Towards a sustainable Creation

*18 June 2015 by Graham Gordon*



**The Pope’s document published this week is not just for the benefit of the faithful, but has been deliberately timed to influence decision-makers at a trio of key United Nations summits this year culminating in the climate-change conference in Paris in December**  
  
For the United Nations, 2015 is a key year. The challenge is to reach potentially transformative agreements following each of three summits that will deliver meaningful change for people living in poverty and protect the environment.   
  
It is no coincidence that Pope Francis has chosen to release his encyclical ahead of the first of these summits, to be held in Addis Ababa next month on financing for development.   
  
He will also be addressing the UN General Assembly in New York in September at the second summit, where leaders will sign up to the new Sustainable Development Goals – the successor agreement to the Millennium Development Goals. World leaders will need to agree a deal on tackling climate change at the third summit in Paris at the end of the year.   
  
This trinity of summits has the potential to set out the path toward a more just and sustainable world over coming generations. So, what relevance might the encyclical have for them? Primarily it keeps the focus on tackling poverty and protecting the environment for both governments and business. It has been clear in the run-up to publication that the thinking behind the encyclical is to focus on human development that is both integral and authentic – about the whole person and about every person. This is development not merely for some, nor even for the many, but for all people, both current and future generations. It is also development that is about respecting and protecting creation. Development is not authentic if it harms the environment, nor is environmental protection enough if it is not also about human development.   
  
Currently there is strong ambition in the latest draft of the  Sustainable Development Goals to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere”, and to consider no target unmet unless it is met for everyone, with goals on ending hunger, providing employment, and health and education for all. Goals are also focused on environmental challenges, seeking to protect oceans, ecosystems and forests. This is a big improvement on the narrower focus of the Millennium Development Goals.  
  
In contrast, the financing for development discussions give insufficient attention to environmental sustainability or poverty alleviation, with a much bigger focus on how much money is needed and where it will come from. The role of the private sector is one of the most contentious issues in all three processes.   
  
Business can make a significant positive contribution, through providing jobs and supporting local economic development, but is too often still associated with human rights abuses and environmental damage, such as the La Oroya case in the Peruvian Andes, where pollution over nearly a decade has produced extremely high levels of lead in children’s blood, affecting their mental development and opportunities in life.   
  
To ensure that all those in development put both people and planet first, and that all development finance goes to where it is most needed, both business and government need to meet the highest standards. One clear proposal on the table for Addis Ababa is to agree a set of sustainable development criteria and accountability mechanisms for all types of finance, whether public, private or a mixture of both. This would help direct resources towards development that is authentic and in harmony with the environment.  
  
Laudato si’ comes amid a vacuum in global political leadership. However, instead of looking to the Pope as the one who will unlock the global political stalemate, the encyclical is intended as a mirror that reflects responsibility back towards global leaders.  
  
World leaders attending the three summits need to use their political capital to achieve a truly transformative agenda, including an agreement on climate change in Paris that will limit global warming. Staying away for fear of failure or lack of priority is not the type of leadership the world needs.  
  
Financial commitment is also a sign of personal or political commitment (“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”  Matthew 6:21). One of the ongoing challenges is the lack of fulfilment of existing financial commitments. For example, rich countries have committed to spend 0.7 per cent of   
their national budgets to aid, but only five countries (Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark and the United Kingdom) have met the target.  
  
Countries have also committed to provide US$100 billion (£63.5bn) to the Green Climate Fund by 2020 for action on climate change, yet only one tenth of this money has been pledged. The summits provide the opportunity for leaders to show how they will fulfil existing pledges and to show the political leadership that is needed.   
  
Action on climate change is a priority for many developing countries who have suffered its devastating effects. In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines with winds of up to 171 mph and a storm surge of up to 25ft high that devastated coastal areas. More than 14 million people had their lives torn apart and more than five million lost their homes. According to the Philippines Government, more than 6,000 people were killed. There was widespread destruction of homes, schools and roads.  
  
Although single events cannot be attributed to climate change, the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events is increasing. Those who are most affected are the poorest communities, which have least contributed to climate change. We need to act on climate change as part of our responsibility to the most vulnerable people, as “a poor Church for the poor”. From this perspective, Pope Francis has taken the unusual step of writing the encyclical to influence the negotiations in Paris and to help support progress in reaching a deal on climate change.   
  
