



„Laudato Si“ – On care for our common home

Pope Francis' Encyclical 'Laudato Si' powerfully reminds the Church and "all men and women of good will" of one of the main problems of our time: climate change and its foreseeable disastrous consequences. Six months before the UN-Climate Summit in Paris the Pope wants to challenge governments to finally reach an agreement about binding global targets to limit climate change. His concern is not only about climate; it is about justice: justice to the poor who are most vulnerable, justice to future generations, justice to for all God's creatures. The Pope criticises our present 'techno-economic paradigm' which treats nature as if it were an inexhaustible cheap source of raw material. In his radical way he says this promotes the extravagant and wasteful life style of the few while ignoring the basic necessities of the life of the poor. Following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, he proposes to us a different vision of creation and a spirituality of simplicity that finds joy in the small things of life. AEFJN and its German branch NAD would like to offer a series of reflections on a number of themes which reappear in the course of the Encyclical:

1. the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet
2. the conviction that everything in the world is connected
3. the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology,
4. the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress,
5. the value proper to each creature
6. the human meaning of ecology
7. the need for forthright and honest debate,
8. the serious responsibility of international and local policy
9. the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.

(Laudato Si 16)

The Pope's insights are drawn from the researches and reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and social movements. He goes back to the teachings of his predecessors Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II; to the vision of late Patriarch Bartholomew and especially to the example of the life of his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi.

(St. Francis) was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace." (LS 10)



Finally, it is worth noting that many of the ideas of 'Laudato Si' are reflected in the wisdom of African cultures as is shown, among other references, by the quotations from the work of the well-known Zimbabwean poet Chenjerai Hove who died recently.

*Nature is protected by the community
of the living and the dead.
This community is the seal of this protection.*

Chenjerai Hove





The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor

- The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet

The primary focus of the Encyclical 'Laudato Si' is neither the climate nor the environment, but global justice. Pope Francis sees a close connection between the destructive brutality of humanity toward nature and the increasing violence between individuals and between nations. The ecological and the social crisis have a common origin and need to be tackled together

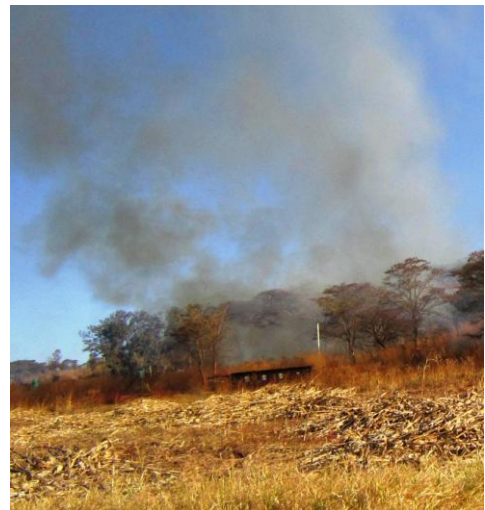
✿ **The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together**; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. ⁽⁴⁸⁾ We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as **to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor** (Laudato Si 49)

✿ These situations have caused **sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out**, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. Yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness. The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. ⁽⁵³⁾

✿ We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature. ⁽¹³⁹⁾

✿ 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. This is why the **earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor**; she "groans in travail". (Röm 8,22). ⁽²⁾

✿ Our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. **Every act of cruelty towards any creature is "contrary to human dignity"**. ⁽⁹²⁾



Our Ancestors knew you can only have your personal dignity when you have enough for a living, this brought people closer together, caring for each other, sympathetic towards each others' fortunes and misfortunes. It was useless to have a full belly, alone, in the village.

Chenjerai Hove



Living in communion with all creatures

- The conviction that everything in the world is connected

In our utilitarian mentality we are inclined to look at nature as a collection of useful items and think of ourselves as individuals apart from and above nature. Science has taught us to see the world as a network of closely connected ecosystems in which living creatures communicate with each other and are dependent on each other. In 'Laudato Si' Pope Francis has given us 'a spirituality of global solidarity' where we see ourselves as 'part of a universal family' living in communion with God and all his creatures of whom we are part and on whom our life depends.

- ✿ ...As part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form **a kind of universal family, a sublime communion** which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect... This is not to put all living beings on the same level nor to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails.

(Laudato Si 89.90)

- ✿ The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves **to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures**. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. **Everything is interconnected**, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity. (240)



- ✿ It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the **seamless garment of God's creation**, in the last speck of dust of our planet. (9)
- ✿ Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another. (42) Although we are often not aware of it, **we depend on these larger systems for our own existence**. (140)
- ✿ The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God... Hence we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships... **No creature is self-sufficient**. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other. (86)
- ✿ Just as the different aspects of the planet - physical, chemical and biological - are interrelated, so too **living species are part of a network** which we will never fully explore and understand.. (138) 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.. (139)

The creator of our life is also the Creator of the lives of wild animals. The relationship we have with animals is decreed by the same Creator. Human beings share their life with both wild and tame animals.

