

STUDY GUIDE

Laudato Si' Praise Be To You



With just weeks until Pope Francis is in Dublin for the World Meeting of Families, attention is focusing on his teachings and what his message will be to the Church in Ireland. Over the next few weeks, we'll continue to publish study guides to the Pope's landmark documents – this week *Laudato Si'* by Prof. Eamonn Conway and Cathal Barry

Prologue

BY ARCHBISHOP EAMON MARTIN
A message of hope and a call to action

Allow me to recommend for your reflection *Laudato Si'*, and this introduction and study guide. There's something about creation that from time to time makes us all want to stop in wonder and awe at God's presence.

What kind of world do we want to leave to our children? This is the central question posed by Pope Francis in his latest encyclical letter. Through the pages of *Laudato Si'* we are invited to reflect on our relationships with God, with our fellow human beings and with every living thing on Earth. As we read the encyclical, we grow in our understanding of how all these things are connected from our personal everyday choices to the weighty decisions and relationships between nations. Recognising that this is an issue that affects everyone, this message is addressed not only to Catholics, but to all people (3).

In his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*) Pope Francis called us to embrace the joy of the Gospel and warned against being "sourpusses" (85). In *Laudato Si'*, while addressing some of the most serious and urgent crises facing humanity, he strikes a similarly optimistic note. Warning that the growth of a "throwaway culture" risks turning some of the most beautiful parts of our world into an "immense pile of filth" (21-22), the Holy Father sees an opportunity for a fresh start, a chance to "take an honest look at ourselves" (205).

Laudato Si' presents a message of hope and a call to action, to "ecological conversion" (217). You will not find it a comfortable read, because Pope Francis captures and connects the anguished cry of the earth to the desperate cry of the poor whose lives and livelihoods are destroyed by the selfishness of others. We are reminded that the decisions we take as consumers have moral implications and profound consequences for the rights of the poor (206). Yet, Pope Francis is not simply telling us that we need to consume less for the sake of others, or for the good of the planet.

He is asking us to contemplate about whether the relentless consumerism of the developed world, with its constant flow of new consumer goods (222), is really making us happy. Human beings are made for love (58). If we allow the material things in life to take over,

relationships suffer and we can end up isolated and miserable. I found the paragraph about the growth of digital media (47) to be particularly moving and challenging. Pope Francis points to the way in which the "noise and distractions of an information overload" can become a sort of "mental pollution" and a barrier to real relationships.

A key ingredient of happiness is appreciation. From the title, *Praise be to You*, Pope Francis channels the appreciation of the essential goodness of God's creation and the wonder of life that inspired the ministry of St Francis of Assisi. We are reminded that no man-made substitute can ever replace the unique beauty of nature. As part of our homework and spiritual nourishment from this encyclical we are tasked with taking time to really appreciate the natural environment that is all around us. Take it out with you to read in the park or on the beach.

Take time to look closely at the sea, the countryside or your garden, with all the different forms of life the world supports and think about how they are all connected. Find a moment in your busy day for prayerful contemplation before God of all creation. Never forget to say grace before and after meals and to be thankful for what we receive from God's 'bounty'. Be alert to those around the globe who are suffering



because of selfishness, greed and exploitation of resources. Examine your conscience at the end of each day and before the Sacrament of Confession to consider ways in

which we can so easily waste or misuse God's gifts to us.

Pope Francis gives us reason to hope that, although the challenges facing us can seem overwhelming,

Foreword

Laudato Si' is one of the most significant Church documents in a generation. In this encyclical, Pope Francis spells out the damage being inflicted on our planet through human activity and clearly aligns the Catholic Church with calls for urgent changes to lifestyles and energy consumption in order to safeguard the future of the planet.

In short, it is a wake-up call to a world sleep-walking into disaster.

The science on climate change is already clear. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis outlines the moral and spiritual arguments for taking action. This encyclical tackles the lethargy that is felt by many people when faced with this most pressing of crises.

Pope Francis highlights that everything is inter-connected. We are custodians of this planet and we have a moral obligation to ensure that everyone has access to its abundant resources and that we hand it to future generations

in a condition that is compatible with life.

Referring to "our common home", Pope Francis warns of the unprecedented destruction of ecosystems as a result of human activity. Pope Francis underscores the human roots of the current ecological crisis and points to the need for a radical shift in direction in political and economic priorities.

Consequences

Trócaire is dealing with the consequences of climate change on a daily basis. Drought, flooding, storms and forced migration are all on the rise. Although we are insulated from the worst impacts in Ireland, we must not forget that hundreds of millions of people around the world are struggling to survive in great part due to the changing climate.

Following on from 'The Cry of the Earth', issued by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in

2014, and the GLAS resource, a pastoral resource issued by Trócaire to accompany 'The Cry of the Earth', *Laudato Si'* offers clear guidance on the position of the Catholic Church on the issue of climate change and the need to protect our planet.

Laudato Si' should mark a turning point in the world's response to climate change. In December world leaders will meet in Paris at the UN Climate Summit. Pope Francis has added the voice of the global Catholic Church to the calls for agreement on a legally-binding framework to decarbonise our societies as a matter of urgency.

As *Laudato Si'* states, "the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all". We must heed Pope Francis' calls to protect what is so precious.

Éamonn Meehan
Trócaire Executive Director

through "little daily actions" (211) we can make a significant impact. Since the Irish bishops first published the Pastoral Reflection 'The Cry of the Earth', the response in our local parish communities has been most encouraging. Recently schools and parish pastoral councils have been taking up the GLAS resource, produced by Trócaire and Eco Congregation Ireland, which provides material for guided reflection and prayer and a checklist with useful tips and ideas for putting care of creation at the heart of our parish life. Some of the best contributions to this work have been from our young people who have a clear understanding that our response to these challenges will have major implications for their future.

I invite everyone to take up the challenge of *Laudato Si'* in a spirit of hope, appreciation and as a call to action!

Introduction

Pope Francis is revolutionising the papacy in more ways than one.

Ever since his election in 2013, the Pope has been making subtle but profound changes to the Church he now heads.

