
The Scope of Environmental Discourse: The Inspiration of Pope

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Introduction

The Encyclical Letter¹ of the Pope, *Laudato Si* opens with the words “Laudato Si’, mi’ Signore”- “Praise to be you, my Lord”. Again this has extended to show the magnitude of our only and one Earth by repeating ‘Praise to be you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and Herbs’². Unlike other Encyclical Letters, this Letter is addressed to all the people in the face of global environmental deterioration due to anthropogenic effects on Earth by their irresponsible use and abuse of goods. The Church’s thinking and concern over environmental protection is enriched by the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups. The enormous growth in the release of waste especially after industrial revolution

from homes and businesses, construction and demolition sites, clinical, electronic and industrial sources, most of which are non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive materials turned the Earth an immense pile of filth. Thus the immediate challenge of environment protection includes the concern of brining the entire humanity to seek a sustainable and integral development. This can only make visible changes in the present tragic effects of environmental degradation since no one can build a bright future by marginalising the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded. Now the time has come near for humanity to adopt the food web system of our nature to the throw away culture of industrial system even though it is hard for us to follow the way natural ecosystems work.

Roots of Ecological Crisis

Science and technology has opened

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up immense possibilities and tremendous power for humanity in the last two centuries. There is a tendency to believe that every increase in power means an increase of progress itself, an advance in security, usefulness, welfare and vigour; and an assimilation of new values into the stream of culture. Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, things have changed to the extent that human beings themselves lay their hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from the nature while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of them. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed. It is easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. Therefore the relationship between human beings and

material objects has become confrontational. The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration.

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural resources. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system. There is also the fact that people no longer seem to believe in a happy future; they no longer have blind trust in a better tomorrow based on the present state of the world and our technical abilities. There is a growing awareness that scientific and technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of humanity and history, a growing

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sense that the way to a better future lies elsewhere. This is not to reject the possibilities which technology continues to offer us. All of this shows the urgent need for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution. Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur.

Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere 'given', as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere 'space' into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference. Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. The time has come to pay renewed attention to reality and the limits it imposes; this in turn is the condition for a more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society. Neglecting

to monitor the harm done to nature and the environmental impact of our decisions is only the most striking sign of a disregard for the message contained in the structures of nature itself. When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities- to offer just a few examples- it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself because everything is connected.

The natural as well as anthropogenic effects on global warming have grave implications for environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. The real problem is that many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seems mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms besides simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change. At the same time, the fact is that if we continue with current models of production and consumption the effects will continue to worsen. The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world. It is because on the one hand the pollutions of companies which operate in less developed countries where they raise their capital is the practice they could

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never do at home and on the other hand developed countries are exporting solid waste and toxic liquids to developing countries. Simultaneously the foreign debt of poor countries has become a new way of controlling them. However in different ways, developing countries, where the most important reserves of the biosphere are found, continue to fuel the development of richer countries at the cost of their own present and future. The poorest areas and countries are less capable of adopting new models or reducing environmental impact because they lack the wherewithal to develop the necessary processes and to cover their costs. Thus the global Catholic Church realizes that in the scenario of climate change the developing countries or the Third World is suffering and being exploited the most. Together, the failure of global summits on the environment makes it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected. So that we must continue to be aware that, regarding climate change, there are differentiated responsibilities.

**Common Solution to the
Common Threat**

In all our circumstances where ever

we are, we use our environment as a way of expressing our identity so we make every effort to adapt to our environment. But it is difficult to find ourselves integrated and happy when our environment is disorderly, chaotic or saturated with noise and ugliness. Here, human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment. 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. Worldwide, the ecological movement has made significant advances, thanks also to the efforts of many organizations of civil society. Although thanks to their efforts, environmental questions have increasingly found a place on public agendas and encouraged more farsighted approaches. Notwithstanding, recent World Summits on the environment have not lived up to expectations due to lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment.

A global consensus is essential for

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confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, 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. Until greater progress is made in developing widely accessible sources of renewable energy, it is legitimate to choose the lesser of two evils or to find short-term solutions.

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro is worth mentioning. It proclaimed that human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. Echoing the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, it enshrined international cooperation to care for the ecosystem of the entire earth, the obligation of those who cause pollution to assume its costs, and the duty to assess the environmental impact of given projects and works. It set the goal of limiting greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere,

in an effort to reverse the trend of global warming. It also drew up an agenda with an action plan and a convention on biodiversity, and stated principles regarding forests. Although the summit was a real step forward, and prophetic for its time, its accords have been poorly implemented, due to the lack of suitable mechanisms for oversight, periodic review and penalties in cases of non-compliance.

With regard to climate change, reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most. The Conference of the United Nations on Sustainable Development, "Rio+20" (Rio de Janeiro 2012), issued a wide-ranging but ineffectual outcome document. International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility. Some strategies for lowering pollutant gas emissions call for the internationalization of environmental costs, which would risk imposing on countries with fewer resources burdensome commitments to reducing emissions comparable to

those of the more industrialized countries. Imposing such measures penalizes those countries most in need of development. A further injustice is perpetrated under the guise of protecting the environment. Here also, the poor end up paying the price.

The strategy of buying and selling 'carbon credits' can lead to a new form of speculation which would not help reduce the emission of polluting gases worldwide. This system seems to provide a quick and easy solution under the guise of a certain commitment to the environment, but in no way does it allow for the radical change which present circumstances require. Rather, it may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors. Environmental impact assessment should not come after the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or programme. It should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure. For poor countries, the priorities must be to eliminate extreme poverty and to promote the social development of their people. They are likewise bound to develop less polluting forms of energy production, but to do so they

require the help of countries in the form of technology transfer, technical assistance and financial resources which have experienced great growth at the cost of the ongoing pollution of the planet. The costs of this would be low, compared to the risks of climate change. Though, there are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. Church believes in society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power - national, regional and municipal - it will not be possible to control damage to the environment. A healthy politics is sorely needed, capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practices and overcoming undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia. Once more, we need to reject the magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals. Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion.

Conclusion

The Encyclical Letter encourages an honest and open debate so that

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particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good and does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. The Letter raises strong criticism against the ineffective outcomes of global summits on climate change and environment protection. It suspects about the actual results of carbon credits and environmental impact assessment on the mitigation of climate change. Thus the Church states that today, in a word, 'the issue

of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyle'. The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society. Anyhow the Catholic Church is very much aware of the threats, exploitation, supremacy and the colonization involved in the context of climate change and environmental protection. ■

References

- 1.It is the letter from the Pope who sent this to all Roman Catholic bishops throughout the world.
- 2.Francis, Pope (2015). *Laudato Si*, Vathican Press: Vathican. This article is written as an opinion on the environmental aspects explained in this book.