Chenjerai Hove



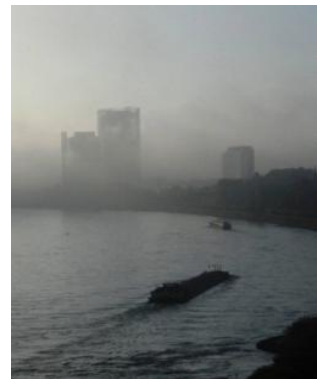
Humanity at a turning point

- The critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology

Science and technology have made such amazing advances that we are tempted to see the solution of all problems, including climate change and environmental degradation, in terms of technology. Pope Francis in 'Laudato Si' praises the marvellous achievements of modern technology. At the same time he sees the necessity of 'a bold cultural revolution' to change the way we live, produce and consume, if we are to cope successfully with the present crisis.

✿ **Humanity has entered a new era** in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads... Technology has remedied countless evils which used to harm and limit human beings. How can we not feel gratitude and appreciation for this progress... (102) Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others. (20) This situation has led to a constant schizophrenia, wherein a technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no special value in human beings. (Laudato Si 118)

✿ The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life. The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its **potentially negative impact on human beings**. Finance overwhelms the real economy. (109)... Economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment. (56) The **idea of infinite or unlimited growth**, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. (106)



✿ **The natural environment is a collective good**, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. (95) **The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all...** A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system... (23) Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of **the principal challenges facing humanity** in our day. (25) The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa... (51)



✿ All of this shows the urgent need for us to move forward in **a bold cultural revolution**. (114)... Humanity is called to recognize **the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption**, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it. (23) We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral. (112)

Our ancestors forbade the sale of game meat. If you killed a wild animal, it was the gift of the soil. You did not keep the animal in your cattle pen, why would you sell it. It was a present from the ancestors and the Creator. Chenjerai Hove

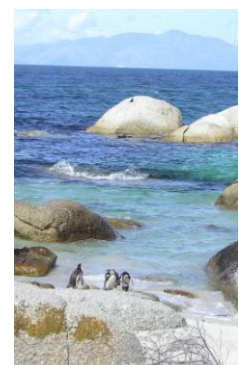
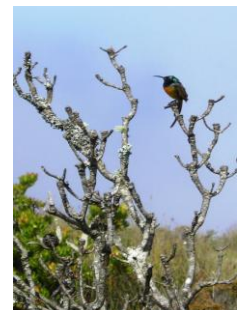


Rays of God's wisdom and goodness

-The unique value of each creature

Many traditional cultures treat nature with great respect and make use of it only for the necessities of life. Our age tends to look on nature mainly as a cheap unlimited source of raw materials to sustain our wasteful life style. Thus, we eliminate every year thousands of plants and animal species – a great loss for future generations. In his Encyclical 'Laudato Si' Pope Francis invites us to look at nature with different eyes and recognise the unique beauty and dignity of each creature which, by its very existence, praises God and gives joy to humanity.

- ✿ In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word “creation” has a broader meaning than “nature”, for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which **every creature has its own value and significance**. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. (Laudato Si 76)
- ✿ **Every creature is 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. (77) Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things. (69)
- ✿ Together with **our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly**, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory... By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws. (69)
- ✿ Our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. **The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift** is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home (155)
- ✿ The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. (145)
- ✿ The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God... yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. **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**. (83)



Spirituality is not the monopoly of human beings. Animals, plants, the soil, hills, trees, places, are components of human spirituality.

Chenjerai Hove

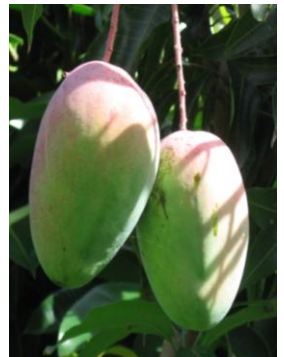


To till and keep the garden of the world - The human meaning of ecology

Our relationship between humankind and nature was for a long time strongly influenced by the first biblical story of creation. There God gives Adam and Eve the mandate “to fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). This has encouraged “the unbridled exploitation of nature”.

Pope Francis emphasises God’s command in the second creation story “to work and keep” the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 2:15) In ‘Laudato Si’, he develops a new and profound theology of creation which looks at human beings as part of nature and as God’s responsible co-workers in creation. There can be no well-grounded ecology without a sound anthropology.

