



***Laudato si'* and
Catholics, Capitalism and Climate**
Molloy College, Rockville Center, Long Island NY, 17 February 2016

The Inspiration of Laudato si'

Your Excellency Bishop William Murphy, President Drew Bogner, Vice President Edward Thompson, dear Faculty, Staff, Students and Friends:

Introduction

Warm greetings to you from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, where we miss our former under-secretary (1980–1987) who is now your Bishop. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace contributed significantly to the writing and launch of *Laudato si'*. Thank you for the invitation to introduce the Encyclical, and then to reflect on “Catholics, Capitalism and Climate” with the help of Fr James Martin as moderator and three distinguished panellists Meghan Clark, R.R. Reno, and Erin Lothes.

It is gratifying to address faculty, staff, students and friends of Molloy College. It is fitting that this audience show a diversity of ages and situations in the world, for regarding today’s topic, everyone is involved. This very important encyclical touches on the timely issue of climate, as well as fundamental issues of faith, economy, development, progress and lifestyle.

Pope Francis himself offers us a quick review of the core message. Let us watch his short video now – it takes just a minute and a half!¹

Let me please suggest the take-aways, to keep in mind throughout today’s discussions:

- ✚ Our nature is created by God and surrounded by the gifts of creation
- ✚ Our failures are that we over-consume and that we do not share the gifts of creation (tilled too much and kept too little!)

¹<http://catholicclimatemovement.global/pope-video/>

- ✚ This has dire consequences for the poor and the planet
- ✚ And so it is urgent that we change our sense of (human) progress, our management of the economy, and our style of life.
- ✚ Such change is going to require major shifts in our thinking and commitments – indeed, a conversion of groups and institutions at every level, from local communities to global humanity.

These take-aways represent the major strokes and strikes of *Laudato si'* in which Pope Francis seeks essentially to do three things:

- a. to propose a social teaching of the Church that creates awareness about the immensity and urgency of the challenge of the present situation of the world and its poor: the two fragilities which lie at the heart of Pope Francis' *integral ecology*.
- b. to make an urgent appeal for a new dialogue about how to shape the future of our planet, especially through an appeal for an *ecological conversion*, an *education in ecological citizenship* and an *ethical and spiritual itinerary to reduce our footprint and reverse the deterioration of the natural and social environment*.
- c. to encourage humanity to respond to the urgent appeal with his profound faith and trust in humanity's ability to work together to build a common home.

But concretely and by way of responding the topic under discussion: *Catholics, Capitalism and Climate*, let us briefly state:

- How as Catholics we may understand our common heritage, this freely given gift of *creation*?
- What should *care* mean: *Capitalism in Laudato si'*
- How the *climate* debate plays out/ is manifested/affects the United States and, more specifically, Long Island and the New York City area.
- In conclusion, as does the Pope's video, our caring for our common home.

I. Catholics and Creation

The Catholic doctrine of creation does not regard the world as an accident. Our planet, indeed the universe, is an intentional act of God that is provided to human beings as a gift. Creation is not just passing from nothing to many things, a lot of "stuff" getting made. Rather, creation is the first step in the great vocation of man: creation, incarnation, redemption.

Humanity is not an afterthought. God did not have two agendas: first, the world and then, humanity. Man and woman are made in the image and likeness of God, they are an intrinsic part of the universe, and their vocation is "to till and to keep" it all. But tilling and keeping cannot include domination and devastation -- *less we till to much and keep too little!* These make a mockery of dignity and respect of *God-s gifts*. We are called to participate in ongoing creation and in its ongoing *redemption*.

In this light, we should find it easy to understand the concerns of Pope Francis for the poor and for nature. He is not offering worldly advice on how to be prudent and practical, although his message has immense practical consequences. Rather, he is reminding us of:

- a) the *basic consequence of creation, which establishes a three-fold level of relationship for the human person: with God (creator), with other human persons in a bond of fraternity and with the world as the garden-home for our existence,*
- b) and the basic demands of our vocation to participate in God's work of creation, as *co-creators*, and responsible for the work of God who does not hide his face from any aspect of creation, poor or rich, nature or human.

Here is how *Laudato si'* presents these ideas.

The second Chapter *Laudato si'* recounts the creation story and moves directly to its moral dimension/implications. It offers a comprehensive view of the gift of creation, based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. With this Pope Francis articulates the “tremendous responsibility” (§90) of humankind for creation, the intimate connection among all creatures and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (§95). The collective good and the responsibility of all underpin the insistent message about the moral dimension of how we treat nature *and the rest of creation*.

