

Five Years After *Laudato Si'*  
Where Are We Now?





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# Five Years After *Laudato Si'* Where Are We Now? Conference Proceedings



Edited by  
Zoran Turza and Miriam Mary Brgles



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## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	v
Cro <i>Laudato Si'</i> Conference Proceedings .....	x
A Good Society or A Society of Goods?	
The Findings of the <i>CRO Laudato Si'</i> Project on the Non-working Sunday .....	1
Integral Ecology, the Church and Theology .....	25
<i>Laudato Si'</i> : A Rudder for Just Development, Recovery and Resilience .....	49
The Social Doctrine of the Church and the Social Encyclical <i>Laudato Si'</i> :	
A Theological Perspective .....	67
The Biblical Perspective on Land in the Encyclical Letter <i>Laudato Si'</i> .....	87
The Lockdown Awakening as a Source for New Economic Models .....	103
What Everyone Should Know About Agriculture .....	119
Notes on the Editors and Contributors .....	xiii



## Introduction

Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home* from 2015 is an Encyclical that is no less relevant today than it was on initial publication. In truth, it seems that its true moment in time has yet to come. The significance of this Encyclical is not in its excellent natural, scientific and theological elucidation, but in the fact that all the issues it mentions are observed in one comprehensive and complete perspective. There are three important ideas in the Encyclical that complement one another: the importance of the dialogue between reason and faith, universal unity and the connection between economy, ecology and poverty.<sup>1</sup> In addition, *Laudato Si'* simultaneously touches upon the very essence of the issue that rests inside us all.

The consequences of climate change are not an issue *per se* for Pope Francis, but they are a pressing issue due to the fact that they concern the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. Care for the marginalized, the vulnerable and the poor is not only at the centre of his pontificate but reflects his general course of action in everyday life, primarily as a person and citizen of our planet, but also as a believer, a monk, a priest, later an archbishop, a cardinal and finally as a pope. Pope Francis takes Saint Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan spirit and way of life as a model, which has been evident throughout his entire pontificate; and the visible 'seal' is precisely the name of choice of the Roman Bishopric (Francis), as well as the title of the Encyclicals *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, which directly refer to St Francis of Assisi. In this context, the care for our common home is the care for the vulnerable *par excellence*. It is about the so-called 'planetary injustice' (comp. LS 48-52), that is to say, it concerns the fact that the people who suffer the most from the consequences of climate change are the same people who participate the least in causing them. Following the imprint of his predecessors, Pope Francis takes a gentle and yet unequivocal approach: the care for our common home entails the care for one's brother and sister. One of the key ideas of the Encyclical is that man is a being in relation to God, their fellow men and their country (comp. LS 66). In this context, a Christian is a person who fulfils their call to holiness through these three relations. In his Message for the World Day of Peace on January 1, 1990, Saint John Paul II emphasized that the care for the environment is a Christian obligation: "I should like to address directly my brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church, in order to remind them of their serious obligation to care for all of Creation. The commitment of believers to a healthy environment for everyone stems directly from their belief in God the Creator, from their recognition of the effects of

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<sup>1</sup> Comp. Turza, Z., Tomić, M., Šuća, M., Zujčić, P. (2021). "How to read Pope Francis's Encyclical *Laudato Si'*?" From Dialogue to Togetherness and Connection." *Diacovensia* 29 (2021, 112).

original and personal sin, and from the certainty of having been redeemed by Christ”<sup>2</sup> (No. 16). The phrasing is simple and succinct: being a person and being a Christian implies taking care of a common home.

Faced with these facts and the urgent call of Pope Francis “to renew the dialogue on how we are shaping the future of our planet” (LS 14), a small number of enthusiasts, scientists, students, monks and nuns launched a project entitled *CRO Laudato Si’ – Caring for Our Home* (abbreviated as *CROLAUDATOSI*) at the Catholic University of Croatia in cooperation with the Croatian National Fraternity of the Franciscan Secular Order (FSO) and the Franciscan Youth (FY) of Croatia. The aim of this project was to encourage all those who are interested in the various activities that can contribute positively to the preservation of the environment and the development of a culture of sustainability to come together in the spirit of collaboration. The project was carried out from December 2019 to June 2021 and consisted of scientific and professional activities. As part of the project, two scientific research proposals were organised. In the first quarter of the project, the initial piece of research on the non-working Sunday was conducted using the survey method in parallel with the practical activity of respecting the non-working Sunday. The second survey dealt with attitudes toward and opinions on Pope Francis’s pontificate, as well as general tendencies and the willingness to change habits that pertained to care for the preservation of the environment and for those in need. The survey was conducted in the second and third quarters of the project; the focus groups were held in the final quarter. The research was characterized by great synergy among the members of the project team and those of the FSO and FY, among whom 65 interviewers were recruited. The interviewers were first trained and then conducted the research in the field across various parts of Croatia together with a large number of students from various departments at the Catholic University of Croatia who actively participated in individual stages of the groundwork. In addition to the research, the project became an integral part of the year-long work of FSO and FY members, who read, studied and discussed the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* within their communities and who carried out project activities from December 2020 to May 2021; among other initiatives, these activities included saving electricity and reducing the use of plastic in the household.<sup>3</sup> As part of the

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<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II (1990). *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*. No. 16. Retrieved on November 22, 2022, from [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html).

<sup>3</sup> See more here: Brgles, M. M. (2020) Project *CRO Laudato Si’*. Presentation of scientific and practical activities. In: Baloban, S. & Petrović Štefanac, D. (Eds.), *Laudato Si’! How to Change Your Lifestyle?* (pp. 198-217) Zagreb, Centre for the Promotion of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Christian Present. Also: Brgles, M. M., Turza, Z., & Žagmešter, M. (2022). The *CRO Laudato Si’* Project: Goals, Activities and Social Outcomes. *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae*, 19(4), 27–37. Retrieved on November 22, 2022, from <https://czasopisma.uksw.edu.pl/index.php/seb/article/view/9579>.



project, three scientific conferences were held at the Catholic University of Croatia. The first scientific conference was scheduled in January 2020 and entitled ‘Alliance Between Humanity and the Environment’; in May of the same year, a conference with international participation entitled ‘Five Years After *Laudato Si*. Where Are We Now?’ was held; and in June 2021, an international scientific conference entitled ‘*Laudato Si*’ – Toward Climate and Social Justice’ concluded the Cro*LaudatoSi*’ Project. In addition, as part of the final scientific conference, there was an exhibition of photographs by Dražen Zetić entitled ‘Sister of Water’.

This collection comprises seven papers that are the result of the May 2020 conference. Entitled ‘Five Years After *Laudato Si*. Where Are We Now?’, during this conference there was a concerted effort to evaluate the scope of scientific, professional and pastoral activity five years after the publication of the Encyclical *Laudato Si*. The authors of these seven papers provide their own perspective on a particular facet of this evaluation.

