

Love for Nature in the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*

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ABSTRACT • In this article I'm concerned to go deeper into the notion of love, which cannot remain a purely theological, philosophical, or mystical notion. It is meant to be a reflex attitude, a way of relating between fellow human beings but also between man and the rest of the creatures. Its lack not only leads to indifference and alienation, but to catastrophic consequences both for the relationships between people and for those between man and nature. For example, the Holy Father, Pope Francis, offers us, in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, an illustration of these consequences and, at the same time, an urge to recover the said attitude. In the following pages I try to focus my attention on this pontifical document emphasizing the need for a better relationship between man and nature.

KEYWORDS • Love, Nature, Pope Francis, Ecological Education

The *Laudato Si'* document was published on June 18th, 2015, and the moment was carefully chosen by its author. In just a few months' time, more precisely between November 30th and December 12th, a *Summit* was to be held in Paris in order to take crucial decisions related to climate change. Of course, the leaders of the different countries were to discuss and take major political decisions that, subsequently, had to materialize in legislative projects, reforms and actions aimed at stopping global warming. But in most situations, there was a lot of pressure on the leaders from the economic and financial spheres and implicitly from the political one. The planned reforms would inevitably lead to huge costs for upgrading certain industries, and even to their elimination—an elimination that obviously would imply loss of jobs for thousands and thousands of workers. And we know what happened: *The summit* took place, the discussions were often particularly tense, scientific arguments often mingled with emotional ones. However, in

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the end, an agreement was reached and a final document was signed, appreciated as satisfactory; it began to be effected, of course at different paces and with diverse speeds and intensities in the various countries. The reluctance of the governments of some important countries (USA, China, India, Russia, etc.) to effectively apply the final document is particularly notorious, because of the economic and social problems they would have to face. Not to speak of the harsh decision of the former president of the United States of America, Donald Trump, to withdraw his country from the Paris agreement (announced in 2017 and formalized in 2020)¹.

It is worth wondering about how the final document of the Summit in Paris would have looked like in the absence of the Pope's wake-up call which strongly resounded in June 2015, stirring such an echo at the United Nations.

Indeed, it is known that Ban Ki-moon, who was the UN Secretary-General at the time, had been expecting Pope Francis' document and greeted it with particularly laudatory words. On the very day of the publication of the Encyclical, he pointed out, among other things, that "climate change is one of the main challenges facing humanity. They are a moral issue that requires a respectful dialogue with all parts of society"². Then, the UN Secretary-General highlighted from among the conclusions of the Encyclical letter the necessity of scientific consensus on a significant warming of the climate system, which is largely due to human activity. This led Ban Ki-moon to draw attention to the fact that

"humanity has a significant obligation to take care of and protect our common home, planet Earth and to show solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable members of society that suffer the most from the climate impact..."³.

In addition, he urged governments "to place the global common good above national interests and to adopt an ambitious and universal climate agreement in Paris"⁴ (which would take place in just a few months' time).

¹ Immediately after his election as president, Joe Biden reintroduced the U. S. into the Paris Agreement (20.01.2021).

² "UN Leaders React to Pope Francis' Release of Encyclical on Climate and Environment", *UN Environment Programme*, Press release, 18.06.2015: <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/un-leaders-react-pope-francis-release-encyclical-climate-and>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Subsequently, Ban Ki-moon invited the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to attend the United Nations General Assembly that was to adopt the 2015–2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to prepare the Paris *Summit*. Pope Francis honoured the invitation to go to New York and, upon his arrival, Ban Ki-moon told him among other things that:

“Regardless of our respective faiths, your humility, your humanity are for us a source of inspiration, as is your call addressed to the whole world to act in favour of social justice, of fighting climate change, in order to ensure a dignified life for all.”⁵

What I intend to present now is the quintessence of the message of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*..., in order to better emphasize how one should understand love for nature, for every creature in it, love for the planet as a whole, which the author so many times calls *our common home*.

What has become of our Home since it has ceased to be loved?