But the relationship with nature does not stand alone; it is intertwined with other dimensions. In the Bible, “the God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected” (§73). The story of creation is central for reflecting on the relationship between human beings and other creatures. “These accounts suggest that human life is grounded, *as observed above*, 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” (§66). Sin breaks the equilibrium: *harmony and communion* of all creation. Thus, Pope Francis writes: “*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'* (Rom 8:22).” (LS § 2).

These are strong words. The Holy Father is explicit that the human relationship with nature can be regarded at times as sinful. He wishes to put an end to that. Thus, even if “we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (§67). Human beings have the responsibility to “‘till and keep’ the garden of the world (cf. *Gen 2:15*)” (§67), knowing that “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” (§83).

Where does this leave us? Dominion must not be absolute domination. Other creatures have their own dignity and purpose. As we search for the right balance, we must avoid two pitfalls. One would be to regard everything as fundamentally the same and “deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails”. The other would be to fall prey to “a divinization of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility” (§90).

This brings Pope Francis to certain virtues and attitudes that are most appropriate to our relationship with creation. Being so connected to all living things, we must accept that “every act of cruelty towards any creature is ‘contrary to human dignity’” (§92). Moreover, “a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (§91; cf. too, §2, 217). What is needed is the awareness of a universal communion: “[All are] called into being by the 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” (§89).

II. Catholics and Care: *Capitalism in Laudato si'*

Let us turn now from creation to *care for creation*, and *care for our common home*.

A great innovation of Pope Francis is that he advocates something more than stewardship. In *Laudato si'* he uses the word “steward” only twice, and instead speaks about *care*. It is in the title, “Care for our Common Home,” and is repeated dozens of times.

Care goes further than “stewardship”. Good stewards take responsibility and fulfil their obligations to manage and to render an account. But one can be a good steward without feeling connected. If one *cares*, however, one is connected. To *care* is to allow oneself to be affected by another, so much so that one’s path and priorities change. Good parents know this. They care about their children; they care for their children, so much so that parents will sacrifice enormously—even their lives—to ensure the safety and flourishing of their children. With caring, the hard line between self and other softens, blurs, even disappears.

Pope Francis proposes that we think of our relationship with the world and with all people in terms of *caring*. As Jesus does when he calls himself the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11-15). Caring for our common home requires, as Pope Francis says, not just an economic and technological revolution, but also a cultural and spiritual revolution—a profoundly different way of living the relationship between people and the environment, a new way of ordering the global economy.

To speak in this way locates *Laudato si'* in the great tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. Pope Leo XIII responded to the *res novae* or “new things” of his time, when the industrial economy was only a century old and posed many dilemmas, especially for workers and families. Similarly, in the era of the emergence of new independent nations in the post-colonial era of the 65's, Pope Paul VI took up the issue of the development of the human person and nations, whole and entire,

in his encyclical letter, *Populorum Progressio*. Development, for Pope Paul VI, was the new name of peace! So too, Pope Francis is responding to the “new things” of our day, when a post-industrial, globalized economy is posing many challenges/dilemmas for humanity and for the planet.

The key principles of our Catholic Social Teaching ground the messages of *Laudato si'*, namely:

- The world’s economy must meet the true needs of people for their survival and integral human flourishing. This is a matter of *respect for human dignity* and a *recognition* of the **common good**. We must make objective moral judgments in this regard.
- In fact, neither *Evangelii Gaudium* nor *Laudato si'* mentions *capitalism*. Instead, Pope Francis joins Blessed Paul VI, St John Paul II and Pope *emeritus* Benedict XVI in asking deeply, “What is development? What is progress?” And in the context of this there is talk of the *Market* and *Trade*, which some consider the expressions of *capitalism*.
- In that sense, if participants in the market were truly moral actors, motivated by the pursuit of virtue, and if trade was fair and free, they would promote healthy competition, creativity and innovativeness. They would have the happiness and flourishing of people as their goal.²
- Now, however, “Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products,” Pope Francis says, “people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending... When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume.” (§§203,204) And so, for Pope Francis, “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast” (§ 217).
- How do technologies contribute to the **common good**? The Encyclical gratefully acknowledges the tremendous contribution of technologies to the improvement of living conditions. Yet it also warns about the misuse of technology, especially when it gives “those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world” (§104). Moreover, markets alone “cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (§109).
- **Solidarity** with all, especially the marginalized and the poor, is a hallmark of our Holy Father’s papacy, and it marks the Encyclical as well. The text speaks with great compassion of dispossession and devastation suffered disproportionately by the poor, vulnerable and *those who are* unable to protect themselves or escape. Pope Francis embraces all people. “Let us not only keep the poor of the future in mind, but also today’s poor, whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting” (§162).

² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). See also Thomas Jefferson.

- **Solidarity** must also apply between generations: “we can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (§159). The Pope’s key question for humanity is put in those very terms: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (§160).

- **Human dignity** underpins the extensive treatment of “The need to protect employment” (§124-29). Work is a noble and necessary vocation: “Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment” (§128). Work is how human dignity unfolds while earning one’s daily bread, feeding one’s family, and accessing the basic material conditions needed for flourishing every day. Further, it should be the setting for rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God.

In the reality of today’s global society, it is essential that “we continue to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone,”³ no matter the limited interests of business and economic reasoning that excludes the human and social costs (§127). It is wrong when some businesses simply replace workers with machines on the basis of efficiency and utility, viewing human beings as interchangeable with machines as mere factors of production. Clearly, the *drive/aim*/obsession is to gain still more profit, but at the cost of less and less decent work. Do individuals thrive from being unemployed or precariously hired? Of course not. Does society benefit from unemployment? Of course not. In fact, we everywhere witness far too many people who cannot find worthwhile and fulfilling work. We should not be surprised when unscrupulous people with demented fantasies recruit such idle individuals into criminality and violence.

- God has exercised **subsidiarity** by entrusting the earth to humans to keep, till and care for it; this makes human beings co-creators with God. Work should be inspired by the same attitude. If work is organized properly, and if workers are given proper resources and training, their activity can contribute to their fulfilment as human beings, not just meet their material needs. It can uphold the full human dignity, the integral human development, of workers. The principle of subsidiarity is a mirror of God’s relationship to humanity.

- Proper *exercise of care* (practices of **stewardship**) keeps the natural environment and human systems *sustainable*. The problem, Pope Francis notes clearly, is that the logic of competition *can* promote short-termism, which *can* lead to financial failure and devastation of the environment. “We need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals” (§190).

³*Caritas in Veritate*, §32.

The Holy Father is not anti-business. But what he decries is an obsession with profit and the deification of the market. Profit has its role in sustaining an enterprise and allowing it to improve and innovate. Pope Francis calls upon business to lead by harnessing its creativity to solve pressing human needs. “More diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can prove very profitable (§191) as well as sustainable.

- God is the Creator of all—the entirety of creation, all people, all goods. **Justice** requires that the goods of creation be distributed fairly. This has the status of a moral obligation, even a commandment, for Pope Francis. “Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy,” he said last July in Bolivia. “It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment. It is about giving to the poor and to peoples what is theirs by right. The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church’s social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples.”⁴
- **Justice** must also reign when the burden of environmental rehabilitation is taken up. Those who have contributed most to greenhouse gas emissions and have benefitted most from the industrial period, should now take the lead and contribute more to the solution than those whose standard of living is just beginning to rise. As a first step, they must be ever more honest about so-called *externalities* or *spill-over effects*, since finally nothing falls outside of the accounts of our one shared common household.

In the light of Creation and our care for it, in the light of Catholic social teaching, let us now consider how the United States is responding to the great challenge of *Laudato si'* / climate.

III. Laudato si' / Climate and the U.S.A.

On 31 March 2015, the United States submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It expressed its strong commitment “to reducing greenhouse gas pollution.” It set “an economy-wide target of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28 per cent below its 2005 level in 2025, and [it intends] to make best efforts to reduce its emissions by 28%.” It called the target “fair and ambitious”.⁵

When Pope Francis arrived in the United States on 23 September 2015, his first public words – delivered at the White House – included the following: “Mr. President, I find it encouraging that you are proposing an initiative for reducing air pollution. Accepting the urgency, it seems clear to me also that climate change is a problem which can no longer be left to our future generation.

⁴Pope Francis, *Address* to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 9 July 2015, § 3.1

⁵<http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/indc/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>

When it comes to the care of our common home, we are living at a critical moment of history. We still have time to make the change needed to bring about a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.”