In *A Good Society or A Society of Goods? The Findings of the CRO Laudato Si’ Project on the Non-working Sunday*, Miriam Mary Brgles and Ivana Brstilo Lovrić present the problem of the non-working Sunday. The first part of the paper presents a chronology of events related to the initiatives for the non-working Sunday in Croatia, with specific reference to the lockdown period during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the second part, the authors present the results of their research on the non-working Sunday, carried out as the first scientific activity as part of the Cro*LaudatoSi*’ Project, which was accompanied in the field by the practical activity of observing Sunday as a non-working day. This important social issue remains current and open to debate in Croatian society. The current consumer society represents a society of goods; it is our position that by legislating the non-working Sunday, this society would strengthen into a *good* society, a premise that has a sound basis in one of the main principles of Catholic Social Teaching: the common good.

In his work, Fabien Revol explains how the Encyclical *Laudato Si*’ has influenced recent theological research and the life of the Catholic Church in general up until 2020. The author has systematically presented newly created institutions and projects inspired by *Laudato Si*’. He has emphasized several important theological conclusions, highlighting the social nature of the Encyclical and the importance of the Theology of Creation to understand the relationship between man and nature. Professor Revol is firmly convinced that the Encyclical *Laudato Si*’ is not a passing trend in the Catholic Church, but rather an important long-term project that through additional philosophical and theological research will attain even greater depth.

Slađana Lovrić begins with the thesis that during the time of the health pandemic the Encyclical *Laudato Si*’ became more important than ever as it encourages the reconsideration

of our fundamental values. Following a brief presentation of the most important messages of *Laudato Si'*, the author focuses on the combined action and research of various social categories that can achieve significant results at different levels through a joint effort in dealing with the consequences of climate change. In particular, Lovrić emphasizes the principal role Catholic organizations continue to play in this effort, with a focus on the broader initiatives of the European *Laudato Si'* Alliance (ELSiA) together with those already being implemented at the local Croatian level.

Dubravka Petrović Štefanac presents several main features of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* from the perspective of the Social Doctrine of the Church. It is the first social Encyclical of Pope Francis, one which the author places in the rich tradition of previous social Encyclicals. At the same time, she observes that two features stemming from the Church's social doctrine are of particular interest to Pope Francis in this Encyclical: integral human development and options for the poor. Ultimately, she emphasizes the importance of creating long-term plans that will enable the realization of integral human development at various levels.

Beginning with the Biblical Theology of Creation, Đurica Pardon observes that in the biblical corpus, especially the Book of Genesis, we find theological starting points for the proper understanding of man and his relationship to Creation. The author believes that in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis also serves to emphasize the importance of understanding the relationship between man and creation as one of the fundamental human relations. In her discussion, the author focuses on the importance of the term 'land' in biblical theology as well as the relationship of man to the land. Through the principle of the 'theology of land' that she develops in her work, the author contends that the relationship towards the land equips the believer for adequate application of theological, political and moral principles in everyday life.

Domagoj Sajter posits the thesis that, among other things, the global pandemic for many meant the exposure of the weaknesses of a capitalist economy and the simultaneous expectation that economists would offer a more favourable economic model as an alternative solution. The author maintains that economic models do not change overnight but over a longer period and in a broader context, one in which there is a clash among not only the existing economic models but also different principles, social concepts and beliefs. After analysing the primary features of the capitalist economy, the author also outlines the main facets of the alternative economic models that became apparent during the coronavirus pandemic.

Ivica Kisić and Aleksandra Perčin present the basic features of industrial and alternative agriculture. The authors argue that the conventional agriculture industry, which is focused on high-yielding cultivars and hybrids, modern and intensive agrotechnics, the application of

pesticides and mineral fertilizers, loses its traditional self-sufficiency and causes more environmental problems than it brings hope for a sustainable future. The irony of our time is that the production of food brings famine and makes land infertile. Sustainable and diversified agriculture, organic agriculture, permaculture, agroforestry, urban agriculture are presented, explained and emphasized as the important ways of alternative forms of growing food.

In the meantime, at the Catholic University of Croatia we had initiated and carried out several other activities for the purpose of promoting the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*. An elective course entitled 'Integral Ecology' was launched in the 2019/2020 academic year; our university community formally joined the *Laudato Si'* Action Platform and thus began to participate in the seven-year journey initiated by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The translation of all the texts on the website <https://laudatosiactionplatform.org> into Croatian is already underway and, finally, together with the Centre for the Promotion of Social Doctrine of the Church of the Croatian Bishops' Conference through the Department of Social Doctrine of the Church at the Catholic Faculty of Theology at the University of Zagreb, we launched a lifelong learning programme entitled '*Laudato Si'*! Through Dialogue to Integral Ecology'; thirty participants from all over Croatia have successfully completed this course in the past academic year.

While the global pandemic is slowly waning, we are now witnessing the escalation of the war in Ukraine, an energy crisis and the dire consequences of accelerated climate change, all of which provide an opportunity to review thoroughly the values on which our societies rest and decide together how we want to establish our own future and the future of our successors. Pope Francis's Encyclical *Laudato Si'* can therefore be a relevant guide for the most effective and comparatively painless way for us to navigate a path out of present and potential crises. We pray that the reader will find the incentives contained in this collection of papers to be of some help along that path.

Zagreb, December 18, 2022

Zoran Turza and Miriam Mary Brgles



***Five Years After Laudato Si'. Where Are We Now?***  
**Academic Conference with International Participation**

**Catholic University of Croatia**

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Microsoft Teams  
Friday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

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Catholic University of Croatia

**Keynote Speech**

Luigino Bruni, PhD, LUMSA University, Rome  
*Laudato Si', Economy and Covid-19*

## Panel 1

### ***Where Are We Now? Integral Ecology, Practice and Energy***

Fabien Revol, PhD, Catholic University of Lyon

*Integral Ecology, Church and Theology*

Andreja Sršen, PhD, Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb

*From an Ecological Conversation to an Ecological Citizenship –*

*The Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' and Integral Ecology after Five Years*

Domagoj Sajter, PhD, Faculty of Economics, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek

*Lockdown Awakening: Alternative Economic Models*

Julije Domac, PhD, Regional Energy Agency North-West Croatia (REGEA)

*Europe, Energy and Laudato Si'*

## Panel 2

### ***Where Are We Now? Laudato Si', Church and Connection***

Ivana Brstilo Lovrić, PhD, and Miriam Mary Brgles, PhD, Catholic University of Croatia

*A Good Society or A Society of Goods?*

*The Findings of the CRO Laudato Si' Survey on the (Non)-working Sunday*

Vlodymyr Scheremeta, PhD,

Chief of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Office for Ecology

*Church Service in Care for Our Common Home –*

*Five Years after the Laudato Si' Encyclical Letter*

Zoran Turza, PhD, Catholic University of Croatia

*Crisis: A Chance for Connection*



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## **A Good Society or A Society of Goods?**

### **The Findings of the *CRO Laudato Si'* Project on the Non-working Sunday**

#### **Abstract**

This paper analyses the topic of the non-working Sunday in the trade sector in Croatian society. It details a decades-long chronology that shows the opposition of entrepreneurial initiatives to public opinion and the demands of the civil sector, primarily from the trade unions and church associations. Several attempts to regulate this issue will be addressed with specific reference to the COVID-19 pandemic context together with previous research findings on the subject. We then focus on presenting the original empirical findings on the non-working Sunday collected within the ‘*CRO Laudato Si'* Project’, which corresponds to previous findings that most Croatian citizens, especially Catholic believers, support the idea of regulating work on Sunday to sustain the prevailing context of social well-being and religious freedom versus the economic criteria of profitability and market freedoms. To that extent, the title embodies the dilemma as to whether a good society or a society of goods represents the essence of this long-term struggle in Croatian society, the outcome of which has yet to be determined.

