

# On Care for our Common Home

## Reflections on Laudato Si'

### an encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis

#### 1 Outline of the concerns of the document

There is an inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, and commitment to a fair and just society.

These are seen within two contexts:

the universe – including our earth – is created by God, and that has implications for the way we treat it;

the environment that we are part of, and the economic and related systems that we have made, affect all of us, but often not with justice or fairness.

| <i>Creation</i>                                      | <i>Two contexts –</i>                                     | <i>Considering especially –</i>  |
|--|---|--|
| Creation<br>the universe,<br>including our<br>world. | created by God<br><br>environmental &<br>economic aspects | it is a showing of God's love, and calls<br>for our respect and care,<br>the whole of humanity;<br>includes the future<br>includes especially poor<br>& those who are or will be in need |

#### 2 What is happening to our home.

##### 2.1 Global warming.

###### *a What is global warming*

Certain gases – called greenhouse gases – trap heat in the atmosphere. This warms the atmosphere

See note: Climate change and global warming N1 on page 10.

###### *b Causes of increasing global warming*

Greenhouse gas levels can be measured for tens of thousands of year in the past. It is only since we have become very industrialized that they have begun to rise significantly, and this rise is due almost entirely to the large-scale use of carbon based fuels, such as wood, coal, natural gas, and oil.

###### *c Effects of increasing global warming*

There are three main effects:

- melting of natural ice, such as glaciers and the ice in the Arctic and in Antarctica, and a consequent rise in sea level;
- changes in the weather system, usually referred to as climate change, which can have devastating effects in many parts of the world;
- alterations in the habitats of animals and plants, so they may not be able to survive in their previous natural homes. In some cases they may be able to survive in other areas.

###### *d 'Tipping points'*

when the air temperature reaches a level where ice melts, it can release gases trapped under the

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ice. The commonest of these gases is methane which is a powerful greenhouse gas, and which degrades very slowly in the atmosphere. So the release of the methane causes more rapid global warming, which in turn melts more ice, releasing more methane, in an increasing spiral which may be unstoppable. See 'Tipping points': N1.4 on page10.

### **2.2 Water**

#### *a Water is essential to life*

without it, we quickly die. We need an ample supply of water which is clean and free from disease.

#### *b International tension*

is caused when water supplies come from another country, which takes more water for its own industry and agriculture.

#### *c Melting of ice on the earth*

has three effects:

increase in the rate of global warming, as white snow and ice reflect heat back into space;

cutting off water supplies, which often come from snow fall in mountain ranges;

raising sea levels, swamping lands used for farming, or cities, flooding them or contaminating them with sea water, making millions of people refugees.

#### *d What water is used for*

A huge amount of water is not used for drinking, but in industry and in agriculture.

### **2.3 Pollution and contamination**

#### *a Toxic contamination from transport and industry*

produced by many industrial processes, and the by-products can be radioactive or very poisonous. Often contamination is caused by over-use of fertilizers.

water is often used on a throw-away basis – the water is used and then discarded – often loaded with chemicals – into rivers and the sea.

#### *b The food chain*

Contamination discarded into the sea is ingested by plants which are in turn eaten by animals, and so the contamination moves up the food chain.

#### *c Waste*

is often simply discarded into waste piles or land-fill.

Recycling is often difficult as manufactured materials can be hard to separate.

Our throwaway culture uses up resources which ought to be left for future generations.

### **2.4 Destruction of the environment**

#### *a Trees and forests*

the most efficient device for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and converting it into oxygen, is a tree or other large plant. Hence the destruction of forests – often for the production of cash crops – is leading us into greater danger.

#### *b Loss of biodiversity*

A number of creatures may become extinct. A large number of plants are useful as sources of medications and they may be many more. If these species are not preserved, there could be significant loss of useful drugs.

### **2.5 Breakdown of society, and decline in quality of human life**

Shortage of food and work, lack of land for farming, excessive urbanisation,

inequality in provision of human rights, such as medical care, provision of education, etc.

## 2.6 Possible solutions

### *a What we could do*

An immediate reduction in the production of greenhouse gases is essential.

