

Full text of the presentation of Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace during the launch of the Encyclical letter *Laudato si'* at the Synod Hall of the Vatican on 18 June 2015

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, distinguished representatives of the media, all who are following by radio and television and on internet, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,
First of all, I greet all of you warmly on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which is honoured to have been called to assist the Holy Father in his teaching ministry by helping to prepare the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*.

A very cordial welcome to the presenters, who are:

His Eminence, the Metropolitan of Bergamo, John Zizioulas, representing the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, who will speak to us of the theology and spirituality with which the Encyclical opens and closes.

Prof. John Schellnhuber, founder and director of the Postdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. He represents the natural sciences, with which the Encyclical enters into in-depth dialogue. Congratulations on his nomination as a full member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences which also contributed significantly to the Encyclical.

Prof. Carolyn Woo, President of Catholic Relief Services and former dean of the Mendoza College of Business at Notre Dame University. She represents the economic, financial, business and commercial sectors whose responses to the major environmental challenges are so crucial.

The teacher Valeria Martano, from Rome, has taught in the outlying areas of Rome for 20 years. She is a witness of human and environmental degradation as well as such “best practices” as are a sign of hope.

Their presence and what they say will remind us that, from the very beginning, the Encyclical *Laudato si'* on care for our common home brings into dialogue all people, organizations and institutions that share this same concern. They address different perspectives, but the world situation leads us to discover that these perspectives are ever more intertwined and complementary: the riches of faith and of spiritual tradition, the seriousness of scientific research, the concrete efforts at various levels, all for an equitable and sustainable development.

This type of dialogue was also employed as the method of preparation that the Holy Father embraced in the writing of the Encyclical. He relied on a wide range of contributions. Some, in particular those from many Episcopal Conferences from all the continents, are mentioned in the footnotes. Others who participated in the various phases of this work [1] all the way to the complex final phases of translation and publication, remain unnamed. The Lord knows well how to reward their generosity and dedication.

As is already clear to everyone, the Encyclical takes its name from the invocation of St Francis of Assisi: “*Laudato si' mi' Signore*” “Praise be to you, my Lord”, which in the Canticle of the Creatures calls to mind that the earth, our common home, “is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (n. 1). The reference to St Francis also indicates the attitude upon which the entire Encyclical is based, that of prayerful contemplation, which invites us to look towards the “poor one of Assisi” as a source of inspiration. As the Encyclical affirms, St Francis is “the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. [...] He shows us just how inseparable is the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (n. 10).

Midway through *Laudato si'*, we find this question: what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? The Holy Father continues, “This question does not have to do with the environment alone and in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal.” This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its values that are the basis of social life: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” “If we do not ask these basic questions” – says the Pope – “it is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations” (n. 160).

These questions arise from an observation: today the earth, our sister, mistreated and abused, is lamenting; and its groans join those of all the world's forsaken and "discarded." Pope Francis invites us to listen to them, urging each and every one – individuals, families, local communities, nations and the international community – to an "ecological conversion" according to the expression of St John Paul II, that is, to "change direction" by taking on the beauty and responsibility of the task of "caring for our common home." He does this using the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, represented here today by His Eminence, the Metropolitan John Zizioulas: "Human beings ... destroy the biological diversity [...] by causing changes in its climate, [...], contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins (n.8).

At the same time, Pope Francis acknowledges that environmental awareness is growing nowadays, along with concern for the damage that is being done. Based on this observation, the Pope keeps a hopeful outlook on the possibility of reversing the trend: "Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home" (n. 13). "Men and women are still capable of intervening positively" (n. 58). "All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start" (n. 205).

At the heart of the process of conversion and of hope in a renewed future, Pope Francis puts the concept of integral ecology at the centre of the Encyclical as a paradigm able to articulate the fundamental relationships of the person with God, with him/herself, with other human beings, with creation. It is worth listening to his words in n. 139:

"When we speak of the "environment," what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Getting to the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, the ways it grasps reality, and so forth. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and at the same time protecting nature."

