and that our actions must care for, and save life.
We have no right to impose suffering on animals
or to sacrifice their lives for no reason.

We must take into consideration
how our interventions
have consequences in other areas.
We support scientific studies, but we must avoid
indiscriminate manipulation of life
in the name of genetic research.

The other important questions are those

related to genetically altered (mutated) vegetables and animals.

A legitimate developmental intervention on nature

is that which acts on it in a manner

that is consistent with creation as precious

in God's eyes.

Related to this is the issue of

“genetically modified organisms” (GMO).

It is quite certain that these modifications

occur in nature itself,

and it is quite certain that human beings

have practiced this technique for thousands of years.

What has changed today is the speed

imposed by these new technologies

on a process that must happen gradually.

Even if we can not definitely say that

GMOs are dangerous,

we have to admit that they have helped solve

the problem of hunger in many places.

But we must not make light of
the difficulties we face.

Its introduction in many places
has led to a monopoly of big multi-national corporations
at the serious disadvantage of small farmers
who cannot compete.

Further, the introduction of GMOs
greatly reduces the diversity of production.

Since GMOs are sterile and do not reproduce,
small farmers that use them
must follow unfair market regulations
created by large production companies.

Questions for reflection

“Do we understand the technological paradigm?

Do we understand how a technologically contemporaneous culture can have an influence
on the way we see reality?

The Pope speaks of the dangers of technology.

What does it mean that technology can dehumanize us?

How can we create a spirituality based on inter-dependent living rather than unbridled
consumerism?



Chapter 4: Integral ecology

We seek an ecological model that includes the human and social dimension of life.

This is what is missing in the economic world where the law of the market is the only criterion for action.

Environmental, Economic, and Social ecology

Ecology is the study of the relationships among all living beings and the environment. We have to insist that everything is interconnected, and if we study

one part of the situation—physics, biology—we are also ignoring the whole situation. The environment is more than simply the place where all living creatures live.

We are part of the environment;
we are part of each other's existence, our very lives are woven to each other.

No two problems are separate,
one environmental and the other social.

Rather we face one complex crisis
that is both social and environmental.

We have allowed our world to be polluted
because we have not sufficiently analyzed
how our society and its economy functions.

When the economy controls politics,
even though there are good laws,
these norms are often not followed.

We cannot simply judge things by their usefulness.

The problem is increasingly economic in that our economy

functions exclusively and principally to make profit.

“Today the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work, and urban contexts.”

From the perspective of our faith we must ask if we have failed to see that all of creation gives praise to God.

Cultural ecology

We have to consider natural and historical patrimony.

We have to consider the cultural values of the people not only from the past but from the present as well.

The consumerist vision of humanity ignores the richness of cultural history.

The massive forms of exploitation can end not only the physical environment but cultures as well.

For these indigenous cultures, “the land is not a commodity

but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors
who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact
if they are to maintain their identity and values.”

Ecology of daily life

We consider carefully the settings where
we live our lives, in our homes and in our workplaces.

We get used to adapting ourselves to our surroundings,
but if negativity surrounds us,
it affects our very identity.

We are grateful to people
who are serious about safeguarding
their environment and their culture.

With determination and consistent efforts,
hell can be transformed into heaven.

Unfortunately, the other extreme is more common:
the deterioration of the environment
opens society to criminality.

However, Pope Francis insists that love can do more.

It is not enough to just protect our own homes and villages.

We have to have an inclusive vision.

If a dialogue is opened,

we can cease to think of the rest as “others”

but as part of “us,” and encouraging us to make connections.

“Creativity must transform endangered villages

into a welcoming city.”

The other huge problem in the cities is transportation.

It is certainly a wise move to make public transportation a priority.

We have all seen many people deal with undignified conditions due to

the inadequacy of the transportation system.

But the environmental crisis does not just happen in the cities:

Let us not forget the serious ecological problems

also experienced by people in the rural areas;

many of them cannot even rely on basic services

and workers from these areas are often treated like slaves.

Human ecology also implies another profound reality:

“The relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment.”

Our body is a gift from God.

And our bodies will not survive without the rest of all creation.

We have to watch, therefore, that we do not interpret this profound truth into a subtle excuse for dominating the rest of God’s creation.

Valuing the body means accepting its feminine and masculine expressions, each viewing the other in a bond of mutuality.