Development of carbon capture and storage technology, where the CO<sub>2</sub> from a power station is captured and buried (this is in fact very hard to do);

Dumping huge quantities of iron filings into the sea (to encourage algae which use up CO<sub>2</sub>) could have disastrous consequences.

Placing huge quantities of aluminium flakes in the air to reflect some of the sun's rays away from the earth could also have dreadful consequences.

### *b These are real and pressing problems.*

We must take doomsday predictions seriously.

Waste and environmental damage is now leading to catastrophe.

We need to act before it is too late.

## 2.7 So what happens?

Well-off people mask the problems, or ignore them;

poor people who cannot control their life situations will suffer.

Laudato si' comments that there is a huge growth in city life, and a shortage of green spaces.

The human race is part of the world too – part of the ecosystem of the earth, and the inequalities caused by damage to the earth's ecosystems are damaging our society and the way we live.

See: The common good N2 on page 10.

The ultimate daft question → 1

A mediation on St Matthew, ch 25, vv31-46 complete text → 2

Jesus said: "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

## 2.8 Summary of the moral aspects of damage to the earth's ecosystems.

People with power will try to ensure that they have all they want, and that they are not affected by the consequences of their use of the world's facilities.

Countries which are poor and not powerful fuel the development of richer countries at the cost of their own present and future.

The doctrine of the Common Good (see N2 on page 10) which allows 'social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment' (quotation from Vatican II).

The preferential option for the poor requires that decisions be made that ensure that the poor are not in any way disadvantaged (see N2.1 on page 11).

## 3 God the creator

### 3.1 What scripture tells us

#### *a God is the creator of everything*

that is. the process of creation continues, and was not located at any point in time;

that creation is understood much more as a task of ordering and organisation than creation from

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nothing; → 3

that God gave the universe to us to rule, or care for, and to use as we need;

Gen 2:15: "The Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden, to till it and keep it."

that God saw all that God had made, and behold, it was very good;

see the note on evolution as the process by which God continues the work of creation N3 on page 11.

##### *b Respect for God's creation*

God saw all that was made, and behold, it was very good.

'Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection . . . Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness.' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 339)

We have a responsibility for creation – to understand it and to develop its potential. Nature is valuable, but fragile, and we must leave behind the untruth of modern material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power, (Laudato Si' 78).

##### *c Creation is an expression of God's love*

Humans are uniquely personal beings. Creation is an expression of God's love, given to everyone, not just for the profit and gain of a few.

Ultimate destiny of universe is in the fullness of God, The ultimate purpose of creatures is not in us, but in God. Our task is to lead everything back to our creator.

##### *d Extract from the hymn of St Francis of Assisi*

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,

especially Sir Brother Sun,

who is the day and through whom you give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;  
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air,  
cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather  
through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night,  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

### **3.2 All creatures are part of a family**

#### *a All creation owned by God and linked into a universal family.*

All of us are linked into a universal family, God has joined us to closely to the world that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment.

#### *b But it is a family with terrible problems*

'Within the universal family are terrible inequalities: especially among humans: we should be indignant of the enormous inequalities in our midst, whereby we continue to tolerate some considering themselves more worthy than others,

We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet.' (Laudato Si' 90)

### **3.3 Creation is a shared inheritance for the whole family.**

'Everyone believes that the earth is a shared inheritance; for believers, this is a question of fidelity to the creator. Hence ecology must take into account must take into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.

Christian tradition has never recognised the right to private property as inviolable or absolute. God gave the earth to the whole human race without excluding anyone. It is not in accordance with God's plan that the gift of creation should benefit only a few.

Everyone has a right to a home, a source of subsistence for his family, includes access to education, credit, insurance, and markets.

Thou shalt not kill: what does it mean when 20% of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations of what they need to survive?' (Laudato Si' 93-95).

## **4 Power, control and responsibility**

### **4.1 The technocratic paradigm**

Laudato Si' uses this term to refer to the control of technological and economic systems to control the world. See N4 on page 11 for some more on this.

Science and technology have given enormous power to those who have the knowledge, and the economic resources to use it, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world.