#### **Keywords**

non-working Sunday, trade sector, Croatian society, social well-being, *CRO Laudato Si'* research

## Introduction

The issue of the non-working Sunday within the trade sector has been present and controversial in Croatian society for several decades. Through the chronology of the non-working Sunday, in this paper we parallel a society of goods that places priority on the consumer mentality and a good society that respects the well-being of its citizens. We associate contemporary Croatian society with the progressive trend of liberalizing working hours within the trade sector, which as a stakeholder in the culture of consumption, follows the discourse of consumer rights and individual freedom of choice, leaving behind workers' rights and the idea of social welfare and the common good. The concept of a common good considers not only the objective but also the subjective side of labour and requires that each worker in the multifarious relations that constitute his or her working environment feels that their humanity is being respected and recognized (Buttiglione, 2019). However, "it is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within" (CV 7). Therefore, the arguments of a good society are opposed to the concept of a society of goods as a society primarily based on economic criteria such as economic growth or GDP. "Societies are constituted not only according to common ends, but also by a shared structure or intrinsic common good" (Hittinger, 2008, p. 93).

The issue is inversely complex. "The task of determining what the common good is has generally not been presented as a simple one. We could say that the concept of social justice is easier to think of and imagine than is that of the common good. And yet without the common good, social justice would have no object" (Alvira, 2008, p. 605). The title of the paper is therefore not only a linguistic figure and reference on the 'common good' as a critical concept of Catholic Social Teaching<sup>1</sup>, but also a paradigmatic shift, primarily because we link social sustainability and well-being to the perspective of a 'free' Sunday.

In this paper we present the most important initiatives for the non-working Sunday in Croatia, as well as an overview of thematic research and a presentation of the results of the original empirical research conducted within the CRO *Laudato Si'* project that was approved by the Catholic University of Croatia. As Turza (2019) states, all of the project activities and scientific research were based on three principles: the principle of grounding the doctrine of Catholic Social Teaching; the principle of the connection of an ecological crisis with a human crisis; and the concern for the dignity of every person from conception to natural death. The

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<sup>1</sup> The 'common good' is defined as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily" (KKC 1906). For more on the roots of the concept within Catholic Social Teaching, see MM 56, 65, 78-81; 151; CV 7, CCCC 407-410, Siegmund (2019).



main goal of the project was to draw attention to the importance of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) by Pope Francis and, following the instructions of the Encyclical, to encourage project partners as well as other stakeholders in the Republic of Croatia to carry out project activities, and among other aspects of the discussion, to address the importance of the non-working Sunday initiative in Croatian society<sup>2</sup>. The scientific activities within the project lasted until June 2021, while the practical tasks were conducted from December 2019 to June 2020 in cooperation with the National Fraternity of the Franciscan Secular Order (FSO)<sup>3</sup> and the Franciscan Youth (FY). Respect for the non-working Sunday<sup>4</sup> was the first practical undertaking of the project; it was carried out from December 10, 2019 to January 31, 2020 and inspired by the last chapter of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, in which Pope Francis speaks of the importance of the day of rest, which awakens within us a “new sensitivity to the rights of others” (LS 237)<sup>5</sup>.

The following is an overview of the events pertaining to the non-working Sunday in Croatian society.

### **Chronology of the non-working Sunday in Croatia**

In an historical sense, Sunday was declared a non-working day in the year 321, which means it was set aside as a day of rest and social gathering. In a more contemporary context, the idea of the non-working Sunday continued to prevail in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries for secular reasons and was regulated in a number of western countries, primarily because it was understood that the entire economic system benefitted from a rested worker (Mravunac, 2014, pp. 160-161). The modern era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by a progressive liberalization of working hours within the trade sector, which we discuss in this paper through the example of Croatia.

Early in Croatia's independence, from the mid-1990s onward, the extension of store opening hours, including Sundays and holidays, has been the subject of repeated criticism and debate. This period symptomatically coincides with the opening of the first shopping centres in the country. For this reason, Croatian Caritas and the Franciscan Institute for the Culture of Peace, together with trade unions and other civil society organizations, organized a citizens' petition in 2003 that collected over 300,000 signatures for the suspension of working on

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<sup>2</sup> For more on the project, see Brgles (2020); for more on the results of the second research within the project, see Brgles et al. (2022).

<sup>3</sup> For more on FSO, see Wicks (2011).

<sup>4</sup> For more on the holiness of Sunday and the importance of the civil recognition of Sunday as a feast day, see CCCC 453 and 454.

<sup>5</sup> Catholic Social Teaching has a long tradition of speaking on the dignity of work and workers, from Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) to Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* (2020).

Sundays, which was realized in 2004 through the Trade Act.<sup>6</sup> Thus Sunday officially became a non-working day in the country, albeit with possible exceptions, such as during the tourist season.

However, this change was in effect for a few months only. Several employers sent a collective letter of complaint to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, contending that such a law violates their market equality within the trade sector, an argument that was ultimately upheld by the Court itself. They also disputed the legal criteria of the sales area, terms such as ‘tourist season’ or ‘needs’ and the procedure for issuing Sunday work permits based on the annual scheduling decision of shifts according to the number of inhabitants of the settlement or place. Among other explanations of the eventual verdict, it was pointed out that the issue of working hours in the Republic of Croatia depend on the will of the legislator and as such cannot be subject to assessment of constitutionality, that the Constitutional Court alone is empowered to examine whether prescribed legal measures are commensurate with protected constitutional values (Brstilo Lovrić & Škomrlj, 2020, p. 801).

Efforts to regulate this issue continued during the following years. In 2009, a clause on Sunday as a non-working day in the Croatian trade sector was formally included in the Trade Act. Similar to the first attempt in 2004, the second was also short-lived and followed a similar pattern. Once again, the united employers and representatives of several companies filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia seeking the withdrawal of the measure.<sup>7</sup> The Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the complaint, and despite the fact that it comprises far too many exceptions to the non-working Sunday clause, favouring some employers while disrupting others in fair market competition, it was upheld, thus leaving the working Sunday in Croatia to the (in)visible hand of the market once again (Žižić, 2015, pp. 298-300).