The various issues treated in the Encyclical are placed within this framework. In the different chapters, they are picked up and continuously enriched starting from different perspectives (cf. n. 16):

- the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet;
- the conviction that everything in the world is intimately connected;
- the critique of the new paradigm and the forms of power that arise from technology;
- the value proper to each creature; the human meaning of ecology;
- the need for forthright and honest debates;
- the serious responsibility of international and local policy;
- the throwaway culture and the proposal for a new style of life; and
- the invitation to search for other ways of understanding economy and progress – this last point being the topic of Prof. Carolyn Woo.

The encyclical is divided into six chapters, the sequence of which outlines a precise itinerary.

The starting point (ch. I) is a spiritual listening to the results of the best scientific research on environmental matters available today, by "letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows." Science is the best tool by which we can listen to the cry of the earth. Extremely complex and urgent issues are addressed, as Prof. John Schellnhuber will explain, some of which – such as climate changes and above all their causes – are the subject of heated debate. The aim of the Encyclical is not to intervene in this debate, which is the responsibility of scientists, and even less to establish exactly in which ways the climate changes are a consequence of human action. The Holy Father reminded us of this last January 15 on his flight from Sri Lanka to the

Philippines. In the perspective of the Encyclical – and of the Church – it is sufficient to say that human activity is one of the factors that explains climate change. We therefore have a serious moral responsibility to do everything in our power to reduce our impact and avoid the negative effects on the environment and on the poor.

The next step in the Encyclical (ch. II) is a review of the riches of Judaeo-Christian tradition, above all in the biblical texts and then in theological reflection upon it. This expresses the “tremendous responsibility” of human beings for creation, the intimate link between all creatures, and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (n. 95).

The analysis then deals (ch. III) with “the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes” (n. 15). Here the dialogue is between philosophy and the human sciences. The aim is to develop an integral ecology (ch. IV), which in its diverse dimensions comprehends “our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings,” in the varied aspects of our life, in economy and politics, in various cultures, in particular those most threatened, and in every moment of our daily lives.

On this basis, chapter V addresses the question about what we can and must do. A series of perspectives are proposed for the renewal of international, national and local politics, of decision-making processes in the public and business sectors, of the relationship between politics and economy and that between religion and science. At this Conference, we welcome three Roman witnesses of environmental and social degradation: a teacher Valeria Martano who will speak, accompanied by a young man Marco Francioni and an older woman Giovanna La Vecchia. All three are available to be interviewed afterwards.

For Pope Francis it is imperative that practical proposals not be developed in an ideological, superficial or reductionist way. For this, dialogue is essential, a term present in the title of every section of this chapter: “There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. [...] the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (n. 188).

Finally, based on the conviction that “change is impossible without motivation and a process of education, chapter VI proposes “some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience” (n. 15). Along this line, the Encyclical offers two prayers, the first to be shared with believers of other religions and the second among Christians. The Encyclical concludes, as it opened, in a spirit of prayerful contemplation.

In its relationship with the environment, humanity is faced with a crucial challenge that requires the development of adequate policies which, moreover, are currently being discussed on the global agenda. Certainly *Laudato si'* can and must have an impact on important and urgent decisions to be made in this area. However, the magisterial, pastoral and spiritual dimensions of the document must not be put in second place. Its value, breadth and depth cannot be reduced to the mere scope of determining environmental policies.

Thank you!

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[1] This is what the Pope himself said on the plane flying to Manila and so is already known: “Cardinal Turkson and his team prepared the first draft. Then, with some help, I took it and worked on it, then with a few theologians I made a third draft and sent a copy to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the second section of the Secretariat of State, and to the Theologian of the Papal Household... Three weeks ago, I got their responses back, some of them this thick, but all of them constructive. Now I will take a week of March, an entire week, to complete it. I believe that by the end of March it will be finished and sent out for translation. I think that if the work of translation goes well ... then it can come out in June or July. (15.01.2015, from Vatican Radio)