The attitude held by some to cancel out this sexual difference violates the diversity of creation and is not healthy!

Questions for reflections

Pope Francis asks us to reflect on real life situations, some in the city, others in the country, and offers us a beautiful goal:

How do we transform this hell into heaven?

Additionally he asks us to share his belief

that we can do more with the power of love.

Can we come up with alternative ways

to challenge behaviors and attitudes, which portray

in demeaning ways the global village where we live?

The principle of the common good

When we speak of human ecology

we are speaking about the common good.

The encyclical *Gaudium et Spes* defines common good as

“the sum of those conditions of social life

which allow social groups and their individual members

relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.”

The common good signifies

respect for the human person.

It also refers to the principle of subsidiarity
and, as a consequence of these two principles,
it refers as well to social peace
and distributive justice.

Finally the common good implies,
a preferential option for the poor.
We only need look at our present reality
to understand the need for this option today.
It is an essential and fundamental ethics
for the realization of the common good.

Justice between the generations

The earth is God's gift to us but it is
also a gift for future generations.
We cannot honestly speak about sustainable development
without intergenerational solidarity.
We cannot seriously consider the ecological question
if we exclude in our consideration our future generations.

Our excessive consumerist habits negatively impacted
our own children and the poor of this world.

We have made our own cage for ourselves:

Our inability to think of future generations
and the poor people today.

So, I believe it is as much *intergenerational*
as it is *intragenerational*

We cannot be any more dramatic.

But if we do not take care of the earth,
it would create a real catastrophe.

Everything depends on what we do right now.

Questions for reflection

What are the cultural and historical treasures of our society?

How are we defending and promoting them?

What kind of world are we going to pass on to our children?



Chapter 5: Lines of approach and action

Up to this point Pope Francis has spoken about the environmental problem and its causes. He points to the necessity of a change of direction and he suggests some actions that can be taken. In this chapter, he wishes to create great paths towards dialogue

that can help us take ourselves out
from the spiral of destruction we have
placed ourselves in.

Dialogue on the environment in the international community

The solutions we seek
must be favored by all and not just a few countries.
We have to begin thinking that “we live in one world
and in one common plan.”

The advanced technology that affects our world
is not going to effectively deal with the problems we have created.
What we need is a grand global consensus
to deal with all of our ecological problems.

This question arises:

Who is going to finance these big changes?

While the generations of the last two centuries
have been the most irresponsible in history,
it behooves those at the beginning of this new millennium

to take on this mission with generosity and responsibility.

But while a certain part of civil society
has indeed responded with such generosity,
politicians and corporations have
responded in sluggish ways.

Let us recall the paper of the World Summits:

The ecological movement worldwide
has made significant advances.

Thanks to them, the environmental issues
have found a place in public agendas.

However, recent World Summits
have not lived up to expectations because,
due to lack of political will, they were unable
to reach truly meaningful and effective
worldwide agreements on the environment.

The declarations of the COP have been ineffective.

International negotiations cannot succeed
when national interests take priority over

global common good.

There are various responsibilities to be shared by all but must also be differentiated and assigned based on capacities and available resources. Industrialized countries must contribute more to the problems that they themselves have caused for the most part.

The buying and selling of carbon credits is a system that allows corporations to emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. And this can lead to new speculations which makes it seem like they are responding positively to the climate change problem, when in reality they are making it worse.

On the other hand, poor people need economic assistance in developing renewable sources of energy. However, government leaders need to accurately assess

the scandalous level of consumption of the privileged classes in their respective countries.

They also need as well to come up with better ways to control rampant corruption.

Every nation, of course, has a right to safeguard its sovereignty.

At the same time, we need global regulatory norms that can effectively deter intolerable actions, for example, when powerful countries dump on other less powerful ones their toxic industrial waste.

Transnational corporations have more power than national and political leaders.

In order to effectively control the tremendous power of these companies.

we need to come up with an international organization sanctioned by all nations to hold these corporations responsible whenever any of them dump toxic waste anywhere on earth. Both St. John XXIII and Pope Benedict XVI

insist on the urgent need in our present time
for such a global political body.

Questions for reflection

Pope Francis has reviewed the history
of what we have achieved so far,
and what we have yet to create
in order to respond effectively to the environmental crisis.

In our nation, who are the ones that spew the most contaminants?

What have people done to improve the situation?

