

# **Laudato Si and the Role of a Catholic University in Combatting Climate Change and its Impacts**

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June 16, 2015 was a big day for the Catholic Church, the environmental community, and I would say for the whole world. Years from now, the release of the “Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*’ of the Holy Father<sup>1</sup><sub>SEP</sub> Francis on care for our common home” will be remembered as a turning point for the planet. A 184-page, 286-paragraphs (with 172 footnotes) long document, let me attempt to provide a summary of its main message.

Let me begin with for whom *Laudato Si*’ was written and what is its purpose. Traditionally, an encyclical was a circular letter sent to all the churches of a particular area in the ancient Roman Church. The word comes from Latin *encyclicus* meaning "general" or "encircling", which is also the origin of the word "encyclopedia". More recently, however, encyclicals have been issued by Popes to guide the Catholic faithful (for example Pope Blessed Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* on contraception) and in some cases to address all men and women of good will (such as Saint John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris*, on peace in the world). *Laudato Si*’ has both these purposes, with Pope Francis stating explicitly that the encyclical is now added to the body of the Catholic Church’s social teaching.

In addition, Pope Francis follows Pope Saint John XIII who in *Pacem in Terris*, “more than fifty years ago, with the world teetering on the brink of nuclear crisis” issued an Encyclical addressed “to the entire ‘Catholic world’ and indeed ‘to all men and women of good will. According to Francis: “Now, faced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet . . . In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.” In later paragraphs, Pope Francis expounds on what he means by this call to dialogue. “I urgently appeal, then, 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.”

Personally, I have never read an encyclical that is written in this way – so simple, in plain language, backed by solid natural and social sciences, and teaching with such clarity, authority, and inspiration. In addition, as one Jesuit commentator puts it, this is the first time that a papal encyclical is written in a gender-inclusive way and with footnotes that cite statements of Bishops’ conferences all over the world, including the 1988 pastoral letter on ecology of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, and non-Catholic sources such as United Nations documents. The Pope also cites Patriarch Bartholomew and a Sufi poet in *Laudato Si*’.

*Laudato Si*’ covers a range of topics – a dissection of environment and development challenges, identifying potential solutions and critiquing false remedies, and articulating

a moral philosophy, theology, and spirituality of ecology. What is remarkable in *Laudato Si'* is that every time the Pope had to choose between different options, he always decides in favor of the protection of the environment and justice for the poor. *Laudato Si'* is incredibly consistent in that way.

*Laudato Si'* is the charter that should guide a Catholic University, indeed all Catholic institutions, in its response to climate change.

### **St. Francis of Assisi as inspiration**

The best summary one can give of this papal encyclical is in the early paragraphs, when Pope Francis meditates on the example of St. Francis. These words will long be remembered:

“I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He 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 and justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace . . . What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.:

For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wildflowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”

A Catholic university must instill in its students this sense of wonder about the world, recognize creation and the creator and that we are only stewards of this awesome world. The events in Taal make this crystal clear.

### **Laudato Si' as vision for environmental justice**

In topic after topic, Pope Francis always make sure that the poor is ubiquitous; raising always the question of the impact of an issue on poor people, emphasizing all the time fairness and justice as a guide in how the world must respond. He does this in discussing climate change, water poverty and pollution, genetically modified organisms and its impact on poor farmers, depletion of fisheries that small fisher folk relies on, and on slums in urban areas.

More positively, Pope Francis also gives examples of a commendable human ecology practiced by the poor despite the challenges they face. He gives us an example indigenous peoples who see “land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values”. According to *Laudato Si'*: “When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.”

Pope Francis explains why we must not separate the state of our planet from what is happening to many of its people: “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.”

In its response to climate change, a Catholic university must above all stand with the poor and for environmental and climate justice.

### **Time to declare a climate emergency**

In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world’s preeminent scientific body on climate change, published a report with a long and complex title: “Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty.” With such a title, the message of the report could be lost in translation.

That is a pity because the findings of the report are crystal clear. As Brookings’s Institution’s Nathan Hultman pointed out in a blog posted right after the IPCC report was released: “An equally accurate but more evocative title could have been “We’re almost out of time.””