After these two legal challenges, a third attempt to regulate the non-working Sunday in Croatia has intensified in more recent years. Thus, in 2018, the ‘Croatian Sunday Alliance’ was founded<sup>8</sup> and co-signed by unions, trade union organizations, various academic institutions, religious communities and civic associations. In addition, numerous conferences, round tables, presentations and discussions were systematically organized with an emphasis on scientific

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this topic, see the “Franjevački institut za kulturu mira. Neradna nedjelja. Rad trgovina nedjeljom trgovanje je ljudima” webpage: <http://franjevacki-institut.hr/aktivnosti/radnici/neradna-nedjelja/24>.

<sup>7</sup> The document *Odluka Ustavnog suda Republike Hrvatske broj: U-I-642/2009 i dr. od 19. lipnja 2009* is available on the following webpage: [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2009\\_07\\_76\\_1857.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2009_07_76_1857.html).

<sup>8</sup> For more on this subject, see the “Savez samostalnih sindikata Hrvatske. Osnovan Hrvatski savez za nedjelju” webpage: <http://www.sssh.hr/hr/vise/nacionalne-aktivnosti-72/osnovan-hrvatski-savez-za-nedjelju-3409>.

arguments in articulating and promoting the idea of the non-working Sunday across Croatian society (Brstilo Lovrić & Škomrlj, 2020, p. 802).

An important contribution to the discussion was provided by the survey *Attitudes and Experiences of Citizens Related to Work on Sunday*<sup>9</sup> (2017) on a nationally representative sample of adults conducted on behalf of the Franciscan Institute for the Culture of Peace. The survey found the majority of respondents (70%) support the regulation of the non-working Sunday in Croatia. They also identified family lunch, socialising with friends, going out into nature or attending church under ‘usual Sunday activity’, while shopping (e.g., grocery and otherwise) was at the bottom of the activities listed as typical for a Sunday. The majority (73%) pointed out that to sustain harmonious and good family relations, it is extremely important for the family to be together on a Sunday, and that they would be mostly or extremely bothered if their family member was obliged to work on Sundays (55%), or if they themselves were forced to work on a Sunday (68%). More than half (64%) of those surveyed said that working Sundays are bad for society because this requirement makes it difficult to reconcile family with business obligations and the need for free time; they regarded this constraint as a pure exploitation of workers (58%), believing that no one should be obliged to work on a Sunday, with the notable exception of those employed by emergency services (57%). The relationship between work on Sunday and religious practice was emphasized, with the result that most respondents agreed either completely or mostly that work on Sunday is morally wrong because some believers cannot live in accordance with their faith (58%) and that it encourages and indeed increases additional consumption and the indebtedness of citizens (57%).

These and other theses on the social importance of the non-working Sunday have been addressed in *Free Sunday*<sup>10</sup> (2019) through the research of Marijana Petir, a former member of the European Parliament, in which the majority of respondents (82%) supported the idea of the non-working Sunday in all shops in Croatia; most emphasized that Sunday should be set aside as a day for the family. Regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics, there were more supporters than opponents of the non-working Sunday among respondents. A discussion on the personal religious dimension of Sunday can be found in the research of Ivica Žižić (2015), which was published in the monograph *Sunday. A Holiday Ethos in the Faith and Life of*

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this subject, see “Franjevački institut za kulturu mira: ‘Stavovi i iskustva građana vezana uz rad nedjeljom’” in the original Croatian title: <http://franjevacki-institut.hr/sadrzaj/pdf/2017-11-23-08-34-1312-.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this subject, see the “Sindikat trgovine Hrvatske. Istraživanje zastupnice u Europskom parlamentu Marijane Petir u suradnji sa Promocijom Plus ‘Slobodna nedjelja’” webpage: <https://www.sth.hr/dat/dat10.pdf>.

*Catholics. Cultural-anthropological Research*.<sup>11</sup> Among the general public, this topic is represented in several areas of commercial research, including RTL's "Banning Working Sundays"<sup>12</sup> (2020) within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following these studies, the far-reaching social and cultural significance of the non-working Sunday is emphasized, while from a sociological point of view, its social functionality can also be determined. Several documents<sup>13</sup> and current research have often been referred to in these discussions, including the article 'Work on Sunday and Quality of Life', which was published in the *Free Sunday – A Vanishing Culture?*<sup>14</sup> (2014) study. This interdisciplinary scientific research is specific because it was based on the experiences of workers in the trade sector with working experience on Sundays. It has been shown that the topic of Sunday work raises a number of issues related to labour rights, such as unrecorded and unpaid overtime hours that contribute to the 'grey economy'; these legal ambiguities favour a specific entrepreneurial faction and thereby reinforce workers' perceptions of social exclusion based on the premise that neither the state nor their employers are concerned for their welfare. It was also stated that labour inspectors themselves do not work on Sundays and that some workers were forced to withdraw their initial statements or lawsuits due to internal pressure from their employers. The workers pointed out that they feel, in their words, like 'poor, miserable people' who are forced to work on Sundays when most other citizens are free. The participants also commented on the importance of the free Sunday from a religious perspective, as most of them are practicing Catholics. They stated that, due to the working Sunday, as believers they suffered appreciable difficulty in attending Holy Mass or were prevented altogether, which is a clear violation of the constitutionally guaranteed civil right to the freedom of religion. The free Sunday proved important to participants in other religions as well: as a day that has a cultural and civilizational background on which most members of society are deemed 'free', most social services such as kindergartens, schools and public services are closed to the public. The workers claimed that nothing can replace their free Sunday, which is irreducible to them and cannot be transferred to another day off during the week, when most members of their families would be working

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<sup>11</sup> *Nedjelja. Blagdanski etos u vjeri i životu katolika. Kulturno-antropološko istraživanje* is the original title of the book.

<sup>12</sup> More on this topic is available on "RTL. Promocija Plus za RTL ekskluzivno: Što građani misle o radu trgovina nedjeljom? Čak 60 posto trajno bi ga zabranilo!":<https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/novosti/hrvatska/3814019/ekskluzivno-istrazivanje-sto-gradjani-misle-o-radu-trgovina-nedjeljom-cak-60-posto-trajno-bi-ga-zabranilo/>.

<sup>13</sup> Documents from church circles such as *Nedjelja dan Gospodnji i dan blagdanskog počinka* (1997) - *Sunday, the Lord's Day and the Day of Holiday Rest*; *Nedjelja radi čovjeka* (2004) – *Sunday, the Working Man's Day*; *Kultura nedjelje i dostojanstvo radnika* (2005) - *Sunday Culture and the Dignity of Workers* provide a systematic contribution to the actualization of the topic of the non-working Sunday in Croatian society.