Has the government exerted any pressure on contaminators to repair the damage and
change their mode of operation?

Have we taken our complaints into a public protest?

Dialogue for new national and local policies

Ecological problems occur between nations
and they are seen in each nation.

A sane society needs to find ways to eliminate

known causes of its problems and come up
with better approaches.

In his encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel* in 2013,
Pope Francis asserts that “time supersedes space” (232).
Since politics is concerned with immediate results,
supported by the consumerist sectors of the population,
it is driven to produce growth in a short term.
Politicians do not like to place ecological limits
on the exploitation of the environment
because it negatively affects their popularity.
The myopia of power pushes away the environmental agenda.

On the other hand, the local situation
can make a significant difference
while the world scene remains stagnant.
There are a great number of small projects
using sustainable development models.
On the local level, people know their own reality

and have an inherent love for their own land.

Since the powerful elite ignores the law,
the people must put pressure on those responsible
for corruption in all levels.

If city dwellers do not control political power,
they also cannot control the damage done
to the environment.

A change of heart is needed
in order to support and promote needed projects
whose results can be seen
both in long and short terms.

When they make serious attempts
at these worthy endeavors,
they will recognize and attest
to their God-given dignity
and leave behind in the path of history
a testimony of self-giving responsibility.

Dialogue and transparency in decision-making

Full transparency effectively

helps to wipe corruption away.

There has to be due pressure and incentives

to be aware of agreements made

and new information needs to be

shared and publicly debated.

Let us have a serious look

at environmental impact studies.

And these should be done as soon as policies are announced,

or as soon as business plans or projects are presented.

There has to be complete freedom from all-political

and economic pressures.

A diversity of sustainable approaches

must be studied and debated

but local population must be

given epistemological and ecological advantages

in the discussions since they have the most to lose
and often the least to gain.

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence,
there are still people who seriously doubt
the reality of the ecological crisis.

But the lack of absolute scientific certainty
is not a sufficient excuse
for the adoption of common ground
for the sake of our common good.

There has to be a more prudent commitment
to testing the truth of safety claims so that
industries and corporations should be compelled
to demonstrate that their technologies and practices
will not contaminate and harm the environment.

This does not mean that we object
to every technological innovation
which improves the quality of life of all people,
but in all cases it must be made clear

that profit is not the only criterion
for what matters in our lives.

We must always humbly admit that the Church
does not have the technical solutions
nor does it pretend to take the place of politics.

As members of the Church
we have the right to critically examine political decisions
and put pressure on powerful economic forces
so that they can follow the path to common good.

Politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfillment

Politics should not be the slave of the economy
and must not subject itself uncritically to the dictates
and to the absolutist claims of the technocratic paradigm.

But this is exactly what transpired in 2008
when the global financial crisis happened and governments solely focused on saving
banks. Protecting the environment cannot be achieved
solely based on the financial formula of costs and benefits.

We must question the old myth
about “the invisible hand of the market.”

Those whose minds and hearts are solely focused
on making the greatest profit
will not bother to consider the effects
of their decisions on the environment.

We are not against progress;
but we seek and believe in a holistic notion of progress.

A real road to this type of progress
should put the brakes on a technology
that solely augments our consumerist habits
should invest its time in finding solutions
to the fundamental problems of the human family.

It has become urgent to reject
predatory business approaches
that destroy the environment.

“The time has come has come

to limit growth in some parts of the world
in order to provide resources and opportunity
for other places to experience healthy growth.”

Finding middle ground solutions
between protecting nature and financial gains
will not make for a healthy environment.

Pollution and contamination do not lead
to progress and will result in our collective destruction.

Let us not allow corporations and banks
to distort our ecological language and values with their technocratic and profit oriented
approaches.

Corporations cannot be allowed to make profits
on the backs of local populations and future generations.

Politicians should not forget the principle of subsidiarity,
which gives priority to local populations closest to the problem
to make decisions about what is best for the common good.

Some sectors of the economy exercise
more power than the state.

What happens is that when the state cannot fulfill its duty, economic interests appear to supposedly solve the problem but in reality make the situation worse by bringing in crime, human trafficking, drugs, and violence. Politicians and economists blame each other when speaking about the problem of poverty and the deterioration of the environmental problem. What we would like is for those two groups to acknowledge their mistakes and seek ways to jointly work together for the common good.