Actions speak louder than words in this social media era, meaning that Pope Francis' simple yet powerful gestures have been both well reported and received around the globe.

More impressive still has been the Pope's ability to capture the imagination of Catholics and non-Catholics alike through his uniquely styled papal documents.

The Pope's open, straightforward and down-to-earth style of communication even made his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), an international bestseller.

Through the use of colloquial phrases, metaphors and musings, Pope Francis has not only altered the Church's message, he's changed the script.

While it is important to note that there hasn't been any modifications in doctrine, there has certainly been a shift in emphasis under Francis.

Mercy

Significantly, by constantly highlighting mercy, he has made clear that he expects the Church to apply its teaching with compassion.

The Pope's newly released encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, is a perfect example of such compassion, and, given its papal seal, is sure to be a big hit in the book stores.

Tipping his *zucchetto* to his namesake St Francis of Assisi, the document takes its name from the 13th-Century Italian saint's famous prayer, 'Cantic of the Creatures',

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thanking God for the gifts of creation.

There hasn't always been such a furor around the publication of such documents but Pope Francis' openness, accessibility and refusal to pull any punches has intrigued the world and ensured its undivided attention.

The fact that this new encyclical is effectively the Pope's first will only serve to bolster such interest. (His first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, was essentially the work of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, to whose words Francis had merely "added a few contributions" of his own.)

Environment

Pope Francis begins his much anticipated encyclical on the environment criticising "the harm we have inflicted" on the Earth "by our irresponsible use and abuse" of God-given goods.

Addressed to "every person living on this planet", the document serves as a stinging critique of humanity's treatment of the environment, urgently calling for action.

Stating that the Earth is "among the most abandoned and maltreated" of the poor, Pope Francis claims the "violence present in our hearts" is "reflected in the "symptoms of sickness" evident in the soil, water, air and all forms of life.

The Pope warns early on in his encyclical that the destruction of the environment is "extremely serious" not only because God has "entrusted the world" to humanity, but because "human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement".

"Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us," he says.

"If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs."

Urgent challenge

The Pope sets out an "urgent challenge" to protect the environment from any further destruction, calling on society to work together "to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change".

"I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all," he says.

Although each chapter of *Laudato Si'* has its own subject and specific approach, it also takes up and re-examines important questions previously dealt with. For example, Pope Francis points to:

- 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 serious responsibility of international and local policy;
- the throwaway culture;
- the proposal of a new lifestyle.

Responsibility

No world leader other than the Bishop of Rome could produce a document such as *Laudato Si'*.

One glance at this encyclical and we know that we are reading the

work of someone free from political and ideological bias and from any manipulation by business and economic interests. It is written by someone who cares solely and passionately about the God-given responsibility we human beings bear for the state of our planet.

The experiences of people on the ground, in every corner of the world, have been given a voice in this document, among them the poorest of the poor who are often voiceless. The Pope has had unique access to their experiences through the statements of various episcopal conferences, which he cites throughout *Laudato Si'*. He has also drawn upon the writings of a Muslim mystic and an Orthodox Patriarch, among others.



Co-operation

Pope Francis invited the co-operation of over 200 specialists and institutions from around the globe in writing this document. The Pope recognises that God's grace can be at work in the secular sciences and we are challenged to hear what they have to tell us about our stewardship of creation. There is no attempt to subject these disciplines to Christian faith and doctrine. Their methodologies and approaches are fully respected.

Nor is there any attempt to make claims about the state of the Earth that cannot be substantiated. Pope Francis acknowledges readily that in some cases there are conflicting credible opinions, and that further research is needed.

Doctrine

In terms of Christian doctrine, there is nothing new in the encyclical. In the introduction, Pope Francis reminds us of the various significant statements on the environment by his recent predecessors.

What is new is the sheer breadth of concrete and irrefutable evidence he presents in regard to our complicity in the destruction of the human environment. New also is the sense of urgency that demands from us what Pope St John Paul II called "a global ecological conversion" (5).

Inseparable bond

Pope Francis refers to St Francis of Assisi, for whom care of the Earth and care for the poor of the Earth are two sides of the one coin. This is the key message of the encyclical. There is an "inseparable bond", Pope Francis tells us, between "concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace" (10).

There is also an inseparable bond between care for the environment (ecology of nature) and concern about sexuality and the family

(human ecology). Citing Pope Benedict XVI, he says that "the book of nature is one and indivisible" (6). Catholics are required to recognise and respect this unity.

Social teaching

Laudato Si' is now part of the Church's social teaching (15) and to dissent from it is to dissent from the authentic teaching of the Magisterium. It should be read in conjunction with the The Joy of the Gospel, which is the programmatic document of Pope Francis' pontificate. In The Joy of the Gospel we are invited to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ. *Laudato Si'* makes clear that authentic discipleship requires us to take care of the Earth as our common home.

How to read Laudato Si'

Pope Francis has always been drawn to a particular method for recognising and responding to various situations as Christians. It is called "See, Judge, Act". Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967) first proposed this method when he founded a movement for poor workers, the Young Christian Workers.

In 1961, St Pope John XXIII endorsed this approach when he wrote: "There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgement on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge act" (*Mater et Magistra*, 236).

Pope Francis follows this method in *Laudato Si'*. He invites us to see, hear and experience the reality "on the ground" for people and their communities.

He then offers a judgment, that is, an informed analysis of the situation, along with findings and conclusions, on the basis of what he has observed and following widespread consultation. This analysis is formed in the light of the various sciences but also in light of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching.

Finally, he proposes actions, concrete changes in behaviour that are necessary. In this he makes an appeal not only to Christians but to every human being. *Laudato Si'* is addressed to everyone, believer and unbeliever alike.

In what follows, we propose to make explicit what each chapter contains or implies under the following headings:

Chapter 1 What is happening to our common home?

Pope Francis addresses what is happening in what he describes as "our common home" in the opening chapter of this encyclical.

Noting that the "acceleration of changes" affecting humanity and the planet coupled with a "more inten-



sified pace of life and work" are at odds with the "naturally slow pace" of biological evolution, the Pope recognises "the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development".