- ✿ We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us... The biblical texts...tell us **“to till and keep the garden of the world”** (Gen 2:15). ‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. (Laudato Si 67)
- ✿ In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word ‘creation’ has a broader meaning than ‘nature’. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas **creation can only be understood as a gift** from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion. (76) Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. (12)
- ✿ Many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which he uses to draw us into the act of **cooperation with the Creator**. God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature. (80)
The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. (233)
- ✿ If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind **the modern myth of unlimited material progress**. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power. (78)
- ✿ Modernity has been marked by an **excessive anthropocentrism** which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. The time has come to pay renewed **attention to reality and the limits it imposes**; this in turn is the condition for a more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society. (116)
- ✿ (The human being) is **not just something, but someone**... How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles!... Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. (65)



Natural resources are there for us to use. But it is a moral obligation for everyone to leave natural resources in their condition. For instance, you are travelling through a bush area, you find scores and scores of fruit trees...you will eat what you need to eat. You leave the rest for others who are coming behind you.

Chenjerai Hove



Creative Dialogue in the service of life

- The need for forthright and honest debate

Nobody has definite answers to the many open questions how to control climate change or how to shape a truly sustainable development for all. Pope Francis in his Encyclical 'Laudato Si' does not offer final solutions to these huge problems. He rather invites all stake holders to enter into a transparent interdisciplinary dialogue and to search for ways out of the crisis leaving aside all particular group interests but focussing on the global common good.

- ✿ I urgently appeal for a new dialogue about how we are **shaping the future of our planet**. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. (Laudato Si 14)
- ✿ There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. Here I would state once more that 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. (188) Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a **frank dialogue in the service of life**, especially human life. (189)
- ✿ **A broad, responsible scientific and social debate** needs to take place, one capable of considering all the available information and of calling things by their name. It sometimes happens that complete information is not put on the table; a selection is made on the basis of particular interests, be they politico-economic or ideological. (135) For new models of progress to arise, there is a need to change "models of global development"; this will entail a responsible reflection on "the meaning of the economy and its goals..." It is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. (194)
- ✿ What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of **a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach** to handling the different aspects of the crisis ... A strategy for real change calls for rethinking processes in their entirety, for it is not enough to include a few superficial ecological considerations while failing to question the logic which underlies present-day culture. (197)
- ✿ The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur **religions to dialogue among themselves** for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity. (201)
- ✿ The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on **a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity**, always keeping in mind that "realities are greater than ideas. (201)



The new vision must know that elders and young people should sit together in dialogue. A dialogue which means the educated people must not be the destroyers. Western education has become foolishness. It does not bring life into its contents.

Chenjerai Hove



Putting the global common good before national interests

- The serious responsibility of international and local policy

The numerous climate summits in the last 20 years have not succeeded to reach a binding agreement for all countries which defines 'common and differentiated responsibilities'. Pope Francis sees the reason for this in a lack of ethics in international relations, the fight for national interests to the detriment of the global common good, the lack of effective international institutions and the dominance of the financial markets over politics. Will the Paris Climate Summit pick up the challenge and live up to its responsibility to future generations?

- ✿ Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an **ethics of international relations**. A true "ecological debt" exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time. ⁽⁵¹⁾ There is **a need for common and differentiated responsibilities**... (as) the countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems.

(Laudato si 170)

- ✿ The failure of global summits on the environment make it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good... ⁽⁵⁴⁾ International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their **national interests above the global common good**.

(169)

- ✿ Because the economic and financial sectors, being transnational, tend to prevail over the political..., it is essential to devise **stronger and more efficiently organized international institutions**, with functionaries who are appointed fairly by agreement among national governments, and empowered to impose sanctions. ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾



- ✿ The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from **intergenerational solidarity**. ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾

What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?

(160)

- ✿ Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for **having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities**. ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely.

(104)



We think and act as if there was only one birth of humanity, as if we were not witnesses of the past and actors of the future.

Chenjerai Hove



Finding joy in simplicity and solidarity with all God's creatures - The throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle

Pope Francis sees one of the causes for the destruction of the environment in a wasteful way of life. The mechanisms of the market push us to accumulate unnecessary consumer goods, create an illusion of freedom and leave us with an inner emptiness. Following the way of St. Francis of Assisi he invites us to live a different spirituality in deep communion with all God's creatures, in a liberating simplicity and in solidarity with the poor expressed in small daily gestures.

- ✿ We lack **an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging**, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. (Laudato Si 202)
- ✿ A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. (222) The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume... **Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle**, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, **can only lead to violence** and mutual destruction. (204)
- ✿ The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that **our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable** as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world. (161)
- ✿ The existence of laws and regulations is insufficient in the long run to curb bad conduct... Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment... **Education in environmental responsibility** can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us. (211) All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our **seminaries and houses of formation** will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God's world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment. (214)
- ✿ Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption... It is **a return to that simplicity** which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. (222) Such **sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating**... In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. (223) We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full. (226) One expression of this attitude is when we stop and **give thanks to God before and after meals**. (227)