Religions in dialogue with the sciences

Science alone cannot help us understand the full picture of our human reality because doing so simply goes beyond the limits of its scientific approaches. In order to have an understanding

of the profound truths that undergird human existence,
we need the arts, culture, and religion.

To provide an ethic that responsibly responds
to the reality in which we move and have our being,
we need a creative dialogue between faith and reason.

Purely technical solutions
will not resolve problems if they ignore
the sources of motivation offered by religion.

There needs to be consistency between our faith and our actions.

Who are we to criticize others?

The vast majority of the people of the world
profess to believe in some religion.

Therefore it makes good sense to enter into a dialogue with them
in order to care for nature and to defend the poor.

And the sciences also need to dialogue among themselves.

Environmental movements must also do the same
and leave aside divisive ideologies

in order to arrive at sound approaches for saving our planet.

Questions for reflection

Pope Francis acknowledges two great difficulties:

- 1) Multinational corporations who cause serious problems to the environment can easily escape from the power of national governments.
- 2) Politicians in our society continue supporting projects whose destructive impacts to the environment are not immediately apparent.

What mechanisms can we count on to pressure our elected political leaders?

Which sustainability-oriented companies can we support to shame those who contaminate the earth and to pressure them to change their ways?



Chapter 6: Education and spiritual ecology

All of humanity needs to change. We all have a common origin and a common future. If we accept this, then it is possible for us to change our lifestyles and our attitudes.

Search for a new lifestyle

The market has implemented a consumer mechanism that created an impulse on the public.

This is the effect of techno-economic paradigm.

This is a present structure in the whole life,
which we usually accept as something rational and true.

The same market convinces us that we are free
because we have the liberty to consume things.
But this is not real liberty.

It makes us remember
of another famous word of Pope Francis
from *The Joy of the Gospel*: We should not be self-referential.

This consumer obsession makes us egoists.

We only care about our proper needs.

We do not worry about defending the environment,
and the ecological crisis that turns into a social crisis.

We still have the ability to overcome our bad habits Even though there are forces that
want to lock us in, no one can take our human dignity. God can always work in our
hearts.

If we are able to change our way of life,
then we can pressure the businesses

that try to sell us their waste-promoting products,
because we do not need these products that much.

Through our healthy habits, the businesses will change
and will stop producing everything that is not healthy for the environment.

In the year 2000, in the Hague, *A Letter of the Earth* was published
and it invited us to leave the self-destruction of nature behind
and start to live a different way of life. There is still a lack
of a universal awareness of this problem.

He has accepted this challenge himself
and he asks us to do the same.

Questions for reflection

In the whole encyclical, Pope Francis unites a concern for the poor with the protection of our environment. He is very critical about the consumerist lifestyle.

How can we begin to create a new way of living?

He invites us to imagine: What would be the political and economic impact of the generalized change of the way we live our lives today? What would be the first steps we can take to make this dream a reality?

Education for the covenant between humanity and the environment

We need to form new habits that rely less on the market
and follow more closely the deeper desire within the heart.

It is a challenge especially for the youth because they recognize the importance of comprehensive ecology, but also they have been raised in our consumerist culture. For some time we have had an ecological education that has neglected to teach us the causes of our present crisis. Recently, we have learned that consumerism is the root of our social problems.

Now we have to take one more step
using the observation of the natural resources
and make the leap towards the mystery that gives meaning to life.

Apart from having an ecological consciousness,
we should develop solid virtues and convictions.

We can form these habits when we express care “for the whole of creation using small daily actions.” Let’s think about some of the small tasks that Pope Francis said that can have big effects:

- Avoid the use of plastic and paper materials.
- Reduce the use of water.

- Separate waste.
- Treat with care all other living creatures.
- Use public transportation.
- Plant trees.
- Turn off light not in use.
- Reuse things instead of throwing them away.

We should not think that what we do is too little.

They are going to produce results more than what we can imagine:

Other people that see us will want to imitate us.

This will reinforce our identity and give us a joy of living,

knowing that we are spreading good actions

that preserves the health and wholeness of the Earth.

Family forms that basis for the culture of life

because this is where small gestures

of sincere courtesy and love are developed,

and where the culture of life that forms us is created.

When we concern ourselves with the care for the environment

and the solidarity between the poor and vulnerable,

it is also important to create new ways of seeing the beautiful.