"Change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity," he says.

Pollution

Tackling the issue of pollution in his characteristically down-to-earth-style, Pope Francis laments the fact that the Earth "is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth". "In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish," he says.

Pointing out that some forms of pollution are "part of people's daily lives", the Pope lists a number of specific causes, such as:

- Transport;
- Industrial fumes;
- Substances which contribute to the acidification of soil and water;
- Fertilisers;
- Various forms of argotoxins.

Noting that very often no measures are taken to curb the effects of pollution until after people's health has been "irreversibly affected", Francis links the issue to a "throw-away culture" which "affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish".

Climate Change

Turning his attention to the issue of climate change, which he believes is "a global problem with grave implications", Pope Francis reminds readers that the climate is a "common good, belonging to all and meant for all".

Noting that a "very solid scientific consensus" indicates that we are presently witnessing a "disturb-

ing warming" of the climatic system, Pope Francis warns that climate change "represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity" and calls on the public to "recognise the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it".

Migration

Pope Francis notes that there has been a "tragic rise" in the number of migrants fleeing from growing poverty caused by "environmental degradation". "Our lack of response," to such an issue, he says, "points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded".

Water

Pope Francis clearly states that, since it is essential to human survival, "access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right".

"Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water," he says, "because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity".

The Pope believes the problem is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is "little awareness of the seriousness" of wasting water and warns that the "control of water" by large multinational businesses may become a "major source of conflict".

Biodiversity

The Earth's resources, according to Pope Francis, are "being plundered" because of short-sighted "approaches to the economy, commerce and production".

Lamenting the disappearance each year of "thousands of plant and animal species", the Pope says people seem to think it's possible to "substitute an irreplaceable and

irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves".

Francis stresses that a "sober look at our world" shows that the degree of human intervention is actually making the Earth "less rich and beautiful" and "ever more limited and grey".

Noting that it "may well disturb" us to learn of the extinction of mammals or birds, since they are more visible, Pope Francis stresses that the efficient functioning of ecosystems also requires fungi, algae, worms, insects, reptiles and an innumerable variety of microorganisms.

Quality of human life

Pope Francis reminds us that human beings too are creatures of this world, "enjoying a right to life and happiness" and "endowed with unique dignity".

The social dimensions of global change, according to the Pope, include:

- the effects of technological innovations on employment;
- social exclusion;
- an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services;
- social breakdown;
- increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression;
- drug trafficking;
- growing drug use by young people;
- the loss of identity.

"These are signs," Francis warns, "that the growth of the past two centuries has not always led to an integral development and an improvement in the quality of life". "Some of these signs are also symptomatic of real social decline, the silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion," he adds.

Pope Francis stresses the need to realise "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach".

It must "integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment", he says, to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor".

Weak responses

Concluding his critique of such issues, the Pope remarks on "how weak international political responses have been".

"The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations," he says.

SEE The last words of this chapter summarise it well: "humanity has disappointed God's expectations" (61).

While acknowledging that there are some issues upon which opinion is divided, Pope Francis nonetheless presents irrefutable evidence that we are destroying our planet. He asks us to see, first and foremost, what we are not seeing, to recognise that we are not "getting it", in terms of our actions as well as our inaction.

Our blindness has various causes: the acceleration of change and rapidification (18); our dishonesty in covering up and masking what is happening (26); mass media that prevents us from learning how to live wisely (46, 54); the globalisation of indifference (25, 52). In addition, we see species as "resources", our "stuff" to exploit (33). Above all, we insulate ourselves from the direct experience of the pain and suffering of our planet and of other people (19, 25, 45, 47, 49, 54), tending to act only when we ourselves are personally affected (21).

We need to see that the poor suffer most by our negligence (22, 25). Our exploitation of their portion of the Earth causes international crises, including migration (25).

JUDGE The lack of shared and sustainable goals, which would treat the whole of humanity and of creation with dignity and respect, is at the heart of the problem (18, 23).

Population growth in developing countries would not be a problem if we were all committed fully to integral and shared development. The problem is the unsustainable habits of consumption of those of us in the developed world (23, 34). Calls for reproductive health policies that seek to restrict birth control in developing countries are attempts to legitimise forms of extreme consumerism in the developed world that could never be universalised (50).

The damage we in the developed world are causing by our lifestyles is impacting disproportionately upon the poor, upon those discarded because they are considered disposable (22, 45).

Our demand for development places the natural pace of biological evolution under stress (18), resulting in harm to the quality of life. Not all changes are necessarily for the better (19).

Vested interests, at international level, seem to get the better of political policies that would address environmental matters in a sustainable way because of poor leadership and lack of commitment (50). Nonetheless, there are small signs of hope, signs of an emerging increasing sensitivity to the environment (19, 55, 58).

ACT Pope Francis pleads with us to "dare to turn what is happening to our world into our own personal suffering and so discover what each of us can do about it" (19).

We need to be more respectful of the natural pace of biological evolution and more deliberate in choosing changes and developments that are sensitive to the environment and to people in developing countries (18, 19).

We need better international legal frameworks on environmental issues, as well as an ethics of international relations (51, 53, 54).

It is not enough to claim to be "green". If we are truly ecologically committed then we will also be committed to justice for the poor. We need to hear the "the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor" together (49).

We need to elect politicians who do not cover up the problems but show real leadership in addressing them and who think of their responsibility to future generations (26, 53).

The bottom line, however, is the need to make costly changes to our lifestyles, to our personal patterns of production and consumption (23).

Chapter 2 The Gospel of creation

Pope Francis delves into the Bible in chapter two in an attempt to face the problems illustrated in the previous section.

Here, Francis expresses what he believes to be the "tremendous responsibility" of humankind for creation, the intimate connection among all creatures and the fact "the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone".

"We are not God. The Earth was here before us and it has been given to us," the Pope says.

Recognising "the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes", Pope Francis says there is a need to realise that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of "interpreting and transforming reality".

"Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. 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," he says, adding that the Catholic Church "is open to dialogue".