Love for nature and for our planet does not mean, in Pope Francis' view, a slipping into poetry or into a kind of self-deception like that offered by the “Animal Planet” broadcasts, which seem to imply that nothing wrong is happening to nature, its life is simply following its normal course.

It is true that the Holy Father opens his Encyclical Letter with the words of the Poem *Laudato Si'*... of St. Francis of Assisi: *Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs* (No. 1). He does it in order to awaken in our souls the delight and emotion expressed by St. Francis in this masterpiece of medieval lyrics, and then to show us by contrast what man has been able to do to our Mother Earth. Pope Francis says:

“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 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’...” (No. 2).

⁵ “Visite historique du Pape François au siège des Nations Unies à New York”, *ONU Info*, 25.09.2015: <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2015/09/319342>

This first remark of the Pope sounds like a prolonged “groan” of pain, and what follows fully confirms that nature is violently assaulted, the Earth is torn apart by the unbridled cupidity of man. This guilty cupidity—sinful, as Pope Francis will call it (No. 66)—takes on various forms and causes some of the most serious consequences. In this sense, the Holy Father draws a “fresco” of present reality under the title: *What is Happening to Our Common Home?* In this “fresco” the dramatism of the events consists not only in the scale of the changes, but also in their catastrophic features and in the speed with which they occur. Here are the main aspects of this “fresco”:

Pollution and Climate Change

Within this fresco drawn by Pope Francis the first aspect evoked is climate change. The Holy Father wishes to emphasize from the very beginning that, since the climate is a common good of all, its changes—which often acquire threatening aspects—cannot leave us indifferent, well knowing that they often entail very serious and often irreversible consequences. Thus:

1. Various forms of pollution (caused by transport, industrial fumes, waste, fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, etc.) spoil the environment and affect the health of people. In addition, they generate a “throwaway culture” that affects both human beings and things that quickly turn into garbage. However, while the ecosystems have proven able to recycle, the industrial system has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse garbage and debris (Nos. 20–22).

2. The warming of the climate system is an important factor of concern, and humanity must be aware of the need to change its lifestyle, in terms of production and consumption. Even if there are other factors that contribute to this climatic warming (volcanic activity, variations in the earth’s orbit and axis, the solar cycle, etc.), scientific studies have shown that the main causes can be traced back to human activity based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, on changes in soil use, especially on deforestation for agricultural purposes. All these changes have entailed major disturbances, such as the melting of glaciers or the partial disappearance of the planet’s biodiversity. They have generated important changes in the habitat of man and animals and have caused massive migration phenomena of the human population, animals and insects as well as vegetation. However, in such a situ-

ation, what stands out is the lack of reaction on the part of the leaders—which attests a serious loss of the sense of responsibility on their part (Nos. 23–25).

The Water Issue

The depletion of natural resources is one of the important indicators of the current changes—which leads to the impossibility of supporting the current level of consumption in developed countries, where the habit of squandering and discarding has reached levels never heard of before. However, there are countless signs that the planet has exceeded acceptable limits of exploitation (No. 27).

1. The first resource evoked is water—so indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The lack of water is felt more and more, causing both people and other living beings to suffer (No. 28). In addition, the pollution of surface waters and even of groundwater is at the origin of many diseases that affect humans (No. 29).

2. Very serious is the tendency to privatize this vital resource whereas, says the Holy Father, “access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights”. Therefore, the world has “a grave social debt towards the poor who do not have access to drinking water” (No. 30). On the other hand, given the waste of water from countries that have sufficient reserves, the Pope considers the issue of water to be an educational and cultural issue that requires awareness of the seriousness of such behaviour within a context of great inequality (*ibid.*).

3. A major consequence of the lack of water is the increase in the cost of food and of the various products that depend on its use—which would have repercussions on billions of people and could become an important source of conflict (No. 31).

Loss of Biodiversity

The Pope points out that the plundering of the earth’s resources, takes place because of the way people understand economy, commerce and pro-

duction—too tied to the outcome or, we might say, to immediate gain. In such an equation people fail to realize that:

1. The massive cutting down of forests while failing to replace them inevitably leads to the loss of animal and plant species (potential sources of food and health), of fungi, algae, worms, insects, etc. (necessary to maintain the balance of ecosystems). Therefore, any human intervention (highways, dams, artificial accumulation of water, etc.) must foresee the destructive effects on the environment and make investments—expensive as they may be—to mitigate them (No. 32–39).