In essence, we only have until 2030 to transform the global economy to avoid the worst impacts of climate change by 2050. This is very different from when I did a law dissertation on the subject for Yale Law School in the early 1990 when the science was much more uncertain, and the projections of the worst scenarios were for the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century or 2200 and thereabouts.

Of course, between the 1990s and the 2010s, we have seen how the early science has underestimated in terms of timing and severity the arrival of the impacts of climate change. In the 1990s, whenever I talked about climate change, I always mentioned how one day typhoons like Yolanda, Pablo, Sendong, Ondoy, more recently Ursula etc. could devastate our islands and cities. But in my first presentations, because of the scientific

information available then, I always said these storms were like to happen later in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century or early in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century. I was a hundred years off in my projection.

Nowadays, in my climate change lectures, I point to our vulnerable cities, foremost of which are those in the Manila Bay region. I tell my usually younger audiences that I will not be surprised if within their lifetimes, they would have to deal with major storm surges that threaten the reclaimed areas and Manila's historic sites. When I give my usual lecture to our young diplomats undergoing training as cadets at the Foreign Service Institute, I ask them to imagine themselves or their colleagues one day trapped by floods and/or storm surges, exacerbated by sea level rise in the old Department of Foreign Affairs building in Roxas Boulevard. I do the same here in my environmental law classes in San Beda's Graduate School of Law.

In the context of the threat of climate change, all the efforts of Mayor Isko Moreno to revive the glory of Old Manila will come to naught. Certainly, all proposed reclamation projects in the region should be abandoned as they will increase the threat for all of us. San Beda University should be at the forefront of this.

Given the magnitude of what the climate change impacts we are facing, it is time now to declare a climate emergency. The global community should do that. The Philippine government must do that. The city of Manila, all the cities of our metropolis, and all our coastal cities and provinces must do that.

Among others, instead of withdrawing or minimizing our diplomatic engagement on climate change, we actually need to give it more priority and emphasis. Our strong voice, effective for many years (including up to the 2015 Paris meeting, the last important gathering of heads of state), is needed to push this important goal of having the global community declare a climate change emergency.

Indeed, we are faced with a climate crisis of immense dangers. The climate threat has been described as not just "dangerous", or even "catastrophic", but "existential".

The threat is not only to people, but to all life. Climate change, as pinned down by the recently released Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), accelerate the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of species. In that assessment, the authors conclude that a million species face extinction and rank five direct drivers of that, with climate change as the third biggest culprit following changes in land and sea use and direct exploitation of organisms and ranked higher than pollution and invasive alien species.

Time is running out to address the climate emergency, but actions being done are not commensurate to what has to be done.

San Beda University should lobby Manila to make this declaration and for an adoption of a plan of action.

## **The climate emergency and the poor**

In all my lectures on climate change, I always emphasize the double injustice in climate change: the poorest countries and the poorest communities in all countries will suffer first and most from climate change even as they have contributed the least to the anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions that causes climate change. Conversely, the richest countries and the wealthiest people in all countries will have more options in dealing with climate change.

This gross climate injustice and inequity will be exacerbated in the years and decades to come, as made clear in a recent report by Philip Alston, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. That report issued last June 25, 2019 concluded: “Climate change will have devastating consequences for people in poverty. Even under the best-case scenario, hundreds of millions will face food insecurity, forced migration, disease, and death. Climate change threatens the future of human rights and risks undoing the last fifty years of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction.”

The Alston report does not mince words, outlining how climate change will intensify existing poverty and inequality: “It will have the most severe impacts in poor countries and regions, and the places poor people live and work. Developing countries will bear an estimated 75-80 percent of the costs of climate change.”

This is because poor people live in areas more vulnerable to climate change, including in housing that is less resistant. The poor “lose relatively more when affected; have fewer resources to mitigate the effects; and get less support from social safety nets or the financial system to prevent or recover from the impact”. For obvious reasons, the livelihoods and assets of the poor are more exposed. In addition, poor communities are “more vulnerable to natural disasters that bring disease, crop failure, spikes in food prices, and death or disability”.