Bible wisdom

Pope Francis says that the Bible's teaching that every man and woman is created "out of love" and in God's own "image and likeness" shows us the "immense dignity" of each human being.

The Pope stresses, however, that we must now "forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the Earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures".

The creation accounts in the book

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of Genesis, according to the Pope, contain “profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality”.

They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships:

- with God;
- with our neighbour;
- with the Earth itself.

According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. “This rupture is sin,” the Pope says.

Referencing Genesis 2:15, the Pope states that human beings have a responsibility to “till and keep” the garden of the world, knowing that the “ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us”. “Rather,” he says, “all creatures are moving forward, with us and through us, towards a common point of arrival, which is God”.

Universal Communion

Pope Francis stresses that the fact human beings are not the masters of the universe “does not mean to put all living beings on the same level and to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails” nor does it imply “a divinisation of the Earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility”.

While Francis is clear that every “act of cruelty” towards any creature is “contrary to human dignity”, he points point out “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”.

What is needed, according to the Pope, is the awareness of a universal communion: “All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect,” he says.

Evolution

Human beings, Pope Francis claims, possess a “uniqueness which cannot be fully explained by the evolution of other open systems”.

“Each of us has his or her own personal identity and is capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself,” he says.

“Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other not yet discovered capacities, are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology.

“The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.”

Noting that it would be a mistake to view other living beings as “mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination”, Pope Francis warns of “serious consequences” for society when nature is viewed “solely as a source of profit and gain”.

Common destination of goods

Whether believers or not, Pope Francis notes we are agreed today that the Earth is “essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone”.

“The rich and the poor have equal dignity. The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone,” he says.

SEE Although the encyclical is addressed to everyone, including non-believers, this chapter specifically addresses the biblical understanding of creation. Christian believers have particular reasons to care for the Earth as our common home.

The biblical lens on nature makes clear humans are not God (67). God is the all-powerful Creator and we are creatures (75). To be a creature is to accept one’s own life and all of

creation humbly as a gift. We need to live in accordance with “the rhythms inscribed in nature by the hand of the Creator” (71).

We have dignity because we are the fruit of God’s love, made in God’s image and likeness (65, 77). We are unique and pre-eminent among creatures because we are addressed personally by God, and enjoy a measure of freedom and autonomy (81, 90, 91). But this is limited (66, 76). As human beings, we all have equal dignity, whether rich or poor (94).

Our pre-eminence gives us no right to think the rest of nature exists for us (68). All creatures have a value of their own in God’s eyes (69). We are to cooperate with God in caring for them (77, 78).

We need to recognise the interdependence and interrelatedness of all creatures (71, 87), with whom we share a deep communion (89, 91). All cruelty is sinful (92).

Sin and evil become realities when we fail to respect our limitations as humans. We cause the interrelatedness between creatures to break down (66, 90, 91), endangering life itself (70). But God triumphs over evil (74, 80). Sometimes what we see as evil is creation still evolving, and we are to cooperate in the world’s development (80).

Through Christ we come to see the paternal relationship God the Father has with all creatures (96). Jesus models for us how to live in harmony with creation (98).

JUDGE This account of the Gospel of Creation does not at all contradict scientific reasoning and research. We need both scientific and theological understandings of creation to teach us how to live appropriately and responsibly. As Christians are we sufficiently knowledgeable about the unique perspective on creation that our faith offers us, and do we value it sufficiently? Have we enough confidence to stand by it and witness to it in our dialogue with others and our daily decisions?

Today’s culture seems to find objectionable the notion that we are interdependent creatures with limited autonomy. Arrogantly, we like to think of ourselves as self-made men and women. So too is the idea that our dignity and self-worth are inherent in us as God’s gift. We seem to believe we can construct ourselves as human beings, free of any law or rhythm of nature.

We also tend to see nature as something for us to exploit as we see fit. The poor, as well as future generations, are out of sight and out of mind.

ACT As Christian communities, we need to understand better and promote the biblical understanding of creation and of human beings. It needs to underpin the ethos and curriculum in Catholic schools, not just in religious education but in the sciences as well.

We need to find practical ways of developing a very real sense of deep communion with our fellow human beings, both present and future generations and also with the rest of nature.

We need to recognise that what we regard as our property is only on loan to us; that what we possess



may be ours at the expense of nature and of our fellow human beings. We need to give not merely from our excess but in accordance with a sense of justice in regard to what truly belongs to the poor.

Individually, and as a Christian community, we need to allow Christ, through whom and for whom all things have been created (99), to guide us in how to live respectfully and responsibly in our common home.

We also need to contemplate creation so as to “learn to see ourselves in relation to all other creatures” (85), to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him with them (86).

Chapter 3 The human roots of the ecological crisis

The root of the problems in technocracy and in an excessive self-centredness of the human being are analysed in the third chapter of *Laudato Si’*.

“It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis. A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us,” Pope Francis writes.

Declaring that humanity has entered a “new era” in which our “technical prowess” has brought us to a “crossroads”, the Pope says we are the beneficiaries of two centuries of “enormous waves” of change, referencing everything from railways to nanotechnologies.

“It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us,” Francis says, acknowledging with gratitude the “great contribution” to the improvement of living conditions.

The Pope warns, however, that such advancements give “those

with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world”.

It is the mentality of technocratic domination, the Pope claims, that leads to the destruction of nature and the exploitation of people and the most vulnerable populations.

“The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economics and political life”, preventing us from recognising that the market by itself “cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion”.

Waste

Noting that modernity has been marked by an “excessive anthropocentrism” which “continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds”, Pope Francis says the time has come for a “more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society”.

The Pope hits out at self-centred human beings who focus exclusively on themselves, noting that such an attitude results in a “use and throw away” logic that justifies every type of waste, environmental or human, that treats both the other and nature as simple objects.

It is this mentality, he says, that leads to the sexual exploitation of children, the abandonment of the elderly, human trafficking, organised crime and the drugs trade.

The Pope also states that concern for the protection of nature is incompatible with the justification for abortion. “How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties,” Francis asks.