All the summits need to indicate a much greater urgency to move away from a dependence on polluting fossil fuels, such as coal, oil and gas, which are the greatest contributors to global warming, and move towards clean, renewable energy, such as solar and wind. Fossil fuels are still subsidised globally to the tune of approximately US$700bn (£444bn), while subsidies for alternative cleaner forms of energy are suffering in many places, such as the UK. This is giving the wrong message and showing the wrong priorities.   
  
As well as an issue of justice, acting on climate change is also part of our responsibility before God to protect his creation, as the title of the encyclical, Laudato si’ – or “Praised be” – hints towards. All of creation should praise God and we have responsibility to God for how we treat his creation.   
  
Just as the encyclical will hold up a mirror to politicians over their global responsibility, it holds one up to us in terms of our lifestyles. It is easy to point the finger at those who consume more, but most of us in the UK are still in the top percentage of consumers worldwide. How can we enjoy more of the creation that God has given us, without needing to own it? Can we reduce our impact on the environment by using cars less, installing solar panels and supporting local farmers?   
  
The encyclical will have plenty to say to all of us. It is now up to us all to listen and act.  
   
**Graham Gordon** is head of policy of the aid agency Cafod.  
  
  
KEY INFLUENCES  
The people whose campaigning, knowledge and writing influenced the Pope's thinking on the environment  
  
**Green fingers**

*Fr Sean McDonagh SSC*  
Sean McDonagh was one of the first Christians to articulate the need for the Church to engage with ecology in his 1986 book To Care for the Earth: Call to a New Theology. An Irish Columban missionary, McDonagh saw the impact of environmental damage while working among the indigenous T’boli people on the Philippine island of Mindanao in the 1970s and 1980s.   
  
*Professor John Schellnhuber*   
Professor Joachim Hans “John” Schellnhuber, one of the contributors to the encyclical, is a long-standing member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and chairman of the German Advisory Council on Global Climate Change. In a 2003 article for The Guardian, Professor Schellnhuber described the consumption of cheap fossil fuels as “a lifestyle of mass destruction”. Climate change is accelerating, he warns, and drastic cuts in global carbon dioxide emissions are vital to avoid disaster. He says emissions need to be halved overall by 2050, reduced by 80 to 90 per cent in developed nations and phased out completely by end of century.    
  
*Patriarch Bartholomew and orthodox priest John Zizioulas*  
Patriarch Bartholomew, 75, first among equals of the world’s Orthodox Christians, has been nicknamed the “Green Patriarch” for his environmental activism. In 2002 he issued a joint statement with Pope John Paul II that urged people to undergo “a genuine conversion in Christ” to adopt “a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production”. Bartholomew welcomed Francis to Turkey in 2014. Both leaders are great admirers of the work of Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, metropolitan of Pergamon, who argues that nature is an indispensable link of communion between human beings and God. He contributed to the writing of Laudato si’.   
  
*Leonardo Boff*   
Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff left the priesthood in 1992 after clashing with the Church over his views of the hierarchy, the ordination of women and married men, and his advocacy for the poor. Pope Francis, who previously welcomed Gustavo Gutiérrez, father of liberation theology, to Rome, invited Boff to submit material for inclusion in the encyclical. Explaining the link between concern for the poor and ecology, Boff said: “Along with the poor, you have to add the Earth as the “great pauper” that is oppressed and devastated. It’s the ecotheology of liberation. It is not as if we went from red theology to green theology. It is the same liberating impulse.”  
  
*Cardinal Peter Turkson*   
The Ghanaian head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is the second most senior African in the Vatican after Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship. Francis asked him to start work on the encyclical early on in his papacy, and he submitted a first draft last August. His 2011 proposal for the establishment of an international financial system in the wake of the financial crisis included sustainable development as a way to combat poverty and inequality.  
  
*The Brazilian bishops’ conference*   
After the bishops of Latin America met at the Brazilian shrine of Aparecida in 2007, a leading figure who worked on the document summarising their discussions was the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and future pontiff, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio. Pope Francis was deeply moved by what he heard from the Brazilian bishops who spoke of the destruction of the environment, especially the rainforests of the Amazon.