These observations are true in the Philippines. We have seen the poor suffer the most in all our big disasters, including when Yolanda devastated the Visayas, Pablo destroyed huge areas of Mindanao, and Sendong killed thousands in Cagayan de Oro.

Alston observes that climate change could end up undoing decades of progress in development, global health, and poverty reduction. He notes: “Middle-class families, including in developed countries, are also being rendered poor. The World Bank estimates that without immediate action, climate change could push 120 million more people into poverty by 2030—likely an underestimate and rising in subsequent years. Eight hundred million in South Asia alone live in climate hotspots and will see their living conditions decline sharply by 2050.”

Quoting the most recent scientific studies, Alston points out that, at 2 °C degrees of warming, 100-400 million more people will be put at risk of hunger and 1-2 billion more people may no longer have adequate water. He also cites studies on how climate change

could result in global crop yield losses of 30 percent by 2080, even with adaptation measures.

The Alston report highlights public health impacts, which the poor will bear disproportionately: “Between 2030 and 2050, it is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress. With people in poverty largely uninsured, climate change will exacerbate health shocks that already push 100 million into poverty every year.”

As I noted, what is particularly galling about climate change is the inequity and injustice that characterizes it. Alston documents this as well: “Perversely, the richest, who have the greatest capacity to adapt and are responsible for and have benefitted from the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions, will be the best placed to cope with climate change, while the poorest, who have contributed the least to emissions and have the least capacity to react, will be the most harmed. The poorest half of the world’s population—3.5 billion people—is responsible for just 10 percent of carbon emissions, while the richest 10 percent are responsible for a full half. A person in the wealthiest 1 percent uses 175 times more carbon than one in the bottom 10 percent.”

Alston also cites data that illustrates how “climate change itself has already worsened global inequality and that the gap in per capita income between the richest and poorest countries is 25 percentage points larger than it would be without climate change.”

### **A failure to act**

In the face of these impacts, action has been wanting. According to Alston: “Somber speeches by government officials at regular conferences are not leading to meaningful action. Thirty years of conventions appear to have done very little. From Toronto to Noordwijk to Rio to Kyoto to Paris, the language has been remarkably similar as States continue to kick the can down the road. The essential elements of climate change were understood in the 1970s, and scientists and advocates have been ringing alarm bells for decades. Yet States have marched past every scientific warning and threshold, and what was once considered catastrophic warming now seems like a best-case scenario.”

It’s not just governments that have failed us. Big business has been complicit, especially fossil fuel companies: “In 2015, the fossil fuel industry and its products accounted for 91 percent of global industrial greenhouse emissions and 70 percent of all human-made emissions.” It is an industry that has known for decades about their responsibility for rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels and the likelihood that the rise would lead to catastrophic climate change. And yet, it took no action to change its business model.

According to the Alston report: “From 1988 to 2015, fossil fuel companies doubled their contribution to global warming, producing in 28 years the equivalent of their emissions in the prior 237 years since the Industrial Revolution. During that time, just 100 companies produced 71 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.”

## Responding to climate change

The familiar way of framing the issue – that climate change is a long-term challenge and we still have the time to address it effectively - is no longer tenable. Climate change is already here, and it will get much worse, and the worst impacts will be felt by 2050 or even earlier. In addition, we only have 11 years from today – up to 2030 – to transform the global economy to avert the worst scenarios for 2020.

Truth be told, climate science might be complex but what we need to do to mitigate and to adapt to climate change does not require hard science.

I endorse the view of Mr. Alston that addressing climate change effectively require a fundamental shift in the global economy. It requires rejecting the traditional way States have achieved prosperity, “decoupling improvements in economic well-being and poverty reduction from resource depletion, fossil fuel emissions, and waste production”. According to the Alston report,

“This will entail radical and systemic changes including incentives, pricing, regulation, and resource allocation, in order to disrupt unsustainable approaches and reflect environmental costs in entire economic subsystems including energy, agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and transportation.”