With a contemplative attitude

we can start creating a new paradigm

for viewing human life, our social relationships,

and our relationship with other creatures, nature,

and the whole of God's creation.

Ecological conversion

Our Christian spirituality offers a beautiful contribution

to the intent transforming humanity.

Thus Pope Francis offers some insights

in order to help us understand that our commitment

to the Good News has impact on the way we think, feel, and live.

The Pope does not wish to convince us with ideas; what he wants is a motivation that comes from deep within our hearts because belief without the mystical and spiritual is not enough.

The ecological crisis requires a profound interior conversion.

If our exterior deserts have multiplied in our world,

it is because our interior deserts have widened.

If we are among those that make fun of the effort
or if we have simply become uninvolved,
then we need to be converted.

Our encounter with Jesus Christ
should display itself in our relationships
with the world that surrounds us.

Living the vocation of being protectors
of the work of God is an essential part of the Christian life.

In the first place, conversion involves recognizing our own errors and sins,
repenting from deep within our hearts, and making solid commitments to change.

True reconciliation requires examining our lives
and recognizing the ways our action and inaction
offend God and harm the rest of God's creation.

The situation is so complex
that we are not going to be able to resolve it ourselves.
Perhaps, we have lost the ability and liberty to overcome
the power our consumerist habits have over us

because we have also lost our sense
of the ethical, social, and ecological.

We need to respond with community networks
and not rely on the sum of our individual actions.

Ecological conversion is also a community conversion.

First, we need *Gratitude* for everything that God has given us;
and *Gratitude*, means, generosity towards others.

Secondly, we need to remember that we are united with all other creatures.

We should not contemplate things from the outside,
but from the inside so we can discern our connection with all of God's creation.

Finally, when we allow ourselves to be converted,
there will be growth in our creativity and enthusiasm.

If we put these attitudes in practice, we will act with a lot of responsibility
without thinking we are above everyone else.

Joy and Peace

We wish to encourage a lifestyle that is both prophetic and contemplative.

What we need to learn is the old tradition that says "less is more."

Devoting ourselves to the mere accumulation of material things
distracts and deceives our hearts
and we fail to value the significance of every thing and every single moment.

If we pay humble attention to even the smallest things,
we open ourselves to huge possibilities God can accomplish within us.

“Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation
and a capacity to be happy with little.

Happiness requires knowing how to limit our necessities and to be open to multiple possibilities that life offers to us. Many people do not see the value of moderation and humility, but if we do not practice these virtues we often end up damaging society and the environment.

“It is not enough to only talk about the integrity of ecosystems; we need to also talk about preserving the integrity of human life.”

Besides, Pope Francis added something important:

Integral ecology requires a dedication of time
to recover serene harmony with creation.

This attitude from the heart allows us to view
every person as a divine gift
and we will not have to be preoccupied with what comes next.

Jesus shows us the way to overcome the anxiety,
which brings superficiality and aggressiveness to our lives.

Pope Francis proposes a simple exercise:

The beautiful tradition of giving thanks to God before and after meals.

This way, we remember that we depend on God for everything,
and also remember the people that have worked hard
so we can enjoy these gifts.

Civic and political love

Genuine care of nature requires that we live like brothers and sisters.

We do not love so that we get paid or rewarded.

Love in its highest form is always free.

That's why we can love even our enemies

and we can love the whole universe

even though it is not subject to our control.

This is what is call *universal fraternity*.

We love each other mutually to avoid superficiality.

When we deride faith and goodness,

we destroy the whole basis of social life.

These attitudes not only bring violence,
but also block the development of authentic culture
and the disposition to care for the environment.

In a similar manner, integral ecology develops
through the practice of simple gestures
that breaks away from the logic of individualism.

This is the spirituality of St. Thérèse de Lisieux.

Love is both civil and political,
and is built when we work for a better world.

When we love society and we commit ourselves to the common good,
we practice the highest form of charity.

Charity is not limited solely to actions among human beings.
It can also affect relationships within politics and the economy.
This is why the Church talks about a civilization of love,
and social love as the key to authentic development.

We can also think of charity as creating strategies
that stops environmental degradation

and encourage the promotion of a culture of care.

We do not all work for partisan politics,
but we can have an impact as an organization.

As a community we can organize various activities for the common good:

For example, every time we work in the neighborhood
to protect and improve parks and buildings,
we are also strengthening our social bonds.