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Protecting the environment: the Pope fills the leadership gap left by the world's politicians

18 June 2015 by Professor Lord Nicholas Stern

The publication of the Pope’s encyclical Laudato Si’: On the Care of Our Common Home is of enormous significance. He has shown great wisdom and leadership. Pope Francis is surely absolutely right that climate change raises vital moral and ethical issues. It is poor people around the world who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as an intensification of extreme weather events. And the decisions that we make about managing the risks of climate change matter not only for us, but also for our children, grandchildren and future generations.

We can and should be choosing paths of economic development and growth that are sustainable and promote wellbeing and prosperity. Such paths are likely to be highly attractive in both poor and rich countries, providing a much cleaner, less polluted, more inclusive, dynamic and stronger route to overcoming poverty and raising living standards.

High-carbon economic growth harms us not just through the impacts of climate change, but also through a host of other problems, such as depletion of biodiversity, loss of forests and greater local air pollution. That air pollution is killing millions now. Moral leadership on climate change from the Pope is particularly important because of the failure of many heads of state and government around the world to show political leadership.

I hope other religious and community leaders will also speak out about how to tackle the two defining challenges of our generation, namely overcoming poverty and managing the risks of climate change. This would encourage greater political leadership in the run-up to the summit in Paris at the end of this year where countries should reach a new international agreement on tackling climate change.

We, our children and our grandchildren owe the Pope a great debt of gratitude for his encyclical. It is founded in the best science and shows the importance of ethics in public life. The economics of climate change also tells us how attractive the transition to the low-carbon economy will be.

**Professor Lord Nicholas Stern is the Chairman of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at London School of Economics and Political Science, and President of the British Academy**

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Pope Francis calls for urgent rethink of man's relationship with the Earth in ground-breaking encyclical

18 June 2015 11:00 by [*Catherine Pepinster*](http://www.thetablet.co.uk/author/18/catherine-pepinster)



Pope Francis has urged the world to embark upon a revolutionary ethical rethink and change of heart in its relationship with the planet.

In an encyclical dedicated to the environment he has warned of the threat to God’s creation particularly from climate change, and backed a reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

Vatican sources have indicated that Laudato si’ – named after words of St Francis of Assisi in his Canticle of the Creatures and published today – is a deliberate intervention in the debate over climate change in the run-up to three major UN summits, including that in Paris in December, where 196 countries will meet to sign a new agreement.

The Pope’s words are addressed not only to Catholics but to everyone, including governments and businesses who can make decisions that will limit global warming.

The document makes it clear that Pope Francis is shifting Catholic theology away from a human-centred concept of life towards a more planet-centred idea. “We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us.”

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Laudato Si’ needs to shake politicians into action

*18 June 2015 by Philippa Bonella*

The publication by Pope Francis of *Laudato Si’: On the care of our common home* is a huge contribution to the debate on the environment around the world.

Caritas aid agencies such as Sciaf, the Scottish Catholic bishops’ charity accompany people in poor countries through the daily hardships they face as they are hit by climate change. Unpredictable rains leave families not knowing when to plant their seeds, while flash floods can wash away their fledgling crops or a drought can destroy their harvest.

Through our international networks of Catholic charities such as Caritas and CIDSE, as well as through our national campaigning coalitions, we’ve been calling on world leaders to take action to promote the common good and address climate change for years. Unfortunately, to date, their actions have fallen well short of what’s needed.

Yesterday Sciaf, along with Cafod and many other groups, took part in a mass lobby of our new MPs to urge them to act on climate change. Today, reading Laudato Si’, I have renewed hope that the strength of language used by Pope Francis on the failure of leadership in this arena will spur leaders into acting for the common good and in solidarity with the poorest people.

Pope Francis brings together 50 years of Catholic teaching on creation, justice and the common good. He overlays this with a lyrical sense of the beauty of nature as a hymn to God, and a deep practical understanding of the impact a degraded environment has on the poorest people and on social cohesion. For me, his greatest insight is on the interconnectedness of all things and the inability of technology to address such complex problems. Only people, working and talking together, can find solutions to the challenges we face. There is no quick fix.