### **4.2 Responsibility for progress and development.**

Power comes with scientific knowledge and progress, with increased technological capability, and with economic resources and control.

Scientific knowledge and progress and increased technological ability are made by those with wealth – whether they are countries, or global organisations. And the developments are made to satisfy the needs of the wealthy people, and to increase the profits of those who have invested in the organisations.

This process is out of control – and we are trapped in this paradigm. We can no longer do without its resources and we cannot now escape its power. Our ability to make decisions, to live in freedom, and live in an alternative lifestyle are greatly diminished.

There has to be a new way of looking at things, new ways of thinking, new policies, which can lead to development which takes in the interests of the whole world, not just the wealthy and those with power.

We shouldn't be in control of the world – we should be stewards and carers. If we try to proceed with absolute power, we stop caring about the harm we do to nature, and fail to acknowledge the worth of poor people. If we don't realise that everything – and everyone – is connected, we provoke a rebellion on the part of nature.

### **4.3 The kind of society we want**

Where all have access to clean water, adequate food, and education.

Where all have access to work – should we use technology to replace jobs?

### **4.4 Biological intervention**

This is a heading to include ways of intervening in nature's development, such as the production of genetically modified organisms → 4. Such developments must act on nature in the ways intended by God.

## **5 The situation we should be longing for.**

### **5.1 A new kind of ecology**

*a Ecology*

is the system of relationships between environmental, human and social dimensions.

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### *b Integral ecology*

We need an integral ecology which includes environmental, human and social dimensions.

### *c The life and survival of society*

We are part of society, and we are part of nature, so society is part of our environment. “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, which in turn leads to others and to the environment”. (Laudato Si' 141)

### *d Cultural ecology*

Laudato Si' introduces the idea of a cultural ecology. This means that in seeking solutions to problems we should pay attention to local cultures, and base solutions on them, and not on frameworks imported from outside which may not fit in with local cultural practices.

The document also encourages the preservation of local cultural practices, buildings, and other links with a society's past.

[Author's note: I suspect in this section that the word 'cultural' is a mis-translation, or the term is being incorrectly used. It would probably be better to use an expression such as 'world-view'.]

### *e Ecology in daily life*

This section of Laudato Si' includes a number of sections about daily life:

the provision of adequate housing;

the provision of satisfactory homes, and social life;

good design of buildings;

we need more roads and parking areas. But motor transport introduces pollution, and public transport needs improvement;

rural communities often lack transport links, and often live in poverty,

## 5.2 The Common Good

### *a The principle of the Common Good*

The Common Good is one of the two central themes of the moral standpoint of Christian morality.

The common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment.” (quoted in Laudato Si' §156 from Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* ). Refer to N2 on page 10 for more on the common good.

### *b The option for the poor*

Linked inseparably with it is the option for the poor (see The option for the poor, N2.1 on page 11). This stresses that decisions should be made with the needs of the poor and disadvantaged taking priority in decision-making.

These two principles form the central teaching of the Christian church, based on the teaching of the bible, on care and concern for others.

They should be forefront in our minds when we vote, for example.

### *c Future generations*

People in future generations are also within our concern for others, and are included in the principle of the common good. Leaving future generations a destroyed world, polluted and sterile, places us among those who saw the needs of others and did not respond (See the meditation on St Matthew on page 3, which emphasises the consequences of not recognising and responding to the needy..)

The world is on loan to us – we need to take very seriously the predictions of the damage being caused to our world.

## 6 What needs to be done.

### 6.1 Appropriate dialogue

#### *a International dialogue*

This is a world-wide problem, and the communities of the world need to work together.

Reducing the use of fossil (carbon-based) fuels is especially important, but it is hard to achieve a consensus.

The control of hazardous wastes, with a system of reporting and controls, has had some success.

But many countries place their own interests above the common good;

Strategies often place heavy burdens on countries with few resources.

For poor countries, priority is to eliminate poverty and promote the development of the people.

They should expect help in reducing carbon emissions from countries which have grown wealthy by polluting the planet.

#### *b Subsidiarity, national and local initiatives.*

(Subsidiarity is a principle of social organization which holds that social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution.)

