

A mosaic depicting St. Francis of Assisi in a dark brown habit, standing and gesturing towards a group of birds. The background is a golden, cracked mosaic. The text is overlaid in white, bold font.

# **Study Guide for Laudato Si'**

**The Interfranciscan Commission for  
Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation  
August 2015**

## **Canticle of the Creatures**

O Most High, all-powerful, good Lord God,  
to you belong praise, glory,  
honour and all blessing.

Be praised, my Lord, for all your creation  
and especially for our Brother Sun,  
who brings us the day and the light;  
he is strong and shines magnificently.

O Lord, we think of you when we look at him.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon,  
and for the stars  
which you have set shining and lovely  
in the heavens.

Be praised, my Lord,  
for our Brothers Wind and Air  
and every kind of weather  
by which you, Lord,  
uphold life in all your creatures.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Water,  
who is very useful to us,  
and humble and precious and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire,  
through whom you give us light in the darkness:  
he is bright and lively and strong.

Be praised, my Lord,  
for Sister Earth, our Mother,  
who nourishes us and sustains us,  
bringing forth  
fruits and vegetables of many kinds  
and flowers of many colours.

Be praised, my Lord,  
for those who forgive for love of you;  
and for those  
who bear sickness and weakness  
in peace and patience  
- you will grant them a crown.

Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister Death,  
whom we must all face.

I praise and bless you, Lord,  
and I give thanks to you,  
and I will serve you in all humility.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the Lord give you peace!

It is with great pleasure that we offer this Study Guide for *Laudato Si'*. As preparations were underway for publication of the encyclical, the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF) contacted us, the Interfranciscan Commission for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (Romans VI), and requested that we anticipate the arrival of the papal letter. In response, we proposed creation of a Study Guide meant to promote reading and study of the encyclical. The CFF accepted our proposal.

This Study Guide is offered in a special way to the Franciscan Family and to those with whom we work. Pope Francis makes it clear that his inspiration, not only for the encyclical but for his papacy as well, is Saint Francis of Assisi. In the letter he comments early on: "I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically." We are invited to embody this message in the world today, living out the example of our model Saint Francis, and hearing clearly the cry of the poor and vulnerable and the cry of the earth.

The Study Guide is also presented to all those of good will who might find it helpful. Pope Francis calls repeatedly in *Laudato Si'* for dialogue at all levels and between all actors to address the urgent crisis of our day. May we find ways to respond together to his insistent pleas.

Directions for using this Study Guide are very simple:

- It must be used with a copy of the encyclical in hand; the Guide was prepared with the intention of encouraging the individuals and groups who use it to go directly to the words of the Pope. So those who participate need a copy of the encyclical as well as a copy of the Study Guide.
- The Guide is divided into seven sections, one for the introduction and one for each of the six chapters; prepare a schedule of nine meetings: one for a general introduction, one for each of the seven sections, and a final one for evaluation of the experience.
- Choose a leader for the entire program, and a leader for each of the meetings. The leader should remind participants to read the appropriate section of the encyclical before the session, and then make sure that the session flows well and that everyone gets a chance to participate.

- At each session begin with a moment of recollection, prayer, reflection. Why has the group come together? What results are sought? Then go to the Study Guide, to the summary of the section that is under consideration. Read through it slowly. When a comment or a citation catches the attention of participants, go to the encyclical and read the entire section from which the quote is taken. What is the reaction of participants to the section? Then continue with the summary.
- After the summary, continue with the questions for reflection. Wherever possible, find very concrete responses to the questions. How might participants respond individually? How can the group respond together? What proposals might be taken to the larger community? How can the local community become a spark to ignite the larger activities needed to face our global crisis? Constantly look for ways to implement the suggestions made in the encyclical.
- After the first eight sessions, plan a session of evaluation and celebration. What was the group able to accomplish? What steps are necessary to continue the process? How might the group involve others in the struggle? Might it be interesting for those who participated in the study group to form new groups with new participants?