<sup>14</sup> *Slobodna nedjelja – kultura u nestajanju?* (Eds. Gordan Črpić & Mijo Džolan) is the original title of the book.

anyway. Workers also commented on the behaviour of citizens who often quickly adopted the consumer pattern, thinking mostly of their own comfort, often addressing them either from a superior position, a ‘high ground’ as it were, or through pity that they should have to work on a Sunday, while at the same time contributing to this reality by buying small items on Sundays. Therefore, according to workers, work on Sundays is not socially necessary and they appealed to the social contract regarding its regulation. The authors concluded that Sunday work neither contributes to the individual nor the social well-being because it leads to a consumerist lifestyle that glorifies the liberal model of work and consumption, a model that excludes workers (and their families!) while deepening social divisions, thereby disintegrating the social capital within Croatian society (Batinić et al., 2014, pp. 15-40). This research also connected the non-working Sunday to the paradigm of quality of life as a theoretical and empirical framework that includes a number of parameters in the assessment of individual and social well-being. Bearing in mind the global crisis connected to the Covid-19 pandemic and its context, it has been concluded that economic indicators, such as the level of GDP, are neither the most important nor the sole criteria for social development (Dorotić, 2014, pp. 41-54). More on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the non-working Sunday in Croatia is discussed in the following paragraph.

### **An update on the non-working Sunday during the Covid-19 pandemic**

During the Covid-19 pandemic in Croatia, the issue of the non-working Sunday acquired legal-political connotations, settling into one of the ‘hot’ topics based on several decisions of the Civil Protection Directorate of the Republic of Croatia.

The first decision took place at the end of April<sup>15</sup> when the national Civil Protection Directorate passed a resolution<sup>16</sup> on the regulation of working hours and methods of working in trade during the period initially declared as a ‘Covid-19 epidemic’. Thus, working Sundays in stores, just as holidays and non-working days, was suspended. As an exception to the law, only newsstands, bakeries (also bread and bakery shops) and petrol station shops were allowed to operate.

While this decision on the non-working Sunday was in force, many of those associated with the media and politics commented that it was a manipulative political strategy, particularly

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<sup>15</sup> April 27, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> More on this topic is available at *Koronavirus. Odluka o radnom vremenu i načinu rada u djelatnosti trgovine za vrijeme trajanja proglašene epidemije bolesti COVID-19*: [https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%C5%A0TITA/PDF\\_ZA%20WEB/Odluka%20-%20djelatnost%20trgovine.pdf](https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%C5%A0TITA/PDF_ZA%20WEB/Odluka%20-%20djelatnost%20trgovine.pdf).

in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections, stressing that the suspension of working Sundays was used as a means of catering to the ruling party's conservative electorate.<sup>17</sup>

Further changes followed a month later<sup>18</sup> when the Civil Protection Directorate, due to a more favourable epidemiological context, put into force a new measure on the time and manner of work in stores, thus re-legitimizing work on Sundays in stores, or rather, returning it to a pre-pandemic practice.<sup>19</sup> The development of this situation is still the subject of intense debate in Croatian society due to the decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia from September<sup>20</sup> stating that suspension of the non-working Sunday by the directorate due to the coronavirus epidemic was illegal.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that this was the only decision of the directorate in the pandemic context that was disputed.

The Constitutional Court stated that the purpose of the need to suspend the working Sunday and its justification was not clearly indicated, given its impact on the economic life of the country. To that extent, the constitutional decision pointed out that entrepreneurial freedom may be restricted by law as an exception to protect the interests and security of the Republic of Croatia, nature, the human environment and human health, which is not affected or adjusted by this suspension measure. In this regard, the Court failed to link this previous measure with the protection of workers' rights, even on consideration of the aforementioned aspect of human health; however, they did take into account the economic importance of working on a Sunday, as well as various aspects of possible discrimination against entrepreneurs and traders.

It was observed that such a measure is neither legitimate nor necessary in a democratic society, that the protection of workers can be achieved by other, different measures that would then interfere less with entrepreneurial freedom. Moreover, it was acknowledged that the legal restriction of working Sundays imposed an excessive burden on entrepreneurs and traders.

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<sup>17</sup> More on this topic is available at "Telegram. Kako je, zbog HDZ-ove zabrane rada nedjeljom pred izbore, Stožer postao žrtvom političke manipulacije": <https://www.telegram.hr/price/kako-je-zbog-hdz-ove-zabrane-rada-nedjeljom-pred-izbore-stozer-postao-zrtvom-politicke-manipulacije/>. Also, more information can be found on the webpage "Index. Reakcije na zabranu rada nedjeljom, Huić: Provodi se ono što nije prošlo ranije": <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/reakcije-na-zabranu-rada-nedjeljom-huic-uvodi-se-ono-sto-nije-proslo-ranije/2177894.aspx> and on the webpage "RTL. GLAS žestoko kritizira: 'Zabrana rada nedjeljom je tipična HDZ-ovska štetočinska politika'": <https://www.rtl.hr/vijesti-hr/novosti/hrvatska/parlamentarni-izbori-2020/3823386/glas-zestoko-kritizira-zabrana-rada-nedjeljom-je-tipicna-hdz-ovska-stetocinska-politika/>.

<sup>18</sup> May 26, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> More on the document *Odluka o izmjeni Odluke o radnom vremenu i načinu rada u djelatnosti trgovine za vrijeme trajanja proglašene epidemije bolesti COVID-19* is available at [https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%C5%A0TITA/PDF\\_ZA%20WEB/Odluka%20oradnom%20vremenu%20i%20na%C4%8Dinu%20rada-26.5.2020.pdf](https://civilna-zastita.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/CIVILNA%20ZA%C5%A0TITA/PDF_ZA%20WEB/Odluka%20oradnom%20vremenu%20i%20na%C4%8Dinu%20rada-26.5.2020.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> September 14, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> More on the document *Odluka Ustavnog suda Republike Hrvatske broj: U-I-642/2009 i dr. od 19. lipnja 2009* is available on the webpage: [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2009\\_07\\_76\\_1857.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2009_07_76_1857.html).

One of the objections made against the suspension of the working Sunday was that it violated the constitutionally guaranteed right of equality of all religious communities before the law and that it favoured the worldview of the Catholic Church. At the same time, the right to freedom of religion for workers in the trade sector was *not* debated, despite the statistical fact that Croatian society is predominantly Roman Catholic. However, the discriminatory effects of the suspension measure were taken into account, pointing out that it led to inequality among certain groups of entrepreneurs and traders who are not allowed to work on Sundays when compared to those who are permitted to do so.

Further controversy in Croatian society over this issue is to be expected, as the Prime Minister has announced that a new ‘balanced’ law on the non-working Sunday will be proposed during his mandate, which will include a specified number of working weeks to reconcile family and work interests.<sup>22</sup>

## **Research methodology**

The research was conducted using a survey method in four cycles during the period from December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019 to February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. To monitor the continuity of project activities and respondents’ practices, especially in the form of encouraging change according to sustainable and socially engaged patterns, the implementation of the research was organized in several cycles. Such a format also enabled a better assessment of the effects of project activities.

