

CARE FOR COMMON HOME

The issue of the environment has become one of the most pervasive and challenging topics in contemporary society. It is addressed by eco-activists, economists, politicians, media, churchmen, in short, almost everyone. Modern media, especially in their digital formats and editions, have indeed reduced the world to a “global village”, so that certain issues become global in the blink of an eye. And the impression is that the environmental issue is one of the most represented. Of course, it is not excluded that some of these global issues, including the issue of the environment, are being imposed by hidden centres of power for their own gain and purpose. But regardless of public or secret agendas, hidden or known power centres, the issue of environmental protection is a matter that Catholic theology must also address.

The Catholic Church has not remained silent on the issue of environmental protection. Pope John XXIII, in the encyclical *Pacem Interris*, 1963, had already warned of the danger of a nuclear crisis and an ecological catastrophe, urging at the same time all people of good will to promote a sense of responsibility for the common good and to preserve life and a healthy environment for future generations. Along these lines, his successor Paul VI, with the encyclical *Octogesima Adveniens* in 1971, would warn of the reckless exploitation of natural resources, leading to the destruction of nature and, consequently of man himself. St. John Paul II called for a general ecological conversion, emphasizing that the true development of human race must also carry respect for all creation and the development of socio-economic models that are in harmony with the good of man (cf. Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace in January 1, 1990 *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*; Address of Pope John Paul II to Conference on Environment and Health in March 24, 1997; Message for the celebration of the XXXII World Day of Peace in January 1, 1999; Address at the General Audience in January 17, 2001). Pope Benedict XVI, in the wake of his predecessors, warned that the created world is exposed to peril when man is set up as the final instance of all that exists, or when man decides to take the place of God (cf. Messages for the World Day of Peace in 2007, 2008, 2010; Homily at St. Peter’s Square, June 2, 2006; Message on the occasion of the *Day of the Holy See*, July 10, 2008; Address to the Roman Curia in December 22, 2008; Encyclical *Caritas In Veritate* in 2009, No. 48-52).

Along the line of his holy predecessors, Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si* of 2015, wants to expose an integral ecology.

The starting point of the encyclical is the question: What is happening to our common home? That is also the title of the first chapter. Pope Francis expresses concern about the increasing pollution of the environment, the overexploitation of natural resources, the growth of a culture of rejection, which is leading to a deterioration of living conditions for a growing part of humanity. The Pope also points out the connection between poverty and the fragility of our planet, and urges the search for new models of development that will value the whole of creation. He therefore proclaims the *gospel of creation* and exposes an *integral ecology*, with the aim of developing a general environmental concern that should rest on the concern for the common good and count on intergenerational solidarity. But all efforts to protect the environment will be in vain unless everyone is aware of the need to create new habits of living that will respect all life forms and every creature that came from the hands of the good Creator. New habits should rest on the awareness that no multitude of things can fill the human heart. That is why the Pope calls for an *ecological conversion*, which is a necessary precondition for a new relationship between the creature and the world in which we live.

Pope Francis' encyclical of caring for the common home has not only sparked positive comments around the world, but has given impetus to new environmental initiatives. One of the most important is to raise awareness among all Christians that the relationship with Lord God cannot be lived properly unless one takes into account the creation of God. In other words, the encyclical *Laudato Si* invites and encourages all Christians and goodwill people to be more considerate and respectful of the world we live in, that is, it encourages us all to behave not as masters to the world but as those whom God has entrusted his creature to guard with care. Relationship with God is built and lived through a right relationship with everything created. This relationship, however, presupposes a proper understanding of man himself and the world in which he lives.