Sisters and brothers, we hope that this Study Guide will encourage you to read and study the encyclical, especially in groups that will then be able to work together to implement its call for the changes needed to confront the current crisis. We are aware that all Guides like this one are culturally limited. So we invite the Franciscan Family in each region to consider preparing a more regionally appropriate study guide. We want to guarantee that the Study Guide will not be an elite document, but one that helps all people to read, understand and live the words of Pope Francis found in *Laudato Si'*. Please feel free to share it widely.

We pray that this Study Guide will be a useful tool in understanding the message of the encyclical, and in promoting the process of ongoing conversion so essential to living the Gospel life!

The members of Romans VI



# Introduction

## SUMMARY:

The subtitle of the Pope's encyclical *Laudato Si'* makes clear the underlying concern of the letter: On Care for our Common Home. Saint Francis reminds us that "our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us (#1). Our sister cries out because of the harm done to her due to our lack of responsibility, and because "We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will" (#2).

Given the situation of environmental deterioration in which we find ourselves, Pope Francis calls on all who live on this planet to enter into dialogue about our common home (#3). He cites his papal predecessors who have previously warned about these problems, commenting that their concerns are echoed in the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, along with other Churches and Christian communities and other religions. (#3-9).

Pope Francis comments on the importance of Saint Francis of Assisi for his own life and ministry, and names him "the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically," thus stating clearly one of the basic themes of the encyclical, the relationship between social justice and care for the environment. The Pope says that: "He (Saint Francis) shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" (#10). We are reminded that unless, like Saint Francis, we ap-

proach nature and the environment with an openness to awe and wonder, "our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs" (#11).

The Pope states clearly the appeal he is making: "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development..." (#13), which demands "a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" (#14). He recognizes difficulties associated with this appeal, due not only to powerful opposition, but also to lack of interest. "Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity" (#14).

The introduction ends with a list of certain themes that will appear throughout the encyclical, and which will help to organize and understand the overall message: "...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 call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle" (#16).

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. The name of the encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, highlights the importance of Saint Francis as an inspiration for the letter. Which of the saint's attitudes do you find most engaging?
2. Pope Francis makes clear his understanding that environmental degradation and social injustice are grave concerns, and that they are interconnected. How have you experienced this connection? How can we be part of the dialogue to which he is calling everyone?
3. Review the themes that are listed in the last paragraph above. In your opinion, which ones are most important?

# Chapter 1: What is happening to our common home?

## SUMMARY:

The first chapter of the encyclical is dedicated to reading the signs of the times, and Pope Francis notes that “we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair” (#61). While acknowledging that there is a variety of opinions regarding the situation and its possible solutions, he declares that only honest debate among experts who respect one another’s views can lead us forward (#61). The encyclical proposes six areas that require such careful analysis.

The first deals with pollution and climate change (#20-26). Many types of pollution are leading to a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and technology is not the only way to solve these problems (#20). The hundreds of millions of tons of waste generated every year, much of it toxic, radioactive and non-biodegradable, is another form of pollution, and because of it the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth (#21). These problems are closely related to the throwaway culture in which we live which affects the excluded while reducing things to rubbish; we must learn to preserve resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources (#22).

Regarding climate change, the Pope states that a very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climate system. While other factors are involved, studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due mainly to human activity, and the problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels. Furthermore, many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and this has led to a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, and to promote effective policies to address these issues (#23-26).

The second area is that of water (#27-31). Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is

indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems; the situation is particularly serious in relation to the poor, causing many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases (#28-29). The encyclical is clear in stating that access to safe drinking water is a basic and universal human right (#30).

The third area deals with loss of biodiversity (#32-42). Extinction of plant and animal species caused by humans changes the ecosystem, and future consequences cannot be predicted. This loss entails not only the elimination of resources for us, but the disappearance of species that have value in themselves (#32-33). We must recognize the fact that ALL creatures are connected, and that all are dependent on one another (#42).