Laws are needed to control conduct in the interests of the common good.

Electoral pressures means that governments and political parties will not make decisions in the interests of the common good which affect their power or their results in an election.

Co-operatives and other non-governmental organisations can put pressure on governments for changes.

#### *c Decision-making*

Decisions should always take into account the needs of the poor and the effects on the environment.

Rio declaration of 1992:

“Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a pretext for postponing cost-effective measures which prevent environmental degradation.” This avoids using lack of certainty about the effects of a developments as a means to risking damage to the environment.

#### *d Politics and the economy – structures which benefit the world community.*

A comment on the banking crisis and its effects → 5

Oxygen, water, and disposal of wastes must not be used as if they were free. Industry must pay for the damage they will do to present and future generations.

Businesses make profits by only paying a fraction of the costs involved.

#### *e Towards a new lifestyle*

We think freedom is freedom to consume, but the only real freedom is for those who wield financial and economic power.

Education has its part to play, but does it necessarily change attitudes?

A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes shows the kind of convictions and attitudes that can protect the environment. Education can change the way we recycle, reduce water consumption, cooking only what we can eat, and avoiding waste. (UK around 15 million tonnes of food is thrown away every year. Almost 50% of this comes from our homes).

How our food is brought to us → 6

### 6.2 A change of heart

We need an ecological conversion whereby the effects Christians' encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationships with the world around them.

We must examine our lives and and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's creation through our action – and inaction.

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However individual initiatives will not achieve very much, we must work together to achieve a common conversion.

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## 7 An appendix: Morality and the ecological crisis

This section is not taken from Laudato Si'. It aims to deal with our practical day-to-day responsibility for the effects of our civilisation on the world. It is set out as a series of questions, with notes on the main ones.

### 7.1 Do we actually believe there is a crisis?

The consensus view of reputable scientists is that there is. How quickly it will come depends upon the tipping points (see 'Tipping points': N1.4 on page10) which are largely unknown, and the effect they would have is unpredictable, but certainly dangerous.

Even if we reduce our greenhouse gas emissions now, global warming will continue while the gases dissipate or are absorbed.

How bad could it be? Our near neighbour Venus may have suffered from runaway global warming – its temperature today is over 450°Celsius (dull red heat) → 7.

Laudato Si' quotes the Rio declaration of 1992 in §186: (see above on page 7)

“Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a pretext for postponing cost-effective measures which prevent environmental degradation.” (though in fact most would agree that there is full scientific certainty).

### 7.2 Is living the way we do a serious sin?

We happily enjoy a life of plenty, full of entertainment, warmth (or cool) and this is leading directly to suffering and death for thousands or millions of people.

Have another look at the picture in Saint Matthew's gospel:

A mediation on St Matthew, ch 25, vv31-46 complete text → 8

Jesus said: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’”

So – what did we do?

### 7.3 Beware of 'tokenism'

Doing little things which have no real or lasting impact does not let us off the hook. (Turning off the cold tap while you brush your teeth will not affect the water crisis!)

### 7.4 Which organisations are we part of which have the power to change things?

The runaway problems are due mostly to the misuse of political and economic power, and to the effects of the market economy.

These are some of the organisations that can change things.

How do we act to try to make this happen?

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**A prayer for our earth** (from Laudato Si')

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.

God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten  
of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and  
destruction.

Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with 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.

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**A Christian prayer in union with creation**  
(from Laudato Si')

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 the 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!

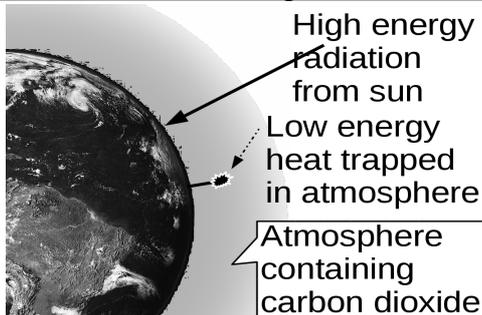
Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite  
love,  
teach us to contemplate you  
in the beauty of the universe,  
for all things speak of you.  
Awaken our praise and thankfulness  
for every being that you have made.  
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined  
to everything that is.