Much of post-industrial poverty reduction and economic growth has been based on unsustainable resource extraction and exploitation. Certain people and countries have gotten incredibly wealthy through emissions without paying for the costs to the environment and human health—costs borne disproportionately by people in poverty. Staying the course will not preserve growth in the long term but will be disastrous for the global economy and pull hundreds of millions into poverty. Climate action should not be viewed as an impediment to economic growth but as an impetus for decoupling economic growth from emissions and resource extraction, and a catalyst for a green economic transition, labour rights improvements, and poverty elimination efforts.

Climate change will require deep structural changes in the world economy. It is imperative this is done in a way that provides necessary support, protects workers, creates good jobs, and is guided by international labour standards. A robust social safety net and a well-managed transition to a green economy will be the best response to the unavoidable harms that climate change will bring.”

The climate emergency is the biggest challenge the world faces. The Philippines is going to be particularly hit by it. That is why we must also contribute in mitigating it as we will not have any moral authority and ascendancy to ask other countries to reduce emissions if we do not do so ourselves.

Working together, we still have time – not much yes, but enough – to avert the worst. But we have to start now.

Governments, the private sector, local governments and communities, families and individuals have roles to play. The youth have a particular role to play.

Governments must take the lead by declaring a global climate emergency and increasing their commitments in the Paris Agreement.

Developed countries and the big developing countries must still take the lead. But middle-income countries and the least developed countries, including the most vulnerable, must also reduce emissions. The richer countries must increase their financial assistance to developing countries so that the latter can adapt better and contribute more to mitigate climate change.

Local governments must now take the lead in addressing the climate change. Hundreds of local governments have now declared a climate emergency. Young and progressive leaders lead the cities of Manila, Pasig, San Juan, Makati, Quezon City, Valenzuela, and Dumaguete and the province of Dinagat Islands, among others. They should make this a priority and have their councils declare a climate emergency, prioritizing climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

Finally, the youth have the most important role in what has to be done to fight the climate emergency. I encourage and support the climate strike movement inspired by Greta Thunberg of Sweden. Young people have the most at stake in the climate emergency. They also have the energy and courage to insist on what has to be done. That is why I endorse the latest demands articulated by Greta in Davos, Switzerland:

“We demand at this year’s World Economic Forum, participants from all companies, banks, institutions and governments:

Immediately halt all investments in fossil fuel exploration and extraction.

Immediately end all fossil fuel subsidies.

And immediately and completely divest from fossil fuels.

We don’t want these things done by 2050, 2030 or even 2021. We want this done now.

It may seem like we’re asking for a lot. And you will of course say that we are naïve. But this is just the very minimum amount of effort that is needed to start the rapid sustainable transition.

So either you do this or you’re going to have to explain to your children why you are giving up on the 1.5-degree target. Giving up without even trying. Well I’m here to tell you that, unlike you, my generation will not give up without a fight.

The facts are clear, but they're still too uncomfortable for you to address. You just leave it because you think it's too depressing and people will give up. But people will not give up. You are the ones who are giving up.

Last week I met with Polish coal miners who lost their jobs because their mine was closed. And even they had not given up. On the contrary, they seem to understand the fact that we need to change more than you do.

I wonder, what will you tell your children was the reason to fail and leave them facing a climate chaos that you knowingly brought upon them? That it seemed so bad for the economy that we decided to resign the idea of securing future living conditions without even trying?

Our house is still on fire. Your inaction is fueling the flames by the hour. And we are telling you to act as if you loved your children above all else.”

In all of these responses, a great Catholic University can contribute by helping develop adaptation and mitigation solutions, by educating its students on the issue (including forming compassionate persons so we avoid a dystopian world), and last but not least by participating in the necessary political actions so national and global change happens.

### **A guide to our response: an integral ecology and an ecology of daily life**

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories that transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them “to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason”.

His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, “from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’”. Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behavior. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

A Catholic University must teach its students integral ecology and an ecology of daily life.

## **From Laudato Si: Intergenerational equity**

For Pope Francis, solidarity with future generations is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice. This is because the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. Indeed, the idea of the common good extends to future generations.