The fourth area deals with the decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society (#43-47). We must take into account the effects of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture on people’s lives (#43). Consideration of these effects indicates that the growth of the last two centuries has not always led to integral development and an improvement in quality of life (#46).

The fifth area is that of global inequality (#48-52). Pope Francis clearly states that “the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet,” the poorest and the excluded, who are the majority of the planet’s population, and who are often treated in international discussions as an afterthought or as collateral damage (#48-49). The encyclical forcefully notes that “a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (#49). The birth rate cannot be used as a scapegoat; we must face the question of “extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some” (#50). Such considerations will lead us to be aware that, in regard to climate change, there are differentiated responsibilities” (#52).

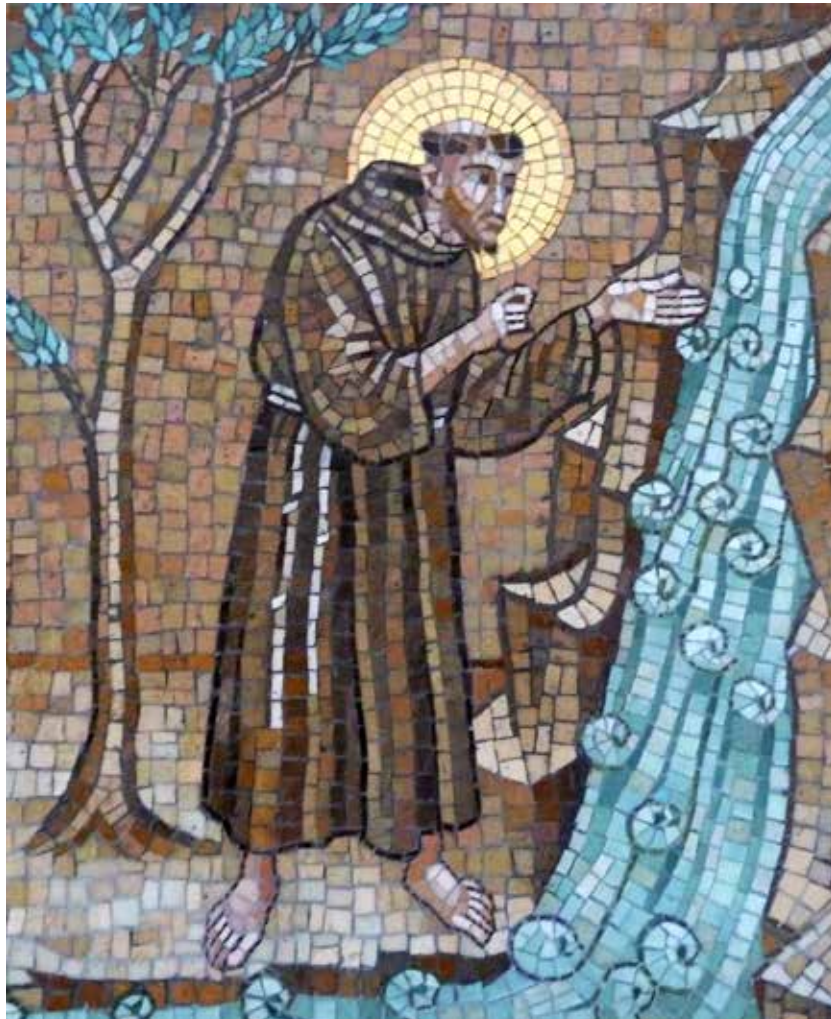
Finally, Chapter 1 addresses the weak response to our environmental problems (#53-59). While we have never mistreated our common home so badly as we have in

the last two hundred years, we have not found adequate responses to this crisis, an indication that international politics are subject to global technology and finance (#53-54). “Any genuine attempt by groups within society to introduce change is viewed as a nuisance based

on romantic illusions or an obstacle to be circumvented” (#54). We cannot be satisfied with “false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness” (#59), but we must face up to our crisis and make bold decisions.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Do you agree with the Pope that the Earth, our common home, is falling into serious disrepair? What evidence can you provide to support your opinion?
2. Over the last few years there has been contention over the causes of global warming. The Pope says that while there are other causes, the main one is human activity. What do you think? What can we do in our personal, communal and social lives to address the causes of climate change?
3. The encyclical calls on everyone to recognize the effects of the environmental crisis on the poor, and to remember that any true ecological approach is always also a social approach to the issues. The Pope also says that in regard to climate change there must be differentiated responsibilities. How might this approach affect our lifestyle?
4. What other area of concern presented in Chapter 1 do you consider important in a discussion of the environmental crisis?