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.  
Lord, seize us with your power and light,  
help us to protect all life, i  
to prepare for a better future,  
for the coming of your Kingdom  
of justice, peace, love and beauty.  
Praise be to you!  
Amen.

## N1 Climate change and global warming

Although not the only ways in which we damage the earth, global warming and its consequence climate change are the most damaging, and may be irreversible.

### N1.1 Global warming



High energy (including light) radiation from the sun penetrates the atmosphere. Some of it is reflected back into space, and the rest warms the earth. The warm earth radiates low energy warmth back into space, but some of this is trapped which is trapped by gases such as carbon dioxide and methane in the atmosphere. So some heat energy is trapped in the atmosphere, which gradually warms. So the gases such as carbon dioxide and methane trap heat, acting like a greenhouse. One effect of this is to cause overall rises in the

temperature of the atmosphere.

### N1.2 Where greenhouse gases come from.

The two main greenhouse gases are:

- carbon dioxide (CO) which is produced whenever any carbon based fuel is burnt (coal, oil, natural gas, and others); carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere by plants, which absorb it and release oxygen back into the atmosphere;
- methane (CH) which is produced mostly by decaying animal and plant residues. Methane is not easily removed from the atmosphere.

### N1.3 Climate change

The general effect of the energy trapped into the atmosphere is to warm it. This has two main effects:

- melting ice: which causes a rise in sea levels (if all the ice melted, including Antarctica sea level would rise by over metres);
- the heat energy in the atmosphere drives the 'weather-engine', and changes to this cause changes in climate in different parts of the world. This causes more violent storms, stronger winds, and alters rain-fall patterns in ways which are, in practice, fairly unpredictable.

### N1.4 'Tipping points'

In some parts of the world, carbon dioxide, or more problematic still, methane, are trapped by layers of ice. Warming causes the ice to melt, releasing these green-house gases, which in turn trap more heat. Once this process starts it is unstoppable and irreversible. The point in the temperature rise at which this positive feedback begins is called a tipping point.

So when the air temperature reaches a level where ice melts, it can release gases trapped under the ice. The commonest of these gases is methane which is a powerful greenhouse gas, and which degrades very slowly in the atmosphere. So the release of the methane causes more rapid global warming, which in turn melts more ice, releasing more methane, in an increasing spiral which may be unstoppable.

## N2 The common good

is a basis for ethical decision-making in any society or group of human beings. As such, it is not necessarily only a Christian concept.

In *Laudato Si*, the common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment.” (quoted from Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* ).

In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a

preferential option [see N2.1 below] for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world's goods, but . . . it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only to look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good.

[Laudato Si §]

See also Pope Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate* → 9

Second Vatican Council, the role of the common good → 10

The common good includes future generations, *Laudato Si* → 11

### N2.1 The option for the poor

also referred to as the preferential option for the poor, means choosing a course of action which helps the poor. It is a key concept in Judaeo-Christian morality in the bible. It implies that the morality of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members, and the poor (in all senses of the word) have an over-riding claim on the care of society and its members.

“In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brother and sisters. . . . We need only look around us to see that today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good.” *Laudato Si*, §

Current data on poverty in the UK from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation → 12

## N3 Evolution

Evolution is the process by which, through selection of the most suitably adapted of random or natural variations in each species, living things progress and change and become better adapted to their circumstances.

For a time after Charles Darwin and others first identified this process (around 1859), it was held to contradict God's role in creating each species as given in the bible, especially in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis.

However it is now generally accepted that:

the bible was not inspired by God to give a literal account of events as they occurred, but to teach the truths of our faith; in this case that God creates everything (note the present tense creates), and that God sees creation as very good.

Most theologians nowadays would see evolution (in an extended understanding to include the formation of inanimate things such as planets, suns, matter etc. from the first moment of the big bang onwards) as the means by which the work of creation continues.

## N4 The Technocratic Paradigm

*Laudato Si'* uses the concept of the technocratic paradigm which it heavily criticises. It means that we allow various technological systems to decide on how we manage the world, and to make it possible for us to continue to have everything we want.