2. Biodiversity in tropical and subtropical seas faces the same fate. Indeed, the destruction by pollution from human activity (the discharge of industrial waste and the use of destructive fishing methods) of coral barriers also entails the disappearance of about one million species of fish, crayfish, molluscs, algae, etc. Indeed, such irreversible losses affect the balance of life in the seas and oceans (Nos. 40–42)—a fact which manifests an unimaginable degree of irresponsibility towards the present and the future of the Planet on the part of humans.

Deterioration of the Quality of Human Life and Social Degradation

Regarding the quality of human and social life, Pope Francis remarks that:

1. Environmental deterioration affects human dignity, depriving it of an essential right, that to life and happiness (No. 43). This is quite obvious in the disorderly growth of cities, which have become unhealthy to live in, not only because of pollution caused by toxic emissions, but also as a result of urban chaos, poor transportation and visual and acoustic pollution, deficiencies in water and energy supply that cause specific diseases, diminution of green spaces or acute lack of housing (Nos. 43–45).

2. Certain technological innovations generate many occupational effects such as: social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social fragmentation, increased violence, and the emergence of new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking and increasing drug use among the youngest, loss of identity. Indeed, the growth of the past two centuries has not resulted in an integral development and improvement in the quality of life; on the contrary, it has often generated real social decline, silent ruptures of the bonds of integration and social cohesion (No. 46).

3. The systematic spread of the media and of the digital world does not favour the development of an ability to live wisely, to think deeply, to love generously; on the contrary, it suffocates wisdom in the midst of the dispersive noise of information. Or, true wisdom, says the Holy Father, is not acquired by mere accumulation of data (which may well turn into a sort of mental pollution), but through real relationships with others. And even if the current means (for example, the Internet) allow us to communicate with each other and share knowledge and feelings, they prevent us from making direct contact with the anguish, fear, joy of others and the complexity of their personal experience—which entails a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relationships or a harmful isolation (No. 47).

Global Inequality

In order to face the degradation of the natural environment and of the human environment, Pope Francis makes an urgent appeal to identify its causes and address them. Such degradation especially affects the most vulnerable on the planet (No. 48), through premature death, through conflicts generated by the shortage of resources and through the lack of concern on the part of the political leaders. In this sense, the Holy Father draws attention to the fact that:

1. There is no clear awareness of the problems that especially affect the excluded. Most often these problems are only mere additions to the issues debated in the International *Summits*, because the participants, who live in affluent surroundings, have no direct contact with these realities, a fact which leads to a numbing of their conscience. This is visible in the distance between their environmentalist rhetoric and their concrete attitudes (No. 49). In addition, instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, they only propose to invest in reducing the birth rate on the grounds that there are no available resources, while food waste reaches unimaginable levels (No. 50).

2. Inequality affects not only individuals, Pope Francis says, but entire countries: this requires the development of an ethic of international relations. What must be taken into account is the seizure of raw materials by industrialized countries to the detriment of those of origin, as well as exports of waste and relocation of polluting activities to poor countries. Indeed,

multinational companies carry out in poor countries activities that are not allowed in developed countries, and, when they cease their activity, they leave behind great human and environmental damage—unemployment, depletion of natural reserves, devastated and lifeless spaces as a result of pollution by harmful substances (No. 51).

3. Nowadays, richer countries continue to feed their standard of living with the riches of poor countries. In this respect, rich countries use the external debt of poor countries as a control tool. The inhabitants of poor countries cannot use their riches to get out of their state because of the systems of trade relations that have been imposed on them when they ran into debt. However, the present situation, dominated by the interests of the most powerful, can no longer be prolonged without dramatic consequences for the poor and helpless. That is why the Holy Father appeals to everyone's conscience by recalling that "we are one single human family" (No. 52), that "there are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide" and that "still less is there room for the globalization of indifference" (ibid.).