Meanwhile in December 2015, the nations of the world signed the Paris Agreement, promising to peak global greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, with the goal of reaching net-zero emissions in the second half of the century. This goal requires, as Pope Francis urged in *Laudato si'*, a “new and universal solidarity”. The United States, as one of the world’s largest carbon emitters – especially in per capita terms – has a special responsibility to act. The U.S. exercised leadership in the run-up to Paris, as evidenced by bilateral agreements with both India and China. Building on its own 26-28 percent commitment, leadership was also shown during the negotiations at COP21. Yet, as Pope Francis realistically warns, economic and other special interests can “easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.” (LS § 54).

I understand that the Supreme Court has stayed implementation of the administration’s Clean Power Plan to reduce emissions from power plants.⁶ Let me only comment that greenhouse gas pollution already affects every man, woman, and child on the planet now, and more so in future generations. Law, as Thomas Aquinas said long ago, must always be oriented to the common good. I know that the great majority of Americans fully supports plans to reduce emissions and protect our common home. Let’s make sure that the dynamic set in motion by COP21 in Paris is not derailed.

At the beginning of this month, Abp. Thomas Wenski, head of the Bishops’ Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, wrote to U.S. Senators as follows:

The U.S. bishops have long spoken out on the importance of prudent action to address the growing impact of global climate change. In the past, we expressed support for a national carbon standard and offered moral principles to guide the EPA and states as they take steps to reduce carbon pollution. Among these principles are care for human life and all of creation, social and economic justice (including equitable distribution of costs and

⁶The U.S. Clean Power Plan would establish state-level targets for emissions reductions, ultimately reducing national electricity sector emissions by an estimated 32 percent below 2005 levels by 2030. The Supreme Court has stayed implementation of the plan until the Federal Appeals Court hears arguments, in early June, whether the Clean Air Act does indeed provide the Environmental Protection Agency with the required authority. If the latter ruling is appealed, the Supreme Court’s final ruling is not expected until June 2017. If the plan is reversed, the next President will have to craft a new plan. Historically, it is not unusual for the EPA’s authority to be questioned by various interests. Though the Clean Power Plan is central to the U.S.’s INDC, still, other laws and regulations are in place through which the federal government can act. The federal administration has also taken a number of steps to engage local levels of government, the private sector and organizations of civil society.

assistance to help mitigate impacts on affected workers), and a priority for the poor and vulnerable.⁷

By now (mid-Feb 2016), over 160 parties have produced their own INDCs to reduce emissions. Here at Molloy College, I am happy to know that you are committed to “hold important discussions on issues of faith and society”. No facet of our world is too great or too small, too lofty or too plain, for us to take it on, to pray over it, and to bring it into constructive dialogue with others.

So I hope you will familiarize yourself with the U.S.’s INDC – it’s only 4 pages – and reflect on how the entire college community can follow what happens to it and indeed push for even more “fair and ambitious” targets to avoid or reverse environmental degradation and harm to all God’s people. What are the social and natural environment challenges on this campus, in its neighbourhood, on Long Island and the whole New York City region? How can you bring dialogue, with honesty and a real commitment to action, to bear on these challenges? How will you respond to the plea of Pope Francis: “That we may take good care of creation –a gift freely given– cultivating and protecting it for future generations.” A first impression might be that the Pope is talking about the Amazon rainforest or about desertification in Africa and Asia – but now realize that *Laudato si’* is also about the endangered shorelines of Long Island.

Laudato si’ does comment on various ways in which business can hurt people and the environment. A key passage, for instance, states that it is naïve to expect markets to solve all problems of poverty; and as was mentioned above, “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (§109). By contrast, a healthy economy with free and fair markets climaxes in the role of business as a vocation to care for our common home.

IV. Conclusion

The core social message of Pope Francis is that humanity is a single family, and we all share a common home to care for. In that home entrusted to us by the Creator, we must not repudiate our Father’s love by telling our sisters to scavenge for food and clothing in garbage dumps. We must not repudiate our Father’s love by letting our brothers lead unfulfilling lives while machines *replace men/women in the work place*.

Laudato si’ welcomes the environmental awareness growing world-wide, along with concern for the damage that is being done. And in spite of the enormous offenses as decried by Lincoln, the Pope keeps a hopeful outlook on the possibility of reversing the trend: “Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home... Men and women are still capable of intervening positively... All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also

⁷ Abp. Thomas G. Wenski of Miami, Letter to the United States Senate, 3.02.2016.

capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start” (§§ 13, 58, 205). *We received the world as garden-home; let us not bequeath a wilderness to our children and generations to come!*

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
President