Pope Francis challenges us all to look at our lives and our actions in the light of the common good. He reminds us that it’s the world’s poorest people who are bearing the brunt of a problem created by the mass consumption of the rich, driven by our unbalanced global economic system which puts profit before people. We have a responsibility to live more simply.

The encyclical is carefully timed to have an impact in the short term as well as contributing to Catholic teaching in the long term. In December a United Nations Summit in Paris will aim to secure a new global deal to tackle climate change. This will be a vital step in setting all nations on a course to keep global temperatures from rising above 1.5oC. The summit must also result in poorer countries getting the help they need to adapt to the climate challenges they face and enable them to develop on a low-carbon path.

Re-invigorated by Pope Francis’ new encyclical, Sciaf will be joining people of goodwill worldwide to urge Prime Minister David Cameron and other leaders to ensure that every country does its bit to tackle climate change and global poverty.

*Philippa Bonella is Sciaf’s Head of Communications and Education*

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Pressure mounts on politicians after Pope’s intervention on climate debate

18 June 2015 13:38 by [*Abigail Frymann Rouch*](http://www.thetablet.co.uk/author/14/abigail-frymann-rouch)

Kofi Annan and the Environment Secretary, Liz Truss, have welcomed Pope Francis’ encyclical that urges politicians, big business and individuals to drastically reduce their carbon emissions to slow down climate change and other damage to the environment.

[Laudato Si’](http://www.thetablet.co.uk/UserFiles/Files/Laudato_Si_-_EN.pdf) was launched this morning at the Vatican, ahead of UN climate talks in Paris later this year at which experts say it is vital that a global agreement on greenhouse emissions is reached to avoid a major disaster.

Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: “As Pope Francis reaffirms, climate change is an all-encompassing threat: it is a threat to our security, our health, and our sources of fresh water and food.”

Annan, who is also chairman of the Africa Progress Panel, added: “Such conditions could displace tens of millions of people, dwarfing current migration and fuelling further conflicts. I applaud the Pope for his strong moral and ethical leadership. We need more of such inspired leadership. Will we see it at the climate summit in Paris?”

Labour MP Maria Eagle asked Ms Truss in parliament today if she agreed with the Pope’s assessment that climate change was largely caused by human behaviour, or the view of the former Environment Secretary Owen Paterson, who Ms Eagle claimed is a “well-known climate change denier”.

Ms Truss responded: “I do agree with the Pope. And what I would say is that this Government is absolutely committed to tackling climate change.

She continued: “We have the Paris summit coming up; we have taken the lead in terms of limiting, getting a deal on limiting temperature rises to 2 degrees [Celsius]. It’s an important priority.”

Yesterday the Energy Secretary, Amber Rudd, told an event hosted by the Climate Coalition, which includes the Catholic charity Cafod: “I am absolutely committed to making sure we get this ambitious deal – and as legally binding as possible in December. The UK has been a leader in this area ... I am picking up the baton and will run with it.”

A spokeswoman for Sciaf, the Scottish bishops’ aid agency, accused politicians of “a failure of leadership in this arena”. Writing on The Tablet website Philippa Bonella said: “We’ve been calling on world leaders to take action to promote the common good and address climate change for years. Unfortunately, to date, their actions have fallen well short of what’s needed.”

Neil Thorns, Director of Advocacy at Cafod, said: “I hope that the Pope’s strong words today will encourage leaders – and every single one of us – to take responsibility for the gift of God’s creation and consider the impact we’re having on our brothers and sisters overseas.”

Lord Deben, the former environment secretary who chairs the independent Climate Change Committee, told The Tablet the encyclical would be “extremely useful” in persuading Christians of the need to care for creation. “It will open people’s minds – both Catholics and Protestants will begin to realise this is something they can’t ignore.”

The Conservative peer, a Catholic, hailed the document as “fundamentally prophetic” and said politicians would find it hard to ignore the impact would have on the Church, “much the largest voluntary organisation in the world”. He anticipated that it would also resonate with people who do not profess a faith and cited George Monbiot, who in Wednesday’s Guardian said Laudato Si’ marked “a potential turning point” whereby people can be persuaded to care for the planet not out of economic concerns but out of love for the living world.

The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, launched the encyclical this morning at Our Lady and St Joseph's Catholic primary school in Poplar, in east London.

