



HUMANITY'S OBLIGATION TOWARD THE CRY OF WOUNDED NATURE...

The apocalyptic scenes in cult films of the 1980's still flash before our eyes. Hurricanes, atmospheric disruptions and possible environmental disasters were all themes of a chain of films that was hoped would prevent scenarios which, instead, have already taken place or else are getting ready to happen. The contemporary world is watching an unfolding of events that were considered impossible 20 years ago but that are now turning the earth's entire ecosystem upside down, threatening the future of all humanity.

Scientists from all over the world gathered in Kyoto, Japan for the first time in 1997 to severely castigate world powers, begging them to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Now, years later, Mother/Sister Earth is vociferously protesting the hardheadedness of capitalism. Pope Francis says as much in his encyclical *Laudato si'*: *On Care for Our Common Home*: "This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."

Alternating joyful and dramatic language, the Holy Father underscores the goodness of the created world and the grave superfi-

ciality of the human family that shares this common home. He offers us a compendium of scientific statements on the subject, along with a presentation of the pastoral stances taken by his papal predecessors and the Fathers of the Church. He constantly returns to the theme of the weight of responsibility that burdens every person who refuses to heed the cry of wounded nature: "wounds," he says, that are "caused by our irresponsible behavior." The encyclical cites St. Francis of Assisi, patron of Europe but above all a friend and lover of nature, as a model of behavior in this regard. The saint's idea of integral development, says his papal namesake, "calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human." In short, the Pope cautions, study sessions, congresses and debates on the subject of protecting the environment are all well and good but the situation today is urgent and touches every aspect of the human being: his/her very survival and, above all, his/her ethical choices, which are closely tied to the economic policies of the major world powers. Pope Francis then goes a step further, extending a plea from the ecumenical and interreligious stance "to every person living on this planet"—all of whom, he says, should cultivate a deep conviction concerning the *integral development* he referred to

earlier, namely: “attention to the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms.”

The Pope clearly analyzes the world situation. Our planet of a thousand colors, the mirror of the Creator’s perfection, is becoming dingy, is losing its serenity, and above all is undergoing a radical upheaval of its vital rhythms. He once again refers to St. Francis, saying, “For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty” (cf. Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, NY 2000, p. 354).

Pope Francis begs the whole human family to accept the challenge of taking care of our common home, coming together to protect it and “seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.”

The provocation of the world powers is clear: the true challenge lies not in decreasing production or industry but in finding new sources of alternative energy (which already exist) and in spreading and applying them. It is clear that all this seems to be a utopia in a world controlled by the great oil industries, which are the principal sources of world power control. Here is where integral development comes into play because a genuine and enduring change of mentality must take place and it must happen before Mother Nature reaches the point of no return.

The Pope optimistically continues to advocate renewed dialogue concerning the way in which human beings are shaping the future of the planet, reminding us that environmental challenges concern everyone. His encyclical systematically deals with all the problems involved in protecting the earth, beginning with a number of fundamental pillars, namely: “the intimate relationship be-



tween 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 and the proposal of a new lifestyle.”

Each subject is tackled clearly and realistically, fixing limits but also offering prospects and hope so that the combined picture of trouble and joy, as the Pope calls it, will reawaken consciences and result in conversion and a change of attitude/mentality. The encyclical ends with a poetic exaltation of Mother Nature, pleading that she be defended and guarded, and with the proposal of two prayers. The first is directed to God, our Creator and Father, asking that human beings might sow beauty, not pollution and destruction, and that we might recognize our profound unity with all creation. The second, entitled *A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation*, seeks to incite all the earth’s inhabitants to concretely witness to this commitment.

The encyclical *Laudato si'* should be read and circulated so that the environmental issues contained in it can be examined and discussed because, as Pope Francis reminds us, “rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”

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