Employment

One issue Pope Francis singles out in this section for attention is the need



to protect employment. The Pope states “any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour” because to “stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society”.

Genetic modification

Another problem regards the limitations of scientific progress, with clear reference to the difficulty about making a general statement about genetic modification (GM), whether vegetable or animal, medical or agricultural, “since these vary greatly among themselves and call for specific considerations”.

Although the Pope acknowledges “no conclusive proof exists” that GM cereals may be harmful to human beings and that in some regions their use has brought about economic growth which has helped to resolve problems, “there remain a number of significant difficulties which should not be underestimated”.

“This is a complex environmental issue,” the Pope says, which calls for a “comprehensive approach which would require, at the very least, greater efforts to finance various lines of independent, interdisciplinary research capable of shedding new light on the problem”.

Integrity

Francis also laments the fact that while some ecological movements defend the integrity of the environment, “they sometimes fail to apply those same principles to human life”.

The Pope points out that there is “a tendency to justify transgressing all boundaries when experimentation is carried out on living human embryos”.

“We forget that the inalienable worth of a human being transcends his or her degree of development,” he says, adding that, in the same

way, “when technology disregards the great ethical principles, it ends up considering any practice whatsoever as licit”.

SEE Pope Francis invites us to recognise the benefits of technology, to rejoice in the advances it enables and the possibilities it creates (102). Technology can be a gift enabling us to exercise our God-given creativity.

At the same time, he invites us to recognise that “a certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us” (101).

We need to acknowledge that through technology some people become powerful at the expense of others (104); also, that the power of technology is not always accompanied by the wisdom needed to exercise it (104, 107, 114).

The purely technological way of looking at the world distorts how we see nature, and how we see ourselves (116, 117). It is only a small step from believing that aspects of nature are exploitable or disposable to believing the same about human life (118, 120).

The idea that there is an infinite supply of the Earth's goods is “based on a lie” and leads to the planet being “squeezed dry” (106).

JUDGE Pope Francis reiterates two key themes from *The Joy of the Gospel* in this chapter. The first is that realities on the ground are more important than theories and ideas (110). For Pope Francis, we judge the appropriateness of technological development first and foremost in terms of its impact upon the lived experience of vulnerable individuals and communities.

He specifically identifies some people at the rough end of technological progress who should be uppermost in our minds when choosing and leading change and gives the example of small farmers affected by mass production of grain made possible by genetic modification (132).

The other theme he takes up from *The Joy of the Gospel* is practical relativism (122). His analysis is that we tend to make decisions purely on the basis of our own immediate convenience. The needs and interests of other people, including future generations, and of the environment, are only of relative interest to us. The problem is the dominance of a technological way of looking at the world. We mistakenly think that everything and everyone around us is subject to our mastery, possession, control and manipulation (106, 110); “we have only a meagre awareness of our own limitations” (105).

Pope Francis says that technological development is never neutral; it is either enhancing life, or it is diminishing it (107, 114).

He is also of the view that despite all our presumed power and “delusions of grandeur”, we seem to lack confidence about the future (113).

Controversially, Pope Francis says we also need to think of restrictions on so-called free market economies. Otherwise, some people get left behind. By itself, he says, “the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (109, 129).

ACT In the past the Church contributed to the false notion of human mastery of the universe (116). Today, we urgently need to offer a “sound ethics, a culture and spirituality” that enable us to identify appropriate limits to the development and use of technologies (105, 111, 119).

As Christians we can contribute a distinctive way of looking at life. We can be a rallying point for others in our societies who want to ensure that technological developments are not at the expense of other people, or of our planet (112, 128).

Christian formation in regard to this renewed Christian vision is key (111). We need to build it in to our school curricula, Catholic teacher education, adult faith formation programmes and preaching.

Christians who are employers need to take the key insights of this chapter to heart. Work is core to human dignity. How do we ensure that the advancement of technology supports rather than undermines people in putting their God-given talents at the service of others?

Business entrepreneurs and politicians, whom he says have “noble” vocations, need to consider if their economic policies genuinely serve the common good (129).

We all need to think about our purchasing power. We need to support businesses that operate in accordance with ethical principles and that put human development above easy profit.

Chapter 4 Integral ecology

Since “everything is closely interrelated and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis”, Francis turns his attention in chapter four to some elements of an “integral ecology”, one which “respects its human and social dimensions”.

Here, the Pope claims “nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere



setting in which we live”.

“We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it,” he says.

Francis is firm in his belief that the analysis of environmental problems “cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves”.

“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,” he says.

Urban environment

Pope Francis stresses that integral ecology involves everyday life and gives specific attention to the urban environment.

“Authentic development,” the Pope says, “includes efforts to bring about an integral improvement in the quality of human life” and this entails considering the setting in which people live their lives.

“These settings influence the way we think, feel and act. In our rooms, our homes, our workplaces and neighbourhoods, we use our environment as a way of expressing our identity,” he says.

The human being, according to Pope Francis, has a great capacity for adaptation and “an admirable creativity and generosity is shown by persons and groups who respond to environmental limitations by alleviating the adverse effects of their surroundings and learning to live productively amid disorder and uncertainty”.

“A wholesome social life can light up a seemingly undesirable environment,” the Pope says, citing how the feeling of asphyxiation brought on by densely populated residential areas is countered “if close and warm relationships develop, if communities are created, if the limitations of the environment are compensated for in the interior of each person who feels held within a network of solidarity and belonging”.

“In this way, any place can turn from being a hell on earth into the setting for a dignified life,” he says.

Human ecology

Pope Francis also states that there is a need to recognise that our body itself “establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings”.

“The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation,” he says.

“Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology.”

Common good

Pope Francis is convinced that human ecology is “inseparable” from the notion of the common good”.

Noting that in today's world where “injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable”, the Pope says committing oneself to the common good becomes “a summons to solidarity and a preferential option” for the poor.

Contemporary lifestyle

Pope Francis also warns that doomsday predictions “can no longer be met with irony or disdain”.

“We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. 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, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world.”