## Chapter 2: The gospel of creation - the Pope's Franciscan vision

### SUMMARY:

In Chapter 2 of *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis turns from an exposition of various illnesses afflicting the world and the human family to the development of a treatment plan rooted in faith and the Bible. He begins by reemphasizing the necessity for science and religion to be in dialogue: "If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. The Catholic Church is open to dialogue with philosophical thought; this has enabled her to produce various syntheses between faith and reason" (#63).

The Pope recalls that human beings are part of God's plan for creation (#65). We were meant for relationship with God, each other, and the world in which we live; sin, especially when we presume to take God's place and forget that we, too, are creatures, is a rupture in those relationships (#66). Thus, rather than thinking that "dominion" over the earth and God's creatures (Genesis 1:28) justifies doing whatever we want with them and each other, we are called to be responsible stewards (#67-69).

Pope Francis repeatedly recalls the Biblical message that "everything is interconnected" (#70). Just one person can restore hope and there is wisdom in the Sabbath rest (#71). Contemplating creation can lead us to praise, thanksgiving and a deeper faith in God's saving love for us and a greater desire for justice (#72-74).

The Pope distinguishes between nature ("a system which can be studied, understood and controlled") and creation ("a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and...a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion") (#76). As "the order of God's love" (#77), creation is in further need of development, and that demands the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit and human cooperation, as well as our creativity and the ingenuity that is often evident in the sciences (#78-81). As people in relationship and subjects who are co-creators, we are called to treat other living beings as subjects to be encountered, not objects to be dominated or controlled.

Pope Francis warns: "When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society" (#82). The purpose and end of the universe is entirely different: "The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things....Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator" (#83).

This is a very Franciscan vision, and it is expanded in the paragraphs that follow: each part of creation has a God-given purpose, reveals God's goodness and generosity, is interdependent and in some way reveals God without being able to capture the fullness of God (#84-88). This approach is beautifully expressed in St. Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures* (#87), the inspiration for the encyclical.

Love for creation, however, cannot obscure the "pre-eminence" of the human person, and at times "more zeal is shown in protecting other species than in defending the dignity which all human beings share in equal measure" (#90). "A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings" (#91). Care for the natural world is fine as long as we do not ignore our brothers and sisters who are suffering. These two concerns are related: "when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings" (#92).

Because the earth and its goods are essentially "a shared inheritance," Pope Francis reminds us that, in the words of St. John Paul II, "there is always a social mortgage on all private property" (#93). Our natural environment is "a collective good" and everyone's responsibility (#95). As Christians we exercise that responsibility following the example of Jesus, who invited people to contemplate the goodness and beauty of the world, lived in harmony with nature, and worked with his hands, thus sanctifying human work (#96-98). Recognizing the honor and



responsibility of our calling to live and work as Jesus did, we can face with courage the human roots of the crisis that currently confronts us.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. St. Francis saw himself as a “universal brother,” one called to live in harmony with the people and world around him. How can we better reflect that harmony in our own lives, as believers, citizens, workers and consumers?
2. Do you find the Pope’s distinction between “nature” and “creation” helpful?
3. How might this encyclical cause us to read and interpret St. Francis’ Canticle of the Creatures in new ways?
4. Given the “pre-eminence” of humanity in creation, what does it mean for us to obey God’s command to the first humans, created in the divine image, in Genesis 1:28ff?
5. How can the vow and tradition of evangelical poverty help others to better understand and treat the environment as a “collective good?”