The survey questionnaires were constructed online, within Google forms, and contained 21-27 questions that were the same for all four survey cycles; however, it should be stated that their number varied depending on the number of Sundays and holidays in the previous period. The questions were mostly close-ended with 2 or 3 open-ended questions; these also varied, depending on the number of Sundays and holidays.

The target sample (non-probabilistic, selected by convenience) included members of the National Fraternity of Franciscans Secular Order and the Franciscan Youth, together with other Catholic believers in Croatia aged 18 or over based on their engagement as partners in the project but also according to their Franciscan and secular identity<sup>23</sup>. The research sample in all four surveys was different: 276 (1<sup>st</sup> survey), 226 (2<sup>nd</sup> survey), 356 (3<sup>rd</sup> survey) and 299 (4<sup>th</sup> survey). The sample was homogeneous in structure: the religious population predominates,

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<sup>22</sup> More on this topic can be found at “Nacional. Vlada će tijekom mandata predložiti balansirani zakon o neradnoj nedjelji”: <https://www.nacional.hr/vlada-ce-tijekom-mandata-predloziti-balansirani-zakon-o-neradnoj-nedjelji/>.

<sup>23</sup> For more on their role in the contemporary life of the Catholic Church, see Pope Francis (2021).

which is a reflection of Croatia as a predominantly Catholic country; women prevailed as the more active members of the FY and FSO and therefore as project partners.

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Croatia. All participants signed a document of informed consent. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; respondents were provided with information about the goal and topic of the research along with the project itself. The collected data were to be used for professional and scientific purposes, with which the respondents were also familiar.

According to type, this research is correctly categorised as descriptive and explorative. The general aim of the research was to investigate the extent to which respondents regard and respect Sunday as a non-working day and to examine their habits and attitudes towards the non-working Sunday. According to the general purpose, specific research goals were derived

- to examine whether the respondents make purchases on Sundays and holidays during December, January and the entire calendar year;
- to determine the reasons for purchasing on Sundays and holidays;
- to determine whether the activity has spread among project partners (FSO and FY);
- to determine the territorial reach of project activities.

Excel was the software chosen for statistical analysis. The analysis concludes with a presentation of the results on the frequency and reasons for making purchases on Sundays and the attitudes of the respondents towards the non-working Sunday. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

## **Analysis of results**

The analysis will present the results in accordance with the general and specified aims of the research.

Taking into account the fact that the project activities related to the promotion of the non-working Sunday took place in cooperation with project partners and on consideration of the specified research objectives, we found that the research covered almost the entire country within two months (Figure 1) and that the number of members of the FSO and FY who followed the first project activity gradually grew.

Table 1 shows that in all four cycles of research more than 50% of respondents belong to these groups: 52.5% (1<sup>st</sup> survey), 69.9% (2<sup>nd</sup> survey), 63.2% (3<sup>rd</sup> survey) and 73.2% (4<sup>th</sup> survey). Thus, the number of FSO and FY members who participated in the survey increased by about 21% over a month and a half, which also shows that the project activity spread solidly among the project members.



**Figure 1**<sup>24</sup> *Territorial distribution of survey respondents*



**Table 1** *Research participants from FSO or FY*

<b>Membership</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> survey (%)</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> survey (%)</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> survey (%)</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> survey (%)</b>
<b>Yes</b>	52.5	69.9	63.2	73.2
<b>No</b>	47.5	30.1	36.8	26.8
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

According to the age shown in Table 2, the largest percentage of respondents—about a quarter or slightly less than a quarter in all four cycles of research—are the respondents aged from 45-54 years: 2.8% (1<sup>st</sup> survey), 19.9% (2<sup>nd</sup> survey), 23.9% (3<sup>rd</sup> survey) and 25.4% (4<sup>th</sup> survey). Due to the questionnaire being online, the lowest percentage of respondents in the age group over the age of 65 was to be expected, and yet their increased proportion from the first (3.3%) to the fourth (8.1%) research cycle is notable.

Table 3 shows that two thirds of respondents in all four surveys were women: 77.5% (1<sup>st</sup> survey), 75.2% (2<sup>nd</sup> survey), 76.7% (3<sup>rd</sup> survey) and 79.3% (4<sup>th</sup> survey), while the rest were men: 22.5% (1<sup>st</sup> survey), 24.8% (2<sup>nd</sup> survey), 23.3% (3<sup>rd</sup> survey) and 20.7% (4<sup>th</sup> survey).

<sup>24</sup> The map was created using GIS Software; partial support for the work was provided by Branimir Brgles.

**Table 2** *Age of respondents*

<b>Age</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> survey</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> survey</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> survey</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> survey</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>18-24</b>	19.2	28.3	22.7	24.1
<b>25-34</b>	21.0	21.7	13.5	11.4
<b>35-44</b>	24.6	14.6	18.0	15.1
<b>45-54</b>	22.8	19.9	23.9	25.4
<b>55-64</b>	9.1	11.1	15.7	15.3
<b>65+</b>	3.3	4.4	6.2	8.7
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

**Table 3** *Sex of respondents*

<b>Sex</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> survey</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> survey</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> survey</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> survey</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>Men</b>	22.5	24.8	23.3	20.7
<b>Women</b>	77.5	75.2	76.7	79.3
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

According to the data in Table 4 pertaining to the frequency of shopping on a Sunday, most respondents make purchases on Sundays as rarely as once in 3 months: 42.9% (4<sup>th</sup> survey) to 50.9% (2<sup>nd</sup> survey); the lowest percentage are those who frequently make purchases one or more times a month, from 11.5% (2<sup>nd</sup> survey) to 17.8% (1<sup>st</sup> survey). Those who stated that they never make purchases on Sundays range from 14.9% (1<sup>st</sup> survey) to 23.4% (4<sup>th</sup> survey).

According to the results of the fourth survey, in which the largest percentage of FSO and FY members participated, 31.1% of members rarely make a purchase on Sundays, 16.7% never make one, 16.7% sometimes make a purchase, and only 8.7% often make a purchase on Sundays. Therefore, the results suggest that members of FSO and FY purchase less frequently on Sundays than the other research participants (Table 5).

Although there is a general societal leniency towards making purchases on Sundays, results showed that most respondents support the free Sunday within the trade sector, which is recognized as the promotion of social well-being in Croatian society. Affirming that they feel uncomfortable<sup>25</sup> when shopping on Sundays, respondents provided explanations that included several arguments that are commensurate with the main principles of CST.

<sup>25</sup> The questionnaire states 'I feel uncomfortable when I buy on Sundays'.