“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,” he says.

SEE Earlier, Pope Francis said we tend to see people and things only in terms of their usefulness to us (106). The dominance of technology blinds us to the inherent dignity of our fellow human beings and of all creation.

A technical way of looking at the world also tends to focus on solving particular problems in isolation from each another, so we miss the bigger picture. Our perspective becomes fragmented (110).

In this chapter Pope Francis goes

further, claiming “the fragmentation of knowledge and the isolation of bits of information can actually become a form of ignorance unless they are integrated into a broader vision of reality (138).

We need to see the interconnectedness of every aspect of the global crisis we face and we should be under no illusions as to its seriousness (161). We need to see ourselves as part of nature, and to accept that we are interdependent creatures (139, 140). We need to appreciate every organism as good (140).

The quality of human life is dependent upon the health of society’s institutions (142).

A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to interventions in rural and urban planning can be destructive of the lived story of people, and of their culture and traditions (143, 144). The patrimony of a people is a gift to be respected, not a commodity to be discarded (146). Its elimination is just as significant as the extinction of a species or a plant (145).

Pope Francis asks us to notice how well poor people often take care of their homes, even though their local environment may be very badly managed. They often also build a strong supportive community spirit (148). But the failure to invest in the infrastructure in these communities can feed antisocial behaviour and violence (149).

We see, however, that love is always more powerful.

The integrity and beauty of human ecology needs to be respected. Our bodies are God’s gift, as is the reality of sexual difference, and the family as the primary unit of society (155).

Finally, we are again asked to see the inherent dignity of poor people (158) and consider the obligation we have to serve the common good (156 - 157).

JUDGE We need solutions that address the complex nature of the problems we face (139). Shortcuts and quick fixes get us nowhere (141).

A key part of the problem is that hand-in-hand with the decline of our environment is a decline in our ability to think and act ethically. Instead, we have succumbed to “a self-centred culture of instant gratification” (162).

Lack of housing is a major root issue globally (152). We need to put people first when it comes to finding solutions and implementing plans (150-155).

We are accountable for our actions both to those who are being excluded and exploited now as well as to future generations to whom we owe a planet that will be inhabitable (160, 161, 162).

ACT *Laudato Si'* summons us urgently to a basic option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters, and to solidarity with them in the protection of our common home (162).

We need to develop a vision that would take account of every aspect of the crisis we face (137, 141). This should draw upon all the various fields of study and carefully distinguish between symptoms and root causes.

We need to develop an integrated approach to the global crisis, one

that would combat poverty, restore dignity to the excluded, and protect nature (139). The Pope says to us: Think first of people, respect the contexts in which they live their lives (147, 150-154) and do not impose pre-packaged solutions from outside (144).

Chapter 5 Lines of approach and action

Having taken stock of the present situation, Pope Francis outlines some lines of approach and action in chapter five, clearly wanting to initiate honest dialogue that builds transparent decision-making processes at every level of social, economic and political life.

The chapter essentially addresses the question of what we can and must do to protect the environment and prevent any further changes to the climate.

Earlier in the document, the Pope recognises the need for proposals “for dialogue and action which would involve each of us as individuals and also affect international policy”. They will “help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us,” he says.

Acknowledging that there are “certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus” and that the Church “does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics”, the Pope is “concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good”.

Politics

Pope Francis strongly appeals to politicians to be “courageous” and “attest to their God-given dignity and leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility”.

“A healthy politics is sorely needed, capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices and overcoming undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia,” he says.

“Politics and the economy tend to blame each other when it comes to poverty and environmental degradation. It is to be hoped that they can acknowledge their own mistakes and find forms of interaction directed to the common good.”

Common plan

Calling for a “common plan” among all nations, Pope Francis insists that a “global consensus” is essential for confronting deep problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries.

Such a consensus, the Pope believes, should lead to:

- Planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture;
- Developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy;
- Encouraging a more efficient use of energy;
- Promoting a better management of marine and forest resources;
- Ensuring universal access to drinking water.



● Poverty

Pope Francis also insists that the priority for poor countries must be to “eliminate extreme poverty” and to “promote the social development of their people”. At the same time, he says, they need to acknowledge the “scandalous level” of consumption in some privileged sectors of their population and to “combat corruption more effectively”.

“They are likewise bound to develop less polluting forms of energy production, but to do so they require the help of countries which have experienced great growth at the cost of the ongoing pollution of the planet.”

Oceans

Pope Francis also mentions the system of governance of the oceans. Acknowledging that international and regional conventions do exist, the Pope claims “fragmentation” and the “lack of strict mechanisms of regulation, control and penalisation end up undermining these efforts”, adding that the growing problem of marine waste and the protection of the open seas represent “particular challenges”. What is needed, he sug-

gests, is an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of so-called “global commons”.

Radical decisions

Ultimately, the Pope says, the same mindset which “stands in the way” of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty.

A “more responsible overall approach” is needed to deal with both problems, he says.

“Given this situation, it is essential to devise stronger and more efficiently organised international institutions, with functionaries who are appointed fairly by agreement among national governments and empowered to impose sanctions.”

Later in this chapter, Pope Francis insists on the development of honest and transparent decision-making processes, in order to “discern” which policies and initiatives can bring about “genuine integral development”.

In particular, a proper assessment of the environmental impact of new “business ventures and projects demand transparent political pro-

cesses involving a free exchange of views” is needed.

“On the other hand, the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project, in exchange for favours, usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and to allow for full debate,” the Pope says.

Dialogue

When it comes to religions in dialogue with science, Pope Francis insists that it “cannot be maintained that empirical science provides a complete explanation of life, the interplay of all creatures and the whole of reality”. “This would be to breach the limits imposed by its own methodology,” he says.

“Any technical solution which science claims to offer will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lose sight of the great motivations which make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices and to treat others well,” he says.

“If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve.”

SEE In this chapter, Pope Francis makes many concrete proposals, proposals that most of us have neither the power nor the authority to influence. Yet this does not let us off the hook.