## Chapter 3: Human roots of the ecological crisis

### SUMMARY:

In the spirit of Saint Francis, Pope Francis focuses on the concerns of our day and gives central attention to the dominant technocratic paradigm and its effects on people and on their actions in the world. He asks us to look at our understanding of the causes of the ecological crisis and to consider what changes we need to make so that all might share in the benefits of technology. He calls for dialogue to create an ethical framework of principles and behaviors, and suggests several areas for discussion and decision-making.

First, we have been brought to a crossroads by our technological developments. We are grateful for those which have improved the quality of human life through medicine, engineering, and communications. Yet it needs to be acknowledged that there have also been disastrous effects. Advances in technology are matched by advances in power, especially for those with the knowledge and economic resources to use them (the Pope cites the use of nuclear bombs, the array of technology used by totalitarian regimes and the deadly arsenal of weapons available for modern warfare). There can be the tendency to believe that an increase in power is an increase in progress. Pope Francis observes, however, that technological development must be accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. The situation calls for sound ethics, a culture and spirituality capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint (#102-105).

The second is consideration of the globalization of the technocratic paradigm. Technological products are not neutral, but create a framework which ends up conditioning lifestyle and shaping social possibilities dictated by certain powerful groups that dominate economic and political life. This approach promotes the notion of infinite or unlimited growth, which is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods (#106). The problems of global hunger and poverty cannot be resolved simply by market growth. Wasteful consumerism offers an unacceptable contrast to dehumanizing privation. From this perception, Pope Francis notes that the deepest roots of our present failures have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth. There needs to be

a realization that our struggle to constantly accumulate novelties can lead to a superficial life (#106-114).

A third area of concern is the crisis and effects of modern anthropocentrism. God has given earth to us, and we must use it with respect for its original good purpose. We are not called to mastery over the world, but to responsible stewardship. We are also God's gift to one another. When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities, it is difficult to hear the cry of nature itself. We cannot underestimate the importance of our relationship with the environment, with others and with God. Pope Francis calls for a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments of recent centuries (#115-121). He declares: "There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology" (#118); to feel responsible for the world, human beings must first truly understand who they are. Then he urges us to bring our rich Christian tradition into fruitful dialogue with the following three situations:

1. Practical relativism. Seeing something as relevant only if it serves immediate interests can lead to environmental degradation and social decay and promote the "use and throw away culture". Some examples Pope Francis cites include human trafficking, organized crime, drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds, the buying of organs, eliminating children and using the fur of endangered species. Political efforts and the force of law will not be sufficient by themselves to bring about change; rather the culture itself must be called into question (#122-123).
2. The need to protect employment. In Genesis, man and woman were given the garden in order to preserve and keep it fruitful. From this example, Pope Francis suggests that work understood in relationship to others is what gives meaning and purpose to our human activities. Together with this perception is the awe-filled contemplation of creation which we find in St. Francis of Assisi. Pope Francis asserts that

when our capacity for contemplation and reverence is impaired, it is easy for us to misunderstand the meaning of work. He encourages work as a means to express our human dignity. As such it should be a setting for rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God. Our lives need to have a balance of reflection and work. With this in mind, helping the poor financially is only provisional; they need to be allowed a dignified life through work. He notes further that technological progress is not when the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines. Instead, the creation of jobs is an essential service for the common good. For this

reason “it is imperative to an economy which favors productive diversity and business creativity”, and “civil authorities have the right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production” (#124-129).

3. Biological technologies. Pope Francis states that human intervention in plants and animals is permissible when it pertains to the necessities of human life. However, he notes that it is difficult to make a general judgment about genetic modification. A broad, responsible, scientific and social debate needs to take place, one considering all of the available information and including those directly and indirectly affected. Technology separated from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power (#130-136).