Reactions of the authorities to this situation

Weak Responses

For the painful aspects mentioned above, compared to the "crying out" of the Earth (which includes the moaning of the abandoned of the world), no culture that would provide the necessary answers has yet materialized. It would be necessary, according to the Holy Father, to build up a *leadership* able to strike out new paths roads in order to meet the needs of present and future generations (No. 53). This would require an honest and pragmatic approach to define the problems and try to solve them. But:

1. The weakness of the responses on the part of international politics can be traced, first and foremost, to their being subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests and very easily the economic interest ends up prevailing over the common good and manipulating information in order to hide the reality (No. 54). To get out of this logic, Pope Francis suggests more effective controls to verify the legality of initiatives and a more sincere fight against corruption (Nos. 55–56).

2. Resource depletion is at the root of new wars, masked by noble claims. But wars always cause serious damage to the environment and to the cultural wealth of peoples. Therefore preventive attitudes are required as well as eliminating the causes that can lead to wars (No. 57).

3. Even where there are positive initiatives for improving the environment, they do not end up solving global problems (No. 58). In addition, a false and superficial ecology is increasingly practiced, that only preserves the current lifestyles and the models of production and consumption, thus delaying important decisions and pretending that nothing wrong will happen (No. 59).

A Variety of Opinions

Regarding the reality evoked (very briefly) above, various approaches and lines of thought have emerged both in the assessment of the gravity of the situation and regarding the possible solutions to be adopted in order to remedy it. Among these, Pope Francis identifies two, situated at extremes that are opposite.

“At one extreme, we find those who doggedly uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change. At the other extreme are those who view men and women and all their interventions as no more than a threat, jeopardizing the global ecosystem” (No. 60)

—an issue to be addressed by a significant reduction in the number of people in order to restore the ecological balance. However, those two solutions prove to be unacceptable given that the first turns out to be utopian and the second immoral. Therefore, the Holy Father proposes that:

1. Avoiding such extremes, the debate between the representatives of the two tendencies should generate viable future scenarios, well knowing that there is not only one way to a solution. “This makes a variety of proposals possible, all capable of entering into dialogue with a view to developing comprehensive solutions” (No. 60).

2. The Church, although it refrains from offering a definite opinion about the serious issues affecting the planet and prefers to listen to all and to promote honest debate among scientists, respecting divergent views, still feels called upon to draw attention to the fact that the deterioration occurs at a

very rapid pace. This is evident both in large-scale natural disasters as well as in social and financial crises. All this proves that the problems of the world cannot be analysed or explained in isolation (No. 61).

The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis

After evoking the worrying situation in which the Earth, *our common Home*, finds itself, Pope Francis states: “It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis” (No. 101). He believes that such a situation is the result of a perverted way of understanding human life and activity. The origin of this perversion would lie in absolutizing the technocratic paradigm and also in the place human beings and human action have come to occupy in the world.

The Holy Father wants to emphasize that, with the development of technology, humanity has actually entered a new era. However, while “it is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us (steam engines, railways, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles, aeroplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies)” (Nos. 102–103), we cannot ignore that “nuclear energy, biotechnology, information technology, knowledge of our DNA” (No. 104) etc., have powers, unimaginable until recently, which give “those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world” (ibid.).

In such a situation, it is impossible for people not to feel uneasy knowing that these achievements can too easily turn into weapons of war, capable of destroying the entire planet. But an even greater anxiety, says the Holy Father, is born when we come to ask ourselves “in whose hands does all this power lie” (No. 104), well knowing that “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well”⁶ (No. 105); the huge technological growth has not been accompanied “by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience” (ibid.). In this sense, for example, it must be said that the way in which mankind has taken up technology and its development has, in

⁶ Romano Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, 9th ed., Würzburg, 1965, 87 (English: *The End of the Modern World*, Wilmington, 1998, 82).

our times, undergone a profound change. Indeed, while in the past the intervention of human beings on nature had the trait of a self-service, “stretching out the hand to receive from the hands of nature” what nature itself allowed, now, on the contrary, man is “laying his hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them” (No. 106)—which denotes that human being and material objects have stopped extending a friendly hand to one another and have reached the point of actual confrontation.