We need to take his proposals into account when electing politicians. We need to examine critically our individual lifestyles and how they contribute to the environmental crisis. We also need to consider what steps towards reform we ourselves can take locally.

The specific nature of the proposals made in this chapter is impressive. Their reasonableness is self-evident. The fact that Pope Francis does not seek “to settle scientific questions or replace politics” but instead to “encourage an honest and open debate” adds to the credibility



of the encyclical.

Pope Francis is hopeful about the growing awareness of the interdependent nature of the world (165). At the same time the weakening of nation states means that economic bodies with vested interests can become powerful and out of control (175).

Within nations there can be many inequalities as well and these need to be identified and tackled (176).

The most impressive efforts at addressing environmental issues are often made at local level but they need the support of public and civic authorities (179).

JUDGE The more we become aware of how interdependent we are, the more we have to acknowledge how damaging our individual lifestyles can be (164).

Solutions to the key problems need to be found at global level, but generally world summits have proven to be ineffective (164, 166, 169).

Politicians generally don't recognise sufficiently the urgency of the environmental crisis. They tend to meet short-term and immediate goals that benefit them politically rather than act in the long-term interest of the common good (181). Also, they often put national interests above the common good (188, 196). Pope Francis says, "Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility" (169).

Pope Francis criticises solutions that cause poor countries to pay for the environmental crisis, even though they never benefitted from high industrialisation (170).

It is essential that we would examine critically our understanding of progress (194). The principle of subsidiarity is also helpful. This grants groups at every level of society the necessary autonomy to find solutions to the problems within their control. Those at higher levels, however, carry greater responsibility (196).

ACT It is necessary to read this chapter in its entirety for a full account of the concrete actions Pope Francis proposes. In general, his concern is to overcome the various ways that progress towards finding solutions at international level has become stalled (165).

There is a need to strengthen international institutions so that they can play a role in enforcing ethical agreements (173, 175). We need some kind of global political authority (177), as many important regulations are unenforceable (174).

As citizens, we should pressurise governments and politicians to develop the necessary policies and regulations instead of thinking only of immediate gain (179, 181).

Merely technical solutions will be useless. Despite past failures religions can offer the wisdom necessary when it comes to developing ethical solutions rooted in a deep sense of global solidarity (172, 200).

We ourselves need to be prepared to accept decreased growth and live with the implications of this for our lifestyles (193). We need to live in a way that witnesses to our faith (200).



At all levels, a change of mindset is needed. It is the same change of mindset that is needed to tackle both climate change and world poverty (175).

Believers need to turn in prayer to God asking for a timely and positive outcome to ongoing political negotiations so future generations do not suffer (169).

Different religions, sciences and even ecological movements need to engage in dialogue towards the common good (201).

Chapter 6 Ecological education and spirituality

Noting that it is human beings above all that have to change, in the final chapter of this "lengthy reflection", Pope Francis calls for an increased "awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging and of a future to be shared with everyone".

This basic awareness, the Pope insists, "would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life".

"A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal," he says.

Lifestyle

The Pope is adamant that change in lifestyle "could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power". "This is what consumer movements accomplish by boycotting certain products," Francis points out.

"They prove successful in changing the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production. When social pressure affects their earnings, businesses clearly have to find ways to produce differently," he says.

The Pope stresses the need to "overcome individualism", in order to develop a "different lifestyle and

bring about significant changes in society".

"Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment.

"These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us," he says.

Education

Pope Francis also highlights the importance of environmental education in this chapter.

Noting that an integral ecology is made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness, the Pope offers some practical suggestions for people to follow, such as:

- avoiding the use of plastic and paper;
- reducing water consumption;
- separating refuse;
- cooking only what can reasonably be consumed;
- showing care for other living beings;
- using public transport or car-pooling;
- planting trees;
- turning off unnecessary lights.

"All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings," Francis says.

"Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity.

"We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread.

"Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on Earth is worthwhile," he says.

Christian spirituality

Recognising that the "rich heritage" of Christian spirituality has a "precious contribution" to make to the renewal of humanity, Pope Francis notes that the "ecological conversion" needed to bring about lasting change is also a "community conversion".

Christian spirituality, the Pope says, proposes an "alternative understanding" of the quality of life and encourages a "prophetic and contemplative lifestyle", one capable of "deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption".

We need to take up an ancient lesson, he suggests, that "less is more". "A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment.

"Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack."

Shared responsibility

Care for nature, according to Pope Francis, is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion.

"We must regain the conviction that we need one another," the Pope says, "that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world and that being good and decent are worth it".

"We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty," he says.

"It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted 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."

Concluding, Pope Francis notes that it is God who "offers us the light and the strength" we need in our endeavours. "In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our Earth and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward," he says. "Praise be to him!"

SEE This chapter provides a clear and coherent account of what we need to do if we are to accept and to live in accordance with the social teaching of the Church in the circumstances of the present day.

It both confirms the beauty and integrity of Christian faith, and disturbs the ways we tend to compromise it in our daily lives. At the same time it is an invitation to conversion (216-227), and provides reasons for hope that we can and will respond positively.

The chapter needs to be read and reflected upon both individually and as parish communities.

We need to see how much we are swept along by compulsive consumerism (203).

The emptier our hearts, the more we consume (204). In the society we have created, many people are adrift. Their lack of identity is worrying (202). The instability and uncertainty in society today is "a seedbed for selfishness" (204).

The mindless consumerism of the few can lead to social unrest and even to violence (204).

One way of having more is by consuming less, and there is a nobility to living simply and economically even when one can afford to do otherwise (211).

Christians know that God can be discovered in all things (233).

"The sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God" (235), above all the Eucharist (236).

JUDGE While circumstances need to change, above all it is we humans who must change. We face a major cultural, spiritual and educational challenge (202).

Freedoms does not come through mindless consumption (202). Lack of authentic freedom is a big problem: "mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet [we] feel unable to give up what the market sets before [us]" (209).

Young people have a keen sensitivity to the problems we face but the sustained pressure of consumption prevents them from developing life-changing habits (209).