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. As a member of a global community, in what ways do you feel that your vision of a satisfying life is affected by the need to constantly purchase and accumulate advanced technology?
2. As you reflect on the importance of dialogue with others regarding the human roots of the ecological crisis, how does your Christianity contribute to a fruitful dialogue with others to bring about needed changes? Or, if you do not have a substantial foundation, how do you see yourself developing one?
3. Pope Francis is very concerned about anthropology, that is, the way we understand ourselves. What is the meaning of his statement: “there can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology”?
4. Do you feel caught into a “use and throw away culture” when technological advances necessitate the purchase of new equipment without the option of upgrading your present one? Can you find a way out of this dilemma?
5. Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of contemplation and describes several characteristics of work. Has your work been such an opportunity for you to integrate contemplation and action? How would you see yourself promoting these values for others?
6. When you buy products are you conscious of the way the product has been developed? Has the development process respected the employment of persons and the innate characteristics of plants and animals?

## Chapter 4: Integral ecology

### SUMMARY:

This chapter is extremely important because Pope Francis defines INTEGRAL ECOLOGY, beginning with the statement that it is one “which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (#137). He then explains various types of ecology: environmental, economic and social; cultural; and finally the ecology of daily life. The chapter ends with a look at two important principles: the common good, and justice between generations. Let us consider each issue in more detail.

**Environmental, economic and social ecology.** To reflect on these three dimensions of ecology, Pope Francis emphasizes the dimension of the interconnectedness of all things and “the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production and consumption” (#138). He calls for an INTEGRATED APPROACH to a complex crisis: “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” (#139). Researchers must be granted broad academic freedom so that they might better understand the interactions of the system and find ways to address the crisis (#140). The concept of economic growth offers a limited understanding of the issues, and suggests the need for an “economic ecology” capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality, a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision (#141). Furthermore, if everything is related, then the health of a society’s institutions also has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life. Institutions that are weak will have negative consequences (#142).

**Cultural ecology.** The Pope notes that “together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat” (#143). This threat demands greater attention to local cultures. A consumerist vision of human beings has a leveling effect on cultures. It attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical

interventions, and can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community (#144). In the context of culture the Pope expresses the need for special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions, noting that they are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world pressure is being put on them to abandon their lands to make room for agricultural and mining projects (#146).

**Ecology of daily life.** In this section the Pope deals with the issue of QUALITY OF LIFE which affects everyone. He commends those who with generosity and creativity respond to the environmental limitations of their surroundings, but notes that extreme poverty can lead to immense challenges in regard to quality of life. He mentions the problems raised by lack of housing, criminalization and overcrowding in mega-cities (#148-149, 152). But he also mentions a series of transformations in urban life that could be part of the new vision for our common home (#147-153). Concern for city life, however, should not cause us to overlook rural populations which “lack access to essential services and where some workers are reduced to conditions of servitude, without rights or even the hope of a more dignified life” (#154). The section ends with a recognition of the relationship between human life and moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment (#155).

**The principle of the common good.** The Pope emphasizes the common good as a central and unifying principle of social ethics, one which is based on respect for the human person as such (#156-157). He calls on society as a whole, and the states in particular, to defend and promote the common good, showing in a special way solidarity with and preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters (#157-158).

**The principle of justice between the generations.** The Pope defines intergenerational solidarity as the notion of the common good extended to future generations.

He comments that: “Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us” (#159), adding that our very dignity is at stake. He says that: “The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable

as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes” (#161). The current crisis demands a very concrete response, and Pope Francis says: “The effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now. We need to reflect on our accountability before those who will have to endure the dire consequences” (#162).

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. Pope Francis says that Integral Ecology is an approach that connects environmental problems with social and economic problems. How do you see this connection?
2. The Pope speaks about a consumerist vision of human beings and that the pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has stretched the planet’s capacity, which can only lead to catastrophes. How do you think we contribute to this situation?
3. How do you see the connection between the universal destination of the world’s common goods and the evangelical preferential option for the poor?
4. Pope Francis affirms that “intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice”. What must be done to guarantee a better future for the generations to come?