Pope Francis then points out that the technocratic paradigm tends to extend its domination over both economy and politics. The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without paying attention to its potentially negative impact on human beings. On the other hand, finances suffocate real economy. Their behaviour seems to imply that the objective of maximizing profits would be enough to compensate for the negative effects on the environment. Nevertheless, market alone does not guarantee full human development and social inclusion (No. 109). These very facts prevent finding adequate ways of solving the most complex problems in the world today, especially those regarding the environment and the poor (No. 110). A change of thought and political attitude should take place in these spheres, a change that includes an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality that would together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best environmentalist initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic (No. 111).

What would it mean, in such a context, to love nature / the planet?

Even this brief description of the situation in which the planet finds itself from a climatic, ecological, economic, and social point of view and of the causes that have led to it confirms that human beings no longer regard it with a sense of brotherhood. Therefore, in such a situation we naturally ask ourselves what would it mean, according to *the Encyclical Laudato Si'*, to love nature, to love the planet? What should be done for the human being to regain his fraternal feeling in relation to nature; to start respecting it and caring for it again?

In essence, Pope Francis—together with his predecessors (Benedict XVI, John Paul II, Paul VI, John XXIII, etc., but also with Patriarch Bartholomew

of Constantinople and together with other religious officials of the world—says that a few things are absolutely necessary:

A Change of Vision...

The Holy Father believes that humanity needs to change (No. 202). And although postmodern humanity has not found a new self-understanding that can guide it, it “still has the ability to work together in building our common home...The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern for bringing the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change” (No. 13). The Pope quotes Patriarch Bartholomew who advises that each human being should “move gradually away from what he wants to what God’s world needs”⁷ (No. 9). More specifically, it is necessary to assume an integral ecology that requires openness to the categories that transcend the language of the exact sciences or of biology and connect with the essence of the human; we must reach the conviction that the earth and the nature on it belong to no one, but is the gift of God to all (No. 146); it asks each of us to begin again to feel intimately united with all that exists (No. 11).

...Towards an Ecology of Daily Life

Pope Paul VI affirmed long ago “the urgent need for a radical change in the conduct of humanity”⁸ (No. 4), and Pope John Paul II called for “a global ecological *conversion*”⁹ (No. 5). As for Pope Benedict XVI, he advocated “eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment”¹⁰ (No. 6), while Patriarch Bartholomew invites all people to recognize sins against creation: “For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human be-

⁷ *Lecture at the Monastery of Utstein, Norway (23 June 2003)*.

⁸ *Speech at FAO on the 25th Anniversary* (November 16, 1970), 4: *AAS* 62 (1970), 833.

⁹ Cf. *Catechesis* (January 17, 2001), 4: *Insegnamenti* 24/1 (2001), 179.

¹⁰ *Speech to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See* (January 8, 2007): *AAS* 99 (2007), 73.

ings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life—these are sins”¹¹ (No. 8) emphasizing that “a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God”¹² (*ibid.*).

Even more specifically, Pope Francis speaks about promoting a true ecological culture. But such a culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent, hasty and partial responses to the immediate problems of environmental decay, depletion of natural reserves and pollution. It should promote “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm” (No. 111). In addition, the Pope encourages those responsible to implement far sighted policies, to promote best practice, without giving in to pressures from the economic and financial sphere (Nos. 175, 178). But the greatest urgency would be, according to Pope Francis, for humanity to break out of the consumerist paradigm that, in addition to a serious and irresponsible waste, entails violence and destructive conflicts (No. 204) and adopt a behaviour that considers the ecology of daily *life*, oriented towards the common good (No. 147, etc.). Moreover, such a change in lifestyles “could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power” (No. 206).

An ecological education...

The education that is most natural in the family, in the Church (through catechesis), in school or in the other educational structures, must take into account the exit from the consumerist, self-referential logic, and the appropriation of a new lifestyle that involves getting out of ourselves and orienting towards the other (person or creature who have in common the same nature). In this sense, a good environmental education must always pursue the common good (No. 156) and the appropriation of new practices and habits (No. 209).