### **a) Solidarity**

- “I’m angry with myself for not planning my time and obligations better, so I have to go shopping on Sundays. I don’t want to encourage the opening of stores on Sundays and when I shop on Sundays I do just that. I’m embarrassed for the shop workers who work so I can shop out of my forgetfulness, laziness or comfort.” (Respondent 13, 1<sup>st</sup> cycle)
- “Because I work on Sundays myself, I’m sorry for people who have to work on Sundays unnecessarily.” (Respondent 156, 1<sup>st</sup> cycle)
- “Because I’m aware that Sunday should be a non-working day, I feel a sense of shame in front of workers because I am with my family and they have to work.” (Respondent 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle)
- “And those people who work need a Sunday for their peace and family.” (Respondent 219, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle)
- “I stand in solidarity with the people who must work on Sundays. I think that if there are no customers, there will be no need to work on Sundays.” (Respondent 73, 4<sup>th</sup> cycle)

### **b) Social justice / Dignity of work**

- “Workers who work on Sundays are mostly denied a fair wage for their work.” (Respondent 251, 1<sup>st</sup> cycle)
- “Others work for me.” (Respondent 324, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle)
- “I feel discomfort because mothers and wives are not with their families, because they are humiliated in their right to a day off, because they are degraded and exploited by employers who pay them very little or nothing for working on Sundays. Be sure to stop work on Sundays.” (Respondent 6, 4<sup>th</sup> cycle)
- “I can’t know if those people who work on Sundays are adequately paid.” (Respondent 126, 4<sup>th</sup> cycle)

### **c) Religious freedom**

- “The day of the Lord should be celebrated, but others should also be able to celebrate.” (Respondent 156, 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle)
- “I consider it a day dedicated to God and family.” (Respondent 197, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle)
- “God’s commandment obliges us all to celebrate Sundays and holidays, and by purchasing on Sundays we confirm the need to have open shops and thus violate the right of employees to celebrate the Lord’s Day.” (Respondent 296, 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle)
- “Because it is a day dedicated to God and man, on that day everyone should be with their family.” (Respondent 262, 4<sup>th</sup> cycle)

The above comments represent individual opinions, but it can be concluded that these attitudes arise from religious affiliation and the practice of celebrating Sunday as the Lord’s Day within the parish community. These perspectives are commensurate with Church doctrine<sup>26</sup> and tradition.<sup>27</sup> As the results show, although religious respondents make purchases on Sundays, these are mostly rare practices, typically ‘once in three months’. It is therefore plausible to conclude that they consider it unnecessary to work on Sundays in the trade sector, which is contrary to those trends showing growth in consumption at the national level.<sup>28</sup>

More details on the frequency<sup>29</sup> of making purchases on a Sunday among respondents and members of FSO and FY are found in Tables 4 and 5.

**Table 4** *The frequency of buying on a Sunday during a calendar year*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> survey (%)</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> survey (%)</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> survey (%)</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> survey (%)</b>
<b>Often</b>	17.8	11.5	15.1	13.0
<b>Sometimes</b>	21.7	22.1	19.7	20.7
<b>Rarely</b>	45.7	50.9	44.1	42.9
<b>Never</b>	14.9	15.5	21.1	23.4
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

**Table 5** *The frequency of buying on a Sunday among members of FSO or FY (4<sup>th</sup> survey)*

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Often</b>	13.0
<b>Yes</b>	<b>8.7</b>
No	4.3
<b>Sometimes</b>	20.7
<b>Yes</b>	<b>16.7</b>
No	4.0
<b>Rarely</b>	42.8
<b>Yes</b>	<b>31.1</b>
No	11.7
<b>Never</b>	23.4

<sup>26</sup> For example, LS 127, MM 68-72.

<sup>27</sup> For example, *Exodus* 20: 8-10, 11. Retrieved from <https://biblia.com/bible/esv/exodus/20/8-11>.

<sup>28</sup> According to CBS data collected by the Household Budget Survey, total household consumption (expressed in HRK) has been increasing over the years: 74, 941 (2011), 81, 315 (2014), 82, 530 (2017) and 93, 522 (2019), but the share of the residue for food and non-alcoholic beverages is falling, although they still account for the highest share at 26.2% (2019), while over the years expenditures on transport and clothing and footwear have been growing (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> The questionnaire explained how frequency was viewed: *Often* (one or more times a month); *Sometimes* (6 to 10 times a year); *Rarely* (once in 3 months).

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>16.7</b>
	No	6.7
<b>Total</b>		100

During the holidays and seasonal sales in December and January, citizens spend more money than in other months.<sup>30</sup> During December, our respondents shopped the least on the last Sunday (December 29<sup>th</sup> (12.4%)), and the most on the second (December 15<sup>th</sup> (18.1%)).

During January, respondents shopped the most (18.1%) on the first Sunday and the least (11.4%) on the third Sunday of the month (Table 6 and Table 7). Only 5.3% of respondents shopped on St Stephen's Day (26 December), while 14% of respondents shopped on Epiphany, January 6 (Table 8).

**Table 6** *Shopping on Sunday in December 2019*

Shopping	Sunday, December 15 <sup>th</sup> (%)	Sunday, December 22 <sup>nd</sup> (%)	Sunday, December 29 <sup>th</sup> (%)
<b>Yes</b>	18.1	17.8	12.4
<b>No</b>	81.9	82.2	87.6
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

**Table 7** *Shopping on Sunday in January 2020*

Shopping	Sunday, January 5 <sup>th</sup> (%)	Sunday, January 12 <sup>th</sup> (%)	Sunday, January 19 <sup>th</sup> (%)	Sunday, January 26 <sup>th</sup> (%)
<b>Yes</b>	18.8	13.0	11.4	15.0
<b>No</b>	81.2	87.0	88.6	85.0
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

**Table 8** *Shopping on St Stephen's Day and Epiphany*

Shopping	St Stephen's Day (%)	Epiphany (%)
<b>Yes</b>	5.3	14.9
<b>No</b>	94.7	85.1
<b>Total</b>	100	100

As Epiphany in 2020 was a Monday and given the percentage (14.9%) of respondents who were shopping at the time, we were interested in their reasons, location and age structure. The results are shown in Tables 9, 10 and 11.

<sup>30</sup> In December 2019 and January 2020, all trade branches achieved growth. Accordingly, the total gross retail trade turnover increased by 5.9% in December 2019 (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2020a) and 8.4% in January 2020 (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2020b) in nominal terms, compared to the same month of the previous year.

For almost half of those surveyed (49.1%), the main reason was “to buy missing groceries,” and only 5.8% of respondents were buying “without a specific reason.” Most of those surveyed (38.1%) were shopping at a chain or convenience shop, and 31% at the bakery. Almost a third of respondents who shopped on Epiphany (27.2%) were in the youngest age group (18-24), and the lowest percentage (4.2%) pertained to the 25-34 age group. The results show that respondents in more mature age groups were shopping in a smaller percentage (up to 20% per age group) on Epiphany.