"Purchasing is a moral and not just an economic activity" (206).

There is a need for "an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith". Christianity proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life free of obsession with consumption (222). Pope Francis quotes Pope emeritus Benedict XVI who claimed the "external deserts" of the world are growing because of the vastness of

our “internal deserts” (217). A sound spirituality can “motivate us for a more passionate concern for the protection of the world” (216).

Central to enabling our conversion is recognition of the world as God’s gift. This fills us with a profound sense of gratitude and enables us to respond with self-sacrifice and generosity (220). We learn “to be grateful for the opportunities life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack” (222). We “shed unsatisfied needs” (223), and this leads to inner peace (225).

ACT We need to embark on new paths of authentic freedom (205).

We need to change our lifestyles, and in so doing bring pressure on those who wield economic, social and political power (206).

We need an end to individualism (208).

We need to awaken a new reverence for life (207). This involves: a disinterested concern for others, the overcoming of self-interest, assessing the impact of our choices and decisions on the world around us (208).

Small gestures, such as grace before meals (227), can instil reverence and gratitude.

Education is key, and all the contexts for education that the Church can influence urgently need to take the Pope’s teaching in this encyclical to heart. These include the family, parishes, schools, seminaries and colleges (213, 214). We should also challenge political institutions and political groups to raise awareness (214).

Education is key to resolving our problems, and there are two aspects to this. The first is to challenge the myths of our culture. We need to show that “individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism and an unregulated market” run counter to “ecological citizenship” (210, 211).

The education needed has to go beyond merely providing information and instill habits (211).

Small changes in our lifestyles matter. Reusing and recycling for the right reasons are acts of love and restore our own sense of self-esteem (211, 212).

We need to appreciate beauty more. This will help us to reject “self-interested pragmatism” (215).

The ecological crisis we face “is also a summons to profound interior conversion” and there is no room for passivity, or for how some otherwise sincere Christians “ridicule expressions of concern for the environment” (217).

We all need to regain the conviction that we need each other (229), and that social love is the key to authentic development (231).

Local communities can take steps to challenge the indifference induced by consumerism (232).

We Christians need to live out our vocation as protectors (218). We need to see the connections between our engagement in the sacramental



life of the Church and our protection of human life and the environment (233-236). The Eucharist confirms us in our stewardship of creation (236).

Observation of Sunday as sabbath reflects a spirit of receptivity and gratuity in our hearts and prevents us from collapsing into an empty

activism (237). It reminds us of and prepares us for the “sabbath of eternity” (243).

For Christians also, renewed devotion to the mystery of the Trinity, to Our Lady, are key pathways to right relationship with God, with one another and the whole of creation (238-242).

Case studies

1. Green fields amidst the drought

Thiga Nanuaga is still getting used to seeing green fields again.

The 65-year-old farmer has lived his whole life near to the village of Chuka in the Tharaka district of central Kenya, but increased drought over recent years was making it more difficult to survive.

Farmers in this region have traditionally relied on two rainy seasons each year. With no other way of getting water to their land, the rain was vital if crops were to grow. When the rains came, farmers could grow enough food to sustain their families through the dry period. When the rains did not come, however, people went hungry.

“We had to wait for the rain for our crops to grow,” explained Thiga. “The rains are disappearing so it was getting more difficult every year. Life was very hard. We experienced hunger very often,” he said.

Thiga, who lives with his wife, Alice, and their two young children, received a lifeline earlier this year when his farm was connected to a Trócaire-funded irrigation project which brings water directly from a river to over 1,400 farms in the area. The irrigation project means that people are no longer reliant on the

rain for their crops.

“The irrigation has made a big difference,” he said, proudly displaying his thriving crops. “We don’t have to wait for the rain any more so we can plant all year round. We are growing crops throughout the year.”

The irrigation project has transformed this community. However, across Kenya millions of farmers are still reliant on rain to grow crops. With rains becoming more erratic and less predictable, hunger is on the rise. “The rains are getting less by the year,” Thiga said. “When I was young there was plenty of rain but not anymore. It is going to be very difficult for people who do not have irrigation. I do not know how they will continue.”

2. Typhoon destroyed lifetime’s work in seconds

It only took a few seconds to destroy a lifetime’s work. Gerardo and Jovita Amantillo were both at home when Typhoon Haiyan struck on November 8, 2013.

The couple, both aged 74, had been warned that a bad storm was on its way but nothing had prepared them for the intensity of what they faced.

The winds had been battering their home for several hours when suddenly the waves crashed down all around them, destroying their home and leaving Gerardo and Jovita fighting for their lives.

The strength of the waves carried Gerardo and Jovita out of their home. They survived only by clinging to the neighbour’s roof – almost three metres off the ground.

“We held on to the roof,” said Gerardo. “The only reason the roof was not blown away was because there were so many of us lying on it. After around two hours the winds died down and the water receded. Our house was completely gone.”

Miraculously, they received only superficial wounds to their legs but were otherwise unharmed. However, sitting on Ormoc pier waiting for a boat to take them off Leyte island, which was the worst affected region of the Philippines, the couple has just one small bag of possessions. Everything else was lost.

The Philippines has always been susceptible to typhoons and storms but climate change is increasing both the frequency and intensity of these occurrences. The Climate Change Vulnerability Index ranks the Philippines as the eighth most at risk country in the world. An estimated 76 million people in the country – 80% of the population – are vulnerable to the impacts of storms and flooding.

Over four million people were displaced by Typhoon Haiyan. Approximately 400,000 are living in evacuation centres, with the rest sheltering with friends or family.

Trócaire is offering shelter and food to people who lost their homes, but also rebuilding affected areas so that people like Gerardo and Jovita can look forward to the day when they can return home.

Prayers

At the conclusion of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis proposes two prayers. The first, he says, is to be shared “with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful creator”, while in the other “we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus”.

A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
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 recognise that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

A CHRISTIAN PRAYER IN UNION WITH CREATION

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence

and your tender love.
Praise be to you!
Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this Earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!
Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father’s love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!
Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.
God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this Earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the Earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you! Amen.