

## Laudato Si' Chapter 5 Lines of Approach and Action.

The world will continue on “the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us,” says Pope Francis, unless everyone works together to find solutions to the environmental crisis through dialogue and transparency. This dialogue must occur on the local, national and international level, and should include people from business, politics, science, religion and the environmental movements, as well as ordinary people whose lives will be affected.

In chapter 5, Pope Francis discusses how we should respond to the crisis. The word 'Dialogue' appears in all five sections of this chapter.

“The Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics,” he writes. “But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good.” Francis then reflects that “Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*.”

However, he notes that despite the progress made in various fields, a global consensus has been difficult to reach and at various Summits “due to a lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment.” Enforceable international agreements are urgently needed and global regulatory norms to impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions.”

Such a global consensus and enforceable agreements could 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, and ensuring universal access to drinking water.”

We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay.”

The Bolivian Bishops have noted that “the countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialisation, at the cost of

enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems they have caused.” These countries in fact owe a “carbon debt” to the rest of the world.

Carbon credits are criticised which could “lead to a new form of speculation which would not help reduce the emission of polluting gases worldwide.”

For poor nations who need help through technology transfer, technical assistance and financial resources, they also have to work to eliminate extreme poverty and promote social development of their own people. They “need to acknowledge the scandalous level of consumption in some privileged sectors of their own population and to combat corruption more effectively.”

“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.”

“The economic and financial sectors, being transnational, tends to prevail over the political.” Hence Francis agrees with Pope Benedict who wrote in *Caritas in Veritate* that there is need for a world political order “to manage the global economy; to revive economies hit by the crisis; to avoid any deterioration of the present crisis and the greater imbalances that would result; to bring about integral and timely disarmament, food security and peace; to guarantee the protection of the environment and to regulate migration.”

Francis calls for greater attention to the environment by local and national authorities which have a “responsibility for planning, coordination, oversight and enforcement within their respective borders.” This would include setting down “rules for admissible conduct in the light of the common good.”

A politics “concerned with immediate results” is “driven to produce short-term growth.” Politicians “are reluctant to upset the public with measures which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign investment.” In addition there is the problem of corruption.

Francis is a fan of cooperatives because “they are able to instil a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. They are also concerned about what they will eventually leave to their children and grandchildren.”

Francis acknowledges that there is “no uniform recipes” that will fit the needs of all countries or regions, but he believes all should promote energy conservation and maximum energy efficiency. This might involve “removing from the market products which are less energy efficient or more polluting, improving transport systems, and encouraging the construction and repair of buildings aimed at reducing their energy consumption and levels of pollution.”

Pope Francis also wants to promote recycling and sustainable agriculture.

All of this will require courage on the part of politicians who “will inevitably clash with the mindset of short-term gain and results which dominates present-day economics and politics.”

Transparency is an essential element in the dialogue to find better ways of preserving the environment, according to the pope, especially transparency in the assessment of the environmental impact of business ventures and projects.

What is needed is environmental impact assessments that are “interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure.” Only when scientific and political discussions are imbued with honesty and truth can all the different stakeholders reach a consensus on the alternatives available. “The culture of consumerism, which prioritizes short-term gain and private interest, can make it easy to rubber-stamp authorisations or to conceal information.”

Francis calls for a thorough investigation and discussion of any proposed venture. “What will it accomplish? Why? Where? When? How? For whom? What are the risks? What are the costs? Who will pay those costs and how?”

If a study finds that “serious and irreversible damage may result, a project should be halted or modified.” He recognizes that sometimes the

evidence is disputable. In such cases, the burden of proof should be on the projects' promoters "to demonstrate that the proposed activity will not cause serious harm to the environment or to those who inhabit it."

This does not mean being opposed to technological innovations but "profit cannot be the sole criterion to be taken into account." Francis believes that "Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy." Rather they should be in dialogue for the common good.

"We need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals." He believes that it is unrealistic to "hope that those who are obsessed with maximising profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage which they will leave behind for future generations."

"Where profits alone count, there can be no thinking about the rhythms of nature, its phases of decay and regeneration, or the complexity of ecosystems which may be gravely upset by human intervention," he writes. "Moreover, biodiversity is considered at most a deposit of economic resources available for exploitation, with no serious thought for the real value of things, their significance for persons and cultures, or the concerns and needs of the poor."

"Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term," he writes. "If we look at the larger picture, we can see that more diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can prove very profitable."

He also believes that we need "to think of containing growth by setting some reasonable limits and even retracing our steps before it is too late." The behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy is unsustainable, "while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity." As a result, "the 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."

“A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress.”

This is why we need “a politics which is farsighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis.” But corruption and short-sightedness cripples politics so that it fails to enact sound public policy and fulfil its responsibilities.

Finally, Pope Francis calls for a dialogue between religion and science. He does not believe that science can provide a complete explanation of life since the scientific methodology leaves little room “for aesthetic sensibility, poetry, or even reason’s ability to grasp the ultimate meaning and purpose of things.”

“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.”

Believers themselves must constantly feel challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions. They need to be encouraged to be ever open to God’s grace and to draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace. 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 need to acknowledge we were mistaken.

Solutions will come only through dialogue “for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity,” he writes. “The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity.”

“Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history,” he writes, “nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities.”

Has Pope Francis been too optimistic in his plea to the nations and people of the World? Eight years after Laudato Si' we do not seem to be hugely further forward. We are into the second year of the War in Ukraine There seems to be Economic crises across the globe and although the IPCC has issued its 'Synthesis Report' or final warning for Action.

As we enter Holy Week, let us consider the Passion of the earth, which is our home, the agonies it is suffering at our hands and let us at least recognise our collective responsibility for this situation and ask for forgiveness, guidance and help.