The truth is that there is no sustainable development without intergenerational solidarity: “Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” (LS 159)

To elaborate further the principle of intergenerational equity, the Pope asks: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” For Pope Francis, this is not just an environmental question that can be addressed in isolation or approached piecemeal. According to him: “When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results. But if these issues are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions: What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” (LS 160)

In answering these questions, Pope Francis then observes that it is not sufficient to just state that we should be concerned for future generations: “We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.” (LS 160)

Laudato Si’ warns that we cannot underestimate the harm we have done with the world and on future generations to whom we are leaving “debris, desolation and filth”. The encyclical points out how rampant and unbridled consumption and waste is stretching our planet’s capacity; that today’s lifestyle can only result in environmental catastrophes. Thus, Pope Francis calls for decisive action here and now and encourages us to reflect on our accountability to future generations who will have to endure the consequences of our actions.

Pope Francis links our failure to take care of our planet with ethical and cultural decline: “Men and women of our postmodern world run the risk of rampant individualism, and many problems of society are connected with today’s self-centered culture of instant gratification. We see this in the crisis of family and social ties and the difficulties of

recognizing the other. Parents can be prone to impulsive and wasteful consumption, which then affects their children who find it increasingly difficult to acquire a home of their own and build a family.” In addition, what is preventing us from considering seriously impact of our actions on future generations is because of “our inability to broaden the scope of our present interests and to give consideration to those who remain excluded from development”. In this regard, Pope Francis calls not merely for a fairer sense of intergenerational solidarity but emphasizes also an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of intragenerational solidarity.

Intergenerational equity is thankfully not a new concept in both international and Philippines law. Edith Brown Weiss, a professor of law in Georgetown University, was one of the first to elaborate the concept in her 1989 book “In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony, and Intergenerational Equity”. In the Philippines, the 1994 case of *Oposa vs. Factoran* recognized this principle with the Supreme Court allowing the petitioners, who were minors, to represent their generation as well as generations yet unborn.

The best place that illustrate the necessity and the feasibility of intergenerational equity are Catholic. Universities like San Beda that are more than a century old and that has roots that go as far as the middle ages.

### **Final word from Laudato Si: the gospel of creation**

Pope Francis argues that, in crafting solutions to sustainable development challenges, there must be respect for diversity of cultures and religions. *Laudato Si'* states: “Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.” (LS 63) In addition, Pope Francis points out how “faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters”. Christians must “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith”.

*Laudato Si'* explains how creation accounts, as found in the book of Genesis, share important teachings about human existence and its historical reality. According to Pope Francis: “They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth to “till it and keep it”. As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual.”

Pope Francis asserts that human beings are not God and strongly rejects an interpretation of the Bible that establishes supremacy and dominion of man over nature is not correct. According to *Laudato Si'*: "The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world. '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. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations."

There is no place in the Bible for a "tyrannical anthropocentrism". Stewardship over creation means we have "to respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world". We must acknowledge that other creatures are valuable in their own right before God. As Pope Francis puts it - "by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory".

*Laudato Si'* uses the biblical story of Cain and Abel and that of Noah to point out the consequences of disregarding and betraying one's duty to care for a neighbor ruins one's relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. According to Pope Francis: "When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered. We see this in the story of Noah, where God threatens to do away with humanity because of its constant failure to fulfill the requirements of justice and peace. He concludes: "These ancient stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others."

Finally, Pope Francis makes ecology very personal, proclaiming that the earth, indeed the whole universe, speaks of God's love and his boundless affection for us, with "soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God". He describes our friendship with God as always linked to particular places. "Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves."

### **Conclusion: Evoking Saint Francis again**

Pope Francis ends the *Laudato Si'* chapter on the gospel of creation with the Canticum of the Sun, the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi from where the title of papal encyclical comes from. For indeed: "When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them." And yes, this is the right song to sing: Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom you give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour; and bears a likeness of you, Most High. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful. Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through whom you give sustenance to

your creatures. Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste. Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong”.