Technocratic means leadership on the basis of technological knowledge and power. Here the word technology is used in a wider sense than usual: it includes economic systems and motivations such as power and profit.

Technology as used here have given us enormous progress, and have given enormous power but to only a few – those with the economic resources to control and exploit the world.

It is restoring a proper sense of responsibility in the exercise of this power that is the central concern of *Laudato Si'*.

The opposite of the technocratic paradigm is a change of heart! Much more difficult to achieve!

## N5 The two great commandments

The two great commandments, frequently quoted by Jesus Christ and others in the gospels, are given for example in St Matthew's gospel:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

They have their origin in the law given to Moses when the people first realised that they were God's people. The bulk of the Mosaic law is concerned with duties towards our neighbour, especially towards those in need. It stresses our duty to those who are not members of the Jewish people. The ten commandments (which are actually some examples of duty to God and neighbour) form only a small part of the law.

The passage quoted in the meditation in the main text above: A meditation on St Matthew on page 3 emphasises the consequences of not recognising and responding to the needy.

Later, in St John's gospel, Jesus refines the second great commandment to 'love others as much as I have loved you' (John 13:34) which, on the evening before his death, has a profound impact.

### N5.1 The third great commandment

In *Laudato Si'* (66), Pope Francis adds a third commandment:

Humans have three relationships: with God, with each other, and with the earth itself. Breaking these relationships is sin.

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- 1 The ultimate daft question is:  
do we want wind turbines producing electricity all over our beautiful hills?  
The answer, of course is no – but remember it was a stupid question.  
The real question is:  
we need more energy; do we:  
: dig more coal mines (producing CO, increasing pollution, dangerous for miners);  
: drill for oil (producing CO, using up oil stock future generations will need);  
: put wind turbines wherever there is useful amounts of wind (on hill-tops)  
: build nuclear power stations (which (at the moment at least) produce large amounts of radioactive and toxic waste)  
: put a large tax on energy (electricity, gas, motor fuel) so that people have to use less of it.  
Remember – to answer the question sensibly, you must choose one answer, you cannot duck out of it!
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- 2 Matthew ch25 vv 31-46 (RSV) Jesus said: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’  
Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”
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- 3 Psalm 104 (103): 10-31: Grail translation: The wonderful arrangements of God.  
You make springs gush forth in the valleys, they flow in between the hills.  
They give drink to all the beast of the fields; the wild-asses quench their thirst.  
On their bank dwell the birds of heaven; from the branches they sing their song.  
From your dwelling you water the hills; earth drinks its fill of your gift.  
You make the grass grow for the cattle and the plants to serve man's needs,  
that he may bring forth bread from the earth and wine to cheer man's heart;  
oil, to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart.  
The trees of the Lord drink their fill, the cedars he planted on Lebanon;  
there the birds build their nests; on the tree-top the stork has her home.  
The goats find a home in the mountains, and rabbits hide in the rocks.  
You made the moon to mark the months, the sun knows the time for its setting.  
When you spread the darkness it is night and all the beasts of the forest creep forth.  
The young lions roar for their prey and ask their food from God.  
At the rising of the sun they steal away and go to rest in their dens.  
Man goes forth to his work, to labour till evening falls.  
How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all.  
The earth is full of your riches.  
There is the sea, vast and wide, with its moving swarms past counting,  
living things great and small; The ships are moving there,  
and the monsters you made to play with.  
All of these look to you to give them their food in due season.  
You give it, they gather it up, you open your hand, they have their fill.

You hide your face, they are dismayed; you take back your spirit, they die,  
returning to the dust from which they came.  
You send forth your Spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the earth.  
May the glory of the Lord last forever! May the Lord rejoice in his works!

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- 4 Genetically modified is used to mean processes where direct modification of the DNA of an organism (plant or animal) modifies its properties in such a way that all descendants of that organism will continue with the modified DNA.

It can be used for beneficial purposes – to produce rice, for example, which is much more nutritious, or which has a heavier yield. It could make a significant contribution to solving the problems of hunger in the world.

