



Pope Francis' Call for Sustainable, Integral and Human Development

Bishop Thomas Dabre
Bishop of Pune

The title of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* is significant on two counts as it is a call to praise and thank God for creation which is his gift to all humanity as it is also a hard-hitting critique of us all for polluting and depleting it.

It is for the first time that an entire Papal Encyclical letter is devoted to the issue of environment and climate change. Thereby Pope Francis has inserted ecology into the all-important eschatological process of salvation. “...the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God...the whole creation has been groaning in travail together, not only the creation, but we ourselves, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies.”(Rom 8:21,22)

Generally we are living as though salvation is limited to God-human relationship and human issues of justice, truth and

love. The encyclical widens the scope of our understanding of our salvation and faith. In simple terms this would mean, we cannot simply continue with our faith, devotions, piety and prayers and let God's creation to go from bad to worse.

The Holy Father says in the encyclical our mother and sister are crying "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. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will." The soil, the water, the air and all forms of life have been depleted and degraded by our greed. The earth herself is burdened and laid waste, and is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (Rom 8:22).

However, unlike us, the Creator on the other hand, has love and tenderness towards the things of his creation. The Holy Bible says, "For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it" (Wis 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection, says the Pope with a moving fellow-feeling for creation.

We cannot use and consume the goods of the earth as we wish. Sometimes people are inclined to say that since they have the money they can buy and use as they like. But that is a gross error. It is God's creation. We respect it as such. It is given to all human beings of all time. We must leave the earth and its goods also for the others who will come after us. We cannot follow the simplistic practice of "first come first served and bones for the late-comers," when it comes to the use of things of the earth.

The Pope urges us to feel responsible for creation and take care of it and develop it. He says, "Judeo-Christian thought emphasizes all the more our human responsibility for nature." He affirms "the responsibility of human beings who, as part of

the world, have the duty to cultivate their abilities in order to protect it and develop its potential. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.” We cannot simply take the resources and riches of the earth and use them at will. We have to take steps to develop what God has laid out before us.

The Church therefore cannot be indifferent to the problems of environment and climate change. The Holy Father implies that if we are not careful with regard to the use of the earth and its goods, we may well destroy ourselves. The Church must therefore give a shining example of the protection of environment and of dealing with the dangerous situation of global warming and climate change. This would also demand a re-ordering and re-prioritizing of the Church work and ministry. The pastors and ministers of the Church should not limit themselves to the typical spiritual ministry of celebrating the sacraments and pious exercises of prayer, worship and piety. These certainly are most important and should be promoted by all means. The Holy Father inspires us not to limit ourselves narrowly to these practices. Indeed these spiritual practices themselves invite us to expand the horizons of our mind and involve ourselves in the care and promotion of the earth and its goods.

Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination. When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all.

The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and

through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.

The exaggerated use of technology has led to the ecological crisis. Therefore the Pope's warning against the dangers of technology is well-founded. "...technology sometimes solves one problem only to create others." Technology is only instrumental. The human agent behind technology has abused these instrumental resources and created the present ecological problems.

The encyclical affirms that all and everyone must help to protect the environment and deal with the challenges of the ecological crisis.

Development is necessary for humans to be able to attain the fullness of life. Besides it should not lead to the marginalization of the poor; nor should it lead to the degradation and depletion of environment and resources of the earth which are meant for the benefit of all human beings. In the use of material resources human beings must maintain their unique dignity and not become a slave of these and be addicted to these. Therefore the call of the Pope to effect a change of models of production and consumption needs to be heeded. More importantly, it is incumbent on all, especially the leaders at all level to ensure a sustainable, integral and human development. 🌱