Little by little the community gets liberated
from consumerist indifference.

Once again we see
how the care of our home
requires the protection of the environment
and realize the interconnectedness
of the things we need on earth.

Sacramental signs and the celebration of rest

Everything comes from God,
and God is present in all things.

We find God in the deepest parts of our hearts,
but we should also find Him in everything around us.

The secret of contemplation
is feeling the intimate connection between God and all beings.
It is not that everything is divine,
but when we admire the beauty of nature
we are also giving glory to God who gave us the gift of nature
and the whole creation.

The sacraments bring to our minds and hearts
the nearness of Jesus Christ,
and reminds us that all creatures of the universe
find their real meaning in Him.

The Eucharist is the best manifestation
of the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God
because it shows God's most intimate presence with us
through a piece of matter: bread and wine.

Since Jesus Christ is King of the universe,
every Eucharist is really a celebration
on the altar of the universe.

We remember that Sunday is the day of rest.

Like the Jewish Saturday,

“it is offered as the day of healing

of the relationship of human beings with God, with each other,
with the world, and with the whole creation.

The Trinity and the relationship between creatures

The Father is the fountain and foundation of all things.

The Son, through which everything has been created,
has united himself with Earth through the breast of Mary.

The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is present in the heart of the universe,
encouraging new paths.

The world was created through three Persons,
but each one according to his own being.

When we study the universe with its beauty,
we should worship the Trinity
because all of reality carries a mark of the Trinity.

The world that the Trinity created is a web of relationships.

In the universe we find an infinite number of relationships that secretly intertwine.

The human person grows and sanctifies himself or herself

when s/he enters into a relationship with,

and lives in communion with God, with others, and with all creatures.

Queen of all creation

Mary, the mother who cared for Jesus,

now turns to us with tears in her eyes, like when she saw her son Jesus crucified,

and calls us to work with her in bringing healing:

To our humanity broken by our greed and selfishness,

and to our common home dying from our addictive consumerism and neglect.

She is the woman “clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet

and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Indeed, she is the mother and queen of all creation.

It was Mary along with Joseph who protected

Jesus from “the violence of the unjust by bringing him to Egypt.”

We then turn to Mary “who now grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor,

and for the creatures of this world, laid waste by human power.”

With Mary as our mother

let us be her daughters and sons today

willing to be raised by her like she did Jesus

so that we can stand up courageously

to speak truth to power,

to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth

and bring healing to our broken humanity

and our dying mother earth!

Questions for reflection

What are the ecological values and virtues our mothers stand for that we have forgotten and ignored?

How do we confront the tyranny of men and the corporations they run which have resulted in the destruction of our planet?

If Mary is the mother of creation, how do we ask forgiveness for killing hundreds of her children in the form of species of plants and animals we have destroyed?

Beyond the Sun

When finishing this long reflection ,
we understand that all things bring us
to the infinite beauty of God.

Jesus brings us towards the New Jerusalem
where He will make all things new (Rev 21,5).

Meanwhile, here on Earth
we unite ourselves to take charge of this home
that God entrusted to us.

Everything we do will be accepted in his glory.
This gives us hope that our worries cannot distract us,
from the love of God and from caring for our planet.

God has summoned us for this mission
and He gives us the strength and the light
to continue forward.

He is in the heart of the world.

He will never abandon us because

He is definitely united with our Earth and with us.

Questions for reflection

Do we need to belong to political groups in order to protect the environment in our communities? Pope Francis urges us to think big when creating strategies that can positively impact our social, political, and economic relationships. This can only happen if we involve ourselves in the life of our neighborhoods and communities; by our openness and willingness to take part in campaigns in response to the forces of corruption of all types. How can we begin to organize ourselves so that politicians and businessmen will give us their attention?

How do we develop the courage to stand up to political leaders acting on behalf of the interest of multinational corporations?

Let us end with a prayer of Pope Francis for our earth.

Almighty God, you are present in the whole universe

and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with tenderness all that exist.

Pour out upon us the power of your love

that we may protect life and beauty

Fill us with peace, that we may live

as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,

so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts

of those who look only for gain

at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,

to be filled with awe and contemplation,

to recognize that we are profoundly united

with each and every creature

as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Strengthen us, we pray, in our struggle

for justice, love and peace. Amen.

Drawings from “My Notebook” by Donna Smith