The downside is

the modified organisms belong to powerful scientific organisations, who can use them to extort money from those who are poor already;

there is the continuing danger of producing an uncontrollable monster plant or animal, which we cannot control. And such an organism can reproduce without limit.

It needs to be remembered that such a process is not new – the breeding of animals or plants with desirable characteristics is thousands of years old. These are not usually referred to as genetically modified organisms.

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- 5 Paragraph 189: Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency—driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life. Saving banks at any cost, making the public pay the price, foregoing a firm commitment to reviewing and reforming the entire system, only reaffirms the absolute power of a financial system, a power which has no future and will only give rise to new crises after a slow, costly and only apparent recovery. The financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world. Production is not always rational, and is usually tied to economic variables which assign to products a value that does not necessarily correspond to their real worth. This frequently leads to an overproduction of some commodities, with unnecessary impact on the environment and with negative results on regional economies.’ The financial bubble also tends to be a productive bubble. The problem of the real economy is not confronted with vigour, yet it is the real economy which makes diversification and improvement in production possible, helps companies to function well, and enables small and medium businesses to develop and create employment.
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- 6 How our food is brought to us:

- Air cargo - 0.8063 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per Ton-Mile
- Truck - 0.1693 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per Ton-Mile
- Train - 0.1048 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per Ton-Mile
- Sea freight - 0.0403 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per Ton-Mile
- Zeppelin - 0.0887 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per Ton-Mile

The road haulage industry is contributing around 20% of the UK's total carbon emissions a year,

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- 7 Global warming on Venus:

A runaway greenhouse effect involving carbon dioxide and water vapour may have occurred on Venus. In this scenario, early Venus may have had a global ocean. As the brightness of the early Sun increased, the amount of water vapour in the atmosphere increased, increasing the temperature and consequently increasing the evaporation of the ocean, leading eventually to the situation in which the oceans boiled, and all of the water vapour entered the atmosphere. On Venus today there is little water vapour in the atmosphere. Its surface temperature is about 460 degrees Celsius (dull red hot).

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- 8 Matthew ch25 vv 31-46 (RSV) Jesus said: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will

separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

- 9 Another important consideration is the common good. To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of "all of us", made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity. To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *pólis*, or "city".

The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practise this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *pólis*. This is the institutional path — we might also call it the political path — of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly, outside the institutional mediation of the *pólis*. When animated by charity, commitment to the common good has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have. Like all commitment to justice, it has a place within the testimony of divine charity that paves the way for eternity through temporal action.

Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family. In an increasingly globalised society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations, in such a way as to shape the earthly city in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided city of God.

From *Caritas in Veritate*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, §

- 10 . . . we are today witnessing a widening of the role of the common good, which is the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. The whole human race is consequently involved with regard to the rights and obligations, which result. Every group must take into account the needs and legitimate aspirations of every other group, and still more of the human family as a whole.

Vatican Council II, *The Church in the Modern World*, § , (tr Flannery).

- 11 The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is

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not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: “The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next”. An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision.

Laudato Si §

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12 MIS: the minimum income standard – is a benchmark of adequate income based on what the public think people need for a minimum acceptable living standard in the UK

The proportion of people in households with incomes below MIS increased by a third between / and /, from to nearly per cent, although the rate of increase has slowed. Since /, families with children have seen the greatest increase in their risk of low income. The proportion below MIS continued rising in /, to per cent. For households without children, the risk of being below MIS shows some signs of falling.

Working families with children have faced a growing risk of low income; per cent of lone parents working full time had incomes below MIS, up from per cent in /; for families with both parents working full time, the risk rose from to per cent. In couples with a single breadwinner, the risk rose from to per cent.

Older singles (over ) living alone and working full-time have a growing risk of inadequate income: their risk of being below MIS increased from to per cent between / and /.

Social tenants became more likely to be below MIS in /, coinciding with introduction of the under-occupancy charge.

For pensioners, the risk of being below MIS rose slightly, but remained far lower than for other groups, at . per cent.

Just over half ( per cent) of individuals with incomes below MIS were in couple families with children ( per cent in /).

Research by Matt Padley at the Centre for Research and Social Policy, Loughborough University  
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