## Chapter 5: Guidelines for action based on dialogue

### SUMMARY:

In Chapter 5, after having presented his overview of the reality of the planet and the profoundly human causes of environmental degradation, Pope Francis offers his thoughts on the more important paths we might follow to “help us escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us” (#163). His approach is built on a series of dialogues that must be carried out: on the environment in the international community; for new national and local policies; for transparency in decision-making; between politics and economics for human fulfillment; between religions and science. The Pope deals with each of these proposed dialogues in more detail, raising the following issues:

Dialogue on the environment in the international community. There is a growing conviction that our planet is a homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home (#164), which ought to lead us to conceive of a common project for the world and for humanity. Despite some advances, there continues to be a lack of global awareness of the gravity of the situation (#165-170). The Pope speaks of the need for “common and differentiated responsibilities” and for the radical changes demanded by present circumstances (#170). He calls for enforceable international agreements. Global regulatory norms are needed to impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions; there needs to be agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of so called “global commons” (#173-174).

Dialogue for new national and local policies. It is not enough to focus on the international issues, but winners and losers on the national and local levels must also be identified (#176). Governments should not be concerned primarily with immediate results, driven by consumerist sectors of the population and concentrating on short term growth (#178), but rather with long term goals that guarantee the common good. They should pass laws that promote respect for the environment and the interests of small producers, and which preserve local ecosystems (#179-181). However the Pope is very realistic about the possibility for these long term goals, and notes that “...public pressure has to be exerted in order to bring about decisive political action” (#179).

Dialogue and transparency in decision-making. In this section the Pope deals with the problem of corruption, which can be addressed effectively with transparent and shared political processes (#182). Every environmental impact assessment must be carried out in a way that is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure (#183). The Pope calls for dialogue between all of the interested stakeholders, especially the local population, and offers a series of questions that must be raised in order to guarantee integral development (#183-185). He also highlights the need to use the precautionary principle (#186-187). The Pope notes that in the case of strong evidence that irreversible damage may result due to an activity, “a project should be halted or modified, even in the absence of indisputable proof. Here the burden of proof is effectively reversed, since in such cases objective and conclusive demonstrations will have to be brought forward to demonstrate that the proposed activity will not cause serious harm to the environment or to those who inhabit it” (#186).

Politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfillment. “Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy” (#189). Politics and economics must be at the service of life, especially human life, and environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits and market forces (#189-190). We cannot hope that those who are obsessed with profit will take into account concern for nature in their calculations (#190). Limitless growth is not a panacea for all our problems; rather, we need to be more creative and invest in sustainable development (#192-194). “...(T)he time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth (#193). The Pope reinforces the call for increased responsibility at all levels, citing the need for subsidiarity (#196), and ends the section by challenging politics to work at restoring its own credibility by promoting a clear and transparent approach to our current problems, thus limiting the space where organized crime can function (#197).

Religions in dialogue with science. Life cannot be to-

tally explained by the empirical sciences, and religious classics foster reflection on ultimate meaning and are able to open new horizons (#199). If we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, and the values such as sacrifice and goodness, no technical solution will be able to fill the void; believers must live in a way consonant with their faith, and not contradict it by their actions (#200). “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be be-

lievers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity” (#201). The Pope also calls for dialogue among the various sciences and various ecological movements. “The gravity of the environmental crisis demands that we all look to the common good,” promoting true dialogue that will lead to concrete results (#201).

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

1. Deforestation; land-grabbing; water pollution; climate change; fossil fuels. Are these mere headlines for us, or are they vital issues raised by Catholic Social Teaching to which we must find concrete responses? Do you agree with the Pope that public pressure is needed to bring about change in these important areas?
2. What is your opinion about global agreement on use of the oceans? How much do you know about the issues related to the resources taken from the oceans? Is it just to think about a supranational organism to govern the use of ocean resources? What needs to be done about this issue and where do we need to start?
3. Are you aware of the contribution of civil society to environmental questions? Are you aware of positive policy results obtained in your country due to the work of the organizations of civil society?
4. Do you think that it is necessary to stay out of politics so as not to “dirty your hands,” or are you convinced that we need to participate in political life so that we might help orient its choices? How might we picture politics or economics that are truly dedicated to human fullness and to promoting environmental justice?
5. Why do many people see religion and science as opposed to one another? Is this an attitude inherited from the Enlightenment? How have religion and science contributed to the attitude that they are irreconcilable? Is this true?
6. Why should I work for a world that is more just, where the poor have a voice and are able to find their own dignity, where they are able to acquire the tools and knowledge necessary to escape their condition?