He told reporters that he hoped politicians would commit to concrete goals to reduce carbon emissions. He went on: "I also would hope that the Prime Minister understands that this challenge takes us deeper than simply carbon emissions and into a discussion that asks about the purpose of business, about the fashioning of global trade."

Standing with his back to the skyscrapers of the City he highlighted a section in the encyclical which "will certainly disquiet some people behind me". He explained: "The Pope continues the very well established Catholic practice of speaking up for the labour contribution to every economy. He says that 'to stop investing in people, for short-term financial gain, is bad business for society'." Turning towards the City, he went on: "On the other hand, he says 'business is a noble vocation, if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good.' There's a balanced critique."

However Philip Booth, Editorial and Programme Director of the Institute of Economic Affairs, complained that the political-economic analysis in Laudato Si’ was “unduly pessimistic”. He said: "There are falling rates of poverty, global inequality, and deaths from natural disasters, whilst access to education and healthcare improves. Indeed, many environmental indicators have also improved dramatically. There are lessons to be learned from where there has been success, but, in terms of its specific policy proposals, the encyclical does not propose copying the successful models. This is a pity because, as Pope Francis makes very clear, the future of the planet is a moral as well as an economic issue.”

Meanwhile the UK-based Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences welcomed the encyclical. Director Fazlun Khalid told The Tablet: “I am moved that the Pope addresses all faith communities, reflecting the reality of a shared Earth. Climate change is a crisis we have brought about by our collective abuse of the Earth and we can only put this and other environmental concerns to right by working together. It so happens that this is the first day of the holy month of Ramadan in the Islamic calendar. This is the month in which Muslims throughout the world fast, and take no food and water during daylight hours as an exercise in frugality. Isn’t this just the kind of message Pope Francis is attempting to put across?”

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# Archbishop Kurtz Welcomes Pope Francis’ Encyclical Laudato Si’

June 18, 2015

WASHINGTON—Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), welcomed the release of Pope Francis’ encyclical on ecology, Laudato Si’, June 18.  
  
Full text of Archbishop Kurtz’s statement follows:

**Statement on the Occasion of the Promulgation of Laudato Si’   
                                               Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz  
                                          Archbishop of Louisville, Kentucky  
                        President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**

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With an open heart and gratitude I, along with my brother bishops in the United States, welcome Laudato Si’. In this beautiful and extensive treatment on care for our common home, the Holy Father calls all people to consider our deep and intertwined relationships with God, our brothers and sisters, and the gifts that our Creator has provided for our stewardship.   
  
Drawing extensively from the teaching of his predecessors, the Pope teaches that care for the things of the earth is necessarily bound together with our care of one another, especially the poor. This interdependency extends from the deep respect due every human person to all living beings and to the earth where we make our home. “Each creature has its own purpose…and the entire material universe speaks of God’s love.”84 The Pope uses the term “integral ecology” to draw our attention to a rich treasury of thought that people of faith bring with them to conversations about the human person and our environment. He states, “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.”229  
  
In Laudato Si’, the Holy Father invites us to reflect deeply on all points of human activity, whether we consider care for creation at the level of our individual choices or in the public square. The need for urgent action is clear and he appeals to us to become “painfully aware” of what is happening to the world and “to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.”210 The Holy Father makes it clear that we were given the earth as a gift from our Creator. It is our responsibility to avoid contributing to a culture of acquisitiveness, individualism, or exploitation.   
  
Pope Francis repeatedly urges us to renewed and urgent action and honest dialogue about our environment – both social and ecological. “The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together”48, both of which disproportionately affect our poorest brothers and sisters. Reflecting on inner city slums, lack of clean drinking water, and a consumerism mentality, Pope Francis asks “what kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us?”160 This question is at the heart of this encyclical and rightfully calls us all to work harder against the challenges the human family faces today.   
  
Genuine efforts to true dialogue will require sacrifice and the confronting of good faith disagreements, but let us be encouraged that at “the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us…he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward.”245 May we help answer Pope Francis’ call in this encyclical, receiving his message and growing in responsibility towards the common home that God has entrusted to us all.  
  
Numbers are reflective of the paragraph numbers in Laudato Si’.  
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