

## **THE PAPAL ENCYCLICAL *LAUDATO SI***

In writing and universally disseminating this Encyclical, Pope Francis has taken a global leadership stance on reducing greenhouse gases in order to mitigate climate change, especially its effects on the poor. The Pope presents his case as a moral and spiritual argument, and supports it with the best science available. He speaks movingly of Earth as “our common home” and compares Earth's vulnerability to that of the powerless poor.

As part of his introduction, the Pope explains his choice of the name Francis to be his guide and inspiration. Saint Francis, he says, is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable. He shows us just how inseparable is the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.” (10)

### **CLIMATE JUSTICE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ENCYCLICAL**

*What follows are some highlights that directly address issues of justice as found in the Encyclical. Well known statements of scientific, political and historical fact are not featured among these highlights, although they are abundant in the Encyclical. Italics are those of the Encyclical. Material not in quotation marks is paraphrased. Parenthetical numbers refer to the paragraph numbers in the Encyclical itself.*

#### **POLLUTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

The acceleration of human activity is in contrast to the naturally slow pace of biological evolution, such that nature cannot adapt to or absorb the fallout from our activities. (21 ,22)

The worst effects of climate change are felt by the poor, who have no resources to enable them to adapt to the effects of climate change; too many are forced by repeated flooding and drought to leave their homelands and become refugees. (25)

Those of the poor who leave land degraded by industrial indifference are not recognized by international conventions as refugees, and lack any legal protection. (23-25)

#### **THE ISSUE OF WATER**

Communities dependent on aquifers, rivers and lakes, as well as oceans, degraded by mining farming and industry suffer from their polluted contents. (29)

Greater scarcity of water will make it attractive to international capital; its inequitable distribution will likely become a major source of conflict in this century. (31)

***"Access to safe, drinkable water is a basic and universal human right."*** (30)

## THE LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY

Human beings have no right "to think of other species merely as potential 'resources' to be exploited, while we overlook that they have value in themselves. (33)

The replacement of virgin forest with monoculture (single crop) plantations depletes the soil, as well as removing the land from the control of its previous inhabitants whose activities were more compatible with the local ecology. (38,39)

## GLOBAL INEQUITY

"Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest" (Bolivian Bishops' Conference) – in illnesses and premature deaths, in conflicts sparked by shortage of resources, and in any number of other problems that are insufficiently represented on global agendas. (48)

The vulnerable poor are the majority of the planet's population, yet in international economic and political discussions, "their problems are brought up as an afterthought ... or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage." (49)

Today we "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 present model of distribution is inequitable in that "a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption." (50)

Multinational corporations take an ours-to-exploit attitude towards poor countries. "... they leave behind great human and environmental liabilities such as unemployment, abandoned towns, the depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, the impoverishment of agriculture and local stock breeding, open pits, riven hills, polluted rivers and a handful of social works which are no longer sustainable." (Bishops of the Patagonia-Comahue Region of Argentina) (51)

"Developing countries, where the most important reserves of the biosphere are to be found, continue to fuel the development of richer countries. [...] "The developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programs of sustainable development." (52)

## WEAK RESPONSES

We of the global community "lack the 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." (53)

“Powerful financial interests prove most resistant to this effort, and political planning tends to lack breadth of vision. **What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?**” (57)

#### TECHNOLOGY: CREATIVITY AND POWER

Humankind has accrued tremendous power over nature and ourselves. “Yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used. (104)

The specialization inherent in technology makes it difficult to see and comprehend the larger picture. This impedes the ability of societies to confront issues complicated by the needs of many people, many living things, and many natural as well as human-contrived systems. Thus, wealthy nations find it difficult to see and accept their role and their responsibility in the growing ecological crisis. (111,113)

Technological progress is increasingly replacing human work. Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on Earth, a path to growth and personal fulfillment. **To stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term gain, is bad business for society.** (128)

The application of certain technologies to agriculture allows for the industrialization of farming. The expansion of such agricultural practices diminishes the diversity of production and relegates entire communities to dependency, pushes small farmers off the land and into urban poverty, depletes the soil, and pollutes waterways and aquifers – a human and natural disaster.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ECOLOGY

A good part of our genetic code is shared by many living beings. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. (138,139)

We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. 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)

A consumerist vision of human beings in a global economy has a leveling effect on cultures, diminishing the rich heritage of humanity as well as damaging ecosystems. (144, 145)

Indigenous communities, living as they do in harmony with their surroundings, care for them the best; for them, land is not a commodity but a gift from God and their ancestors. (146)

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF THE COMMON GOOD

Human beings are not mere facets of an economic reality, which would render any of us exploitable and expendable. We are summoned to a solidarity that includes all of our kind, especially the poor and the powerless. (158)

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)

**“Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth.”** (161)

#### LINES OF APPROACH AND ACTION

“Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan.” (164)

Enforceable international agreements are urgently needed, since local authorities are not always capable of effective intervention due to powerful economic pressures. (173)

International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. (169)

**“Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, 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.”** (165)

Some strategies, such as the internationalization of environmental costs and the buying and selling of carbon credits penalize poor nations for the activities of the wealthy. They are a simple ploy for the continued excessive consumption of those able to pay. (170-171)

#### POLITICS AND ECONOMY IN DIALOGUE FOR HUMAN FULFILLMENT

An economy based on short-term profits and the consumer palate will not be able to safeguard the interests of a biodiverse planet that it considers its exploitable domain. Likewise, growth for its own sake has no interest in conservation of resources or development of human potential. (190)

The desertification of deforested land is a cost that must be borne, not by those left behind with a diminished quality of life, but by those who profited from the destruction. (195)

The principle of subsidiarity demands a greater sense of responsibility for the common good from those who wield greater power. (196)

The issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our consumerist, throw-away lifestyle, and calls us to a greater sense of responsibility for the choices we make. (208)