The ecological crisis is due to a misunderstanding of man and his role in the world he is entrusted with. In the introductory part of the encyclical on the care for common home, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis says that the Earth, our sister and mother, "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. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life." (*Laudato Si*, 2). The human heart, wounded by sin, has shaped the mis-

conception of man and his role in the world in which he lives and to which he belongs. With the Enlightenment began a process in which man set himself up as the measure of everything; at the heart of it all is a man called to not only realize himself but also to create himself; the world and the creature in the world serve man in his deification, in his attempt to take the place of God. This disfigured anthropocentrism sowed seeds that developed into a huge tree that produces bitter fruits. The first fruit of that tree is the superfluity of God and his work in the world. In a world centered on the little god - man, the true God is driven up to heaven; nature and what it has to offer are sufficient for us, and all that it carries is offered to man for his deification and his pleasure. In a world without God and eternal laws, the most important is the benefit, and consequently the skills that enable the benefit. Of course, in such a vision of man and the world, the earth-world is afflicted, but man himself becomes a victim of his madness.

The harmony between creature, man and Creator was tainted by the sin of the first people who, in simple terms, refused to confess themselves as creatures and wished to take the place of God. The consequence of sin is not only a broken relationship with the Creator, strained relationships with humans, but also a distorted relationship with the creature. Instead of "cultivating and taking care", there is exploitation. God's initial command to man to conquer the earth (Gen 1, 28) included responsibility for the creature, since everything created belongs to God. It is in the right attitude towards creation, that is, in the care of the created world, that we can experience how the Lord God continues to care for us, as even today his creative hand continues to create and support the world which he, as a wonderful gift, gives to us, to his children.

"And God saw that it was good," Scripture says of each of God's works in creation. To say that a creature is good at the same time means that it is meaningful, that it was created for a specific purpose. It is not wrong to say that the created world is foreplay for the greatest of all the mysteries of God and the greatest of all the works of God, which is the mystery of the incarnation of God. Through the creation of the universe, God prepares Himself the flesh to offer Himself in an unspeakable way to his creation. The miracle of God's ingenuity, and even more of God's love! The correlation between God and his creation did not end with the mystery of God's incarnation, but has its culmination in the mystery of Christ's resurrection. In it, matter, that is, the created world, reached its final point, its celebration, that is, became spiritualized. In Christ, the resurrected transfiguration and glorification of matter ultimately becomes part

of the divine world, part of the intimate life of God. Matter, which in the act of creation comes from the hand of God, in the resurrection of Christ, is being transformed, accomplished, glorious, and “returns” to its Creator.

In caring for the common home, however, one should not fall into the temptation of eco-centrism that erases the difference among living beings, and this is a feature of many contemporary eco movements and associations. Namely, radical eco-centrism believes that it is necessary to remove the main source of pollution, which is man, for the protection of the environment. Christian doctrine, however, holds that there is an ontological and axiological difference between man and all other beings, and that one cannot and must not reduce man to a living being of equal dignity with others. An egalitarian conception of creatures opens the door to new-paganism and pantheism that do not need the super-world or the super-nature, since they have self-realization (salvation) by themselves, here on earth.

Faithful to the received pledge, the Church teaches that the Creator has written into His creatures the laws by which they are governed and developed, and that a special role belongs to man within the created world. Since this role and task comes from his Creator, man cannot give up on it. Man is, as the Catholic Church teaches, “the only creature that God has willed for its own sake, and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life” (CCC, 356). The Church also teaches that “God created everything for man, but man in turn was created to serve and love God and to offer all creation back to him” (CCC, 358). Yes, man, created in God’s image, is called in the name of God to govern God’s creation, in a way that ultimately he offers that same creature to God. This will only be possible through the rediscovery of man’s own creation, man’s own belonging to the created world, and the rediscovery of responsibility for the creature that God the Creator entrusts to man, whom he calls to be the co-creator of the world entrusted to him. In God’s creative plan, man, though by his dignity transcends the created world, still remains a part of creation. Pope Francis, as an example and model of attitude towards the creature, brings to our attention the figure of St. Francis of Assisi, whose testimony shows us that an integral ecology requires openness to categories that go beyond the language of the exact sciences or biology and bring us to the very essence of man” (Laudato Si, 11).

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