## Chapter 6: Ecological education and spirituality

### SUMMARY:

The opening sentence of chapter six states the issue clearly in the typical style of Pope Francis: “Many things have to change course, but it is human beings above all who need to change” (#202). He then begins to map out a course.

The first section (#203-208) points us towards a new lifestyle, encouraging individuals and groups to reject consumerism, reminding all that “purchasing is always a moral - and not simply economic - act” (#206). He then calls attention to the Earth Charter, expressing the hope that “ours may be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life” (#207).

The second section (#209-215) calls everyone to an education for the Covenant between humanity and the environment. The Pope declares: “An awareness of the gravity of today’s cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits” (#209). He notes that environmental education has broadened its goals, adding a critique of the “myths” of modernity and focusing on establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures and with God. The Pope calls for an “ethics of ecology” (#210).

While speaking of ecological conversion, the Pope suggests the need for an ecological spirituality grounded in our faith and Gospel convictions that foster a passionate concern to protect the world (#216). Appealing once again to the figure of St. Francis of Assisi, he points out that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion (#218), a conversion that entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a loving awareness of our universal communion, and that each creature reflects something of God. He insists, however, that individual efforts alone will not remedy the complex situation of our world; we also need effective community networks (#219).

In the section on Joy and Peace (#222-227), the Pope encourages us to learn from different religious traditions, including the Judeo-Christian, that “less is more”, adding that “to be serenely present to each reality, how-

ever small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment” (#222). “Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little” (#222), certainly echoing the views of St. Francis.

A life marked by simplicity and sobriety is liberating, a way of living life to the full. It makes people capable of shedding unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessions and weariness, even living on little, especially when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, and in developing their gifts in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer (#223).

The Pope recalls the need for being at peace with one’s self, an inner peace closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. “An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence ‘must not be contrived, but found, uncovered’” (#225). In the context of love of creation, the Pope challenges believers to return to the practice of giving thanks before and after meals to remind us of our dependence on God for life, to strengthen our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation, acknowledge those who by their labors provide us with these goods, and reaffirm our solidarity with those in greatest need (#227).

Section 5 on civic and political life (#228-232) states that care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion, ultimately extending “universal fraternity” to all creatures, even the wind, sun and clouds (#228). The Pope issues an impassioned plea: “We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that lighthearted superficiality has done us no good. When the foundations of social life are corroded, what ensues are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for



the environment” (#229).

Addressing the Sacramental Signs and the Celebration of Rest (#233-237), the Pope notes that the “sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life, reminding all that “Christianity does not reject matter” (#235). Speaking of the cosmic dimension of the Eucharist, he adds that even when it is celebrated in a humble place, it is in some way celebrated “on the altar of the world.” He then develops the idea that “Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world.” (#237)

In section 7 (#238-240), appealing to Saint Bonaventure, Pope Francis speaks of the Trinitarian aspect of creation and challenges all to try to read reality in a Trinitarian key. Section 8 (#241-242) speaks of Mary as Queen of all Creation, extending the reflection to Joseph, the just man, who can teach us all to care and support.

Section 9 (243-246) calls our attention to life “beyond the sun”, to eternal life “in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all.” The Holy Father then concludes with two prayers, a prayer for all believers and a specifically Christian prayer.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What is the most urgent need of your society, and what can you do to educate others in this regard?
2. What can you, especially those who profess St. Francis’ way of life, do to live more simply?
3. What “ecological conversion” can you commit to today?