¹¹ *Message for the Day of Prayer for the Safeguarding of Creation* (September 1, 2012).

¹² *Ibid.*

On the other hand, environmental education must aim at creating the idea of *environmental citizenship*. Such a statute presupposes that each member of society should accept the legal norm designed to regulate his new conduct. Yet, says the Holy Father, “only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment...” (No. 211). In concrete terms, education must be able to motivate such a commitment so as to become a new lifestyle, that is to say, to

“encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity” (ibid.).

...Towards an ecological spirituality

As a crowning of the educational path, the Holy Father proposes some lines of ecological spirituality

“grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” (No. 216).

The lines of spirituality make up a path that goes from an inner conversion to the cultivation of a healthy relationship with creation, to an attitude of gratitude towards the Creator, recognizing ourselves as dependent creatures, adopting a behaviour that is based on simplicity, sobriety and humility aimed at achieving inner peace. In this sense, Pope Francis offers us as models the figures of several saints: along with St. Francis of Assisi, Saint Teresa of Lisieux, Saint John of the Cross, the Holy Family of Nazareth (Mary and Joseph, who were in charge of raising the child Jesus). On the other hand, he invites us to a life rhythmmed by individual prayer (for example, before and after meals) and by the sacraments, in particular taking part in the Eucharist.

In addition to these ways of educating and living integral ecology, the Holy Father encourages the creation of a *Laudato Si'* Research Institute that has since been established at the University of Oxford (UK), at the University of Granda (Spain), as well as the organization of events such as the *Year 2021 dedicated to the encyclical Laudato Si'*, with a special moment in the Week of *Laudato Si'* (May 16–25). Also, this year, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia, in partnership with the Faculty of Theology of Melbourne, organized a session of scientific communications (March 15–17). Something similar was organized in Croatia, on June 4–5 (at the same time as our *Symposium*), at the initiative of the Catholic University.

Last but not least, a Declaration of *rectors of the Catholic Educational Institutes* in the world, which counts around 200 signatures, has been drafted, a statement by which they commit themselves to include among the subjects of study ecology in the vision of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Conclusion

The “cry of protest” of our sister Earth is, according to *the Encyclical Laudato Si'*, heartbreaking. Indeed, most of the aggressions that man has committed and continues to commit against the earth denote, according to this document, a profound distortion of the vision of the relationships he should have with nature. Modern man and especially post-modern man forget, says the Holy Father, that “we ourselves are earth (cf. *Gen 2:7*); that our body is made up of the elements of the planet; it is its air that gives us breath and its water that gives us life and cools us (No. 2). In addition, as inhabitants of the Earth, we are intimately connected to nature—a fact that should prevent us from considering nature as something separate from us or as a mere framework of our lives. We are included in it; we are part of it and we are intertwined with it (No. 139).

This connection to nature is inscribed, pope Francis says, in the very heart of biblical legislation that proposes to man norms designed to regularize relations with his fellows, but also with other living beings (No. 68), and with the Earth. The development of this legislation has sought to ensure balance and fairness in the relations of the human being with his fellow human beings and with the land on which he lives and is called to take care of. On the other hand, this legislation implicitly states that the gift of the earth, with its

fruits, belongs to everyone. Those who cultivate it and care for it are called to share its fruits, especially with the poor, with widows, orphans and strangers. For this reason, the Pope also states that the Holy Scripture denies any claim to absolute property (No. 67). When, instead, man behaves as the absolute owner of Earth, then not only the Planet is in danger, but also the poor and even future generations. The Holy Father strongly emphasizes that “The earth is a common inheritance, whose fruits are meant for the benefit of all” (No. 93), including those who will come after us. Therefore, for a responsible use of the things of this world, we must first rediscover their value before God, the One who created them out of love: “Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things” (No. 77). Therefore, each creature enjoys special attention from God (cf. Mt 6:26), and the same feelings should be held by every man.