**Table 9** *Reasons for shopping on Epiphany*

Reason for shopping	%
<b>Buying missing groceries</b>	49.1
<b>Buying fresh groceries</b>	18.9
<b>Various reasons, none of the following</b>	13.2
<b>Lack of time to buy beforehand</b>	7.6
<b>It’s most convenient for me</b>	5.8
<b>Buying a gift, unexpected obligations</b>	3.8
<b>At the request of a friend or family</b>	1.9
<b>Total</b>	100

**Table 10** *Location of shopping on Epiphany*

Location of purchase	%
<b>Chain store/smaller shop</b>	38.1
<b>Bakery</b>	31.0
<b>Shopping mall</b>	12.8
<b>Gas station</b>	5.5
<b>Tobacco</b>	5.5
<b>Bakery and gas station</b>	1.8
<b>Bakery, tobacco and gas station</b>	1.8
<b>Shopping mall, chain store, bakery, tobacco, gas station</b>	1.8
<b>Chain store/smaller shop and bakery</b>	1.8
<b>Total</b>	100

**Table 11** *Shopping on Epiphany by age*

Buying	Age	Age	Age	Age	Age	Age	Total (%)
	18-24 (%)	25-34 (%)	35-44 (%)	45-54 (%)	55-64 (%)	65+ (%)	
<b>Yes</b>	27.2	4.2	17.2	14.1	5.4	13.7	14.9
<b>No</b>	72.8	95.8	82.8	85.9	94.6	86.3	85.1
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

## **Concluding remarks**

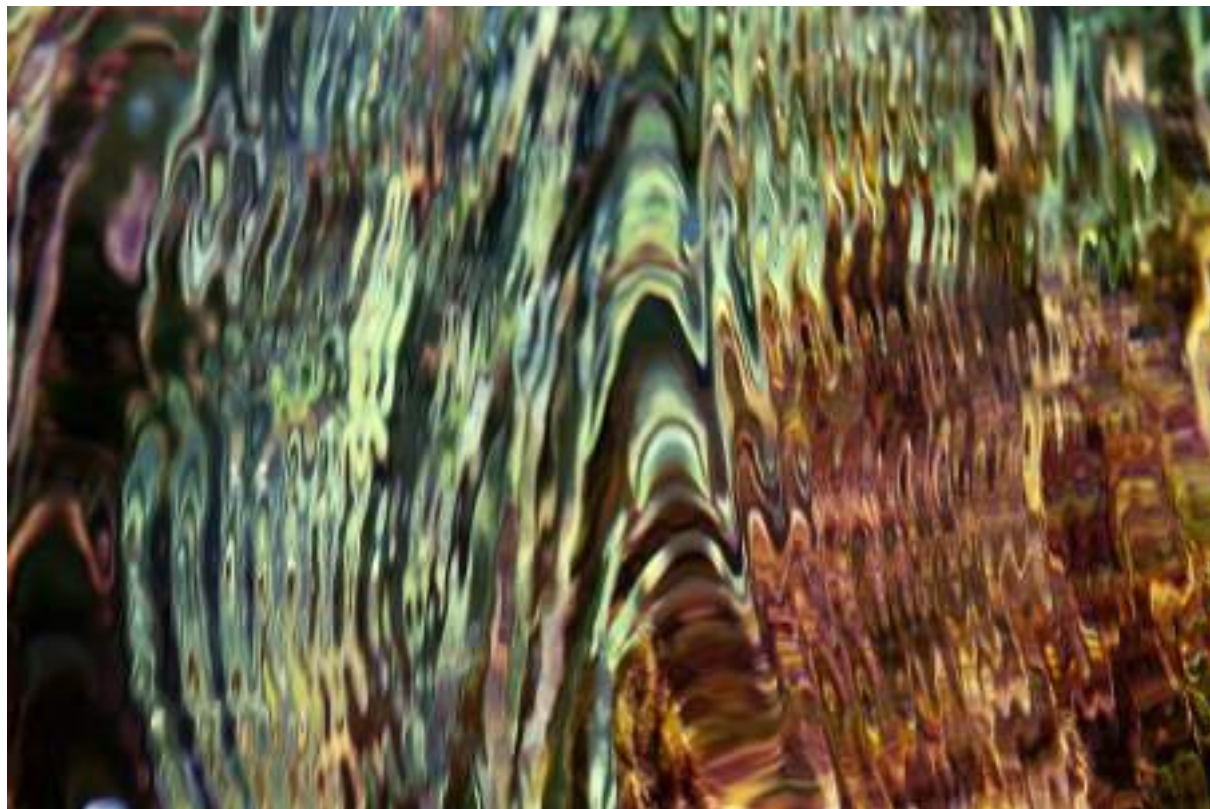
This article analyses the topic of the non-working Sunday in the trade sector of the Republic of Croatia. For more than two decades, numerous initiatives led by church associations and labour unions have systematically advocated the non-working Sunday in the Croatian trade sector.

Several scientific studies have indicated that the majority of citizens are in favour of the non-working Sunday. This topic amassed significant political connotations during the Covid-19 pandemic and the proclamation of quarantine in the country. In this context, in April 2020, through a resolution by the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, all stores and shopping centres were closed on Sundays and holidays. And yet after a month, more precisely in September of the same year, this resolution was withdrawn and the Constitutional Court of Croatia ruled that it was an unconstitutional measure, the only one of its kind out of all other pandemic measures. The issue of the non-working Sunday remains open and is still the subject of numerous controversies and disagreements at the political level.

The primary conclusion of this paper is that Catholic believers support the idea of regulating Sunday work in the trade sector on the premise of solidarity, social justice and the right to religious freedom. According to the specific research objectives regarding the consumer practices of the respondents here represented, our analysis showed that during the course of the year approximately half of those respondents make a purchase on a Sunday as rarely as once in three months. In January, some of them were shopping on Epiphany, mostly stating that the reason was due to a lack of groceries at home. Every other respondent visited a corner store or chain shop, the youngest respondents (18-24 years) being the most numerous group to do so on Epiphany. Although the sample used does not allow for a broad generalization, it nonetheless does show that active believers are in favour of the non-working Sunday in Croatia given the empirical fact that shopping on Sundays is not particularly widespread among them. A good many confirmed the application of the key principles of CST (solidarity, social justice/dignity of work and religious freedom) with regard to their perspective on the non-working Sunday.

When integrating the chronology of the non-working Sunday in Croatia with the CRO *Laudato Si'* research project findings, we observe an ideological and practical discrepancy between the society of goods and a good society. From that perspective, the issue of the non-working Sunday in Croatia is based upon opposing social commentary and its participants, including those from the civil sector, those led by trade unions and the Catholic Church, and those from several other religious organizations and numerous additional participants gathered from within the Croatian Free Sunday Alliance; contrary to this 'free Sunday' perspective, the representatives of various trade entities are strong advocates of the working Sunday model. The

title query is therefore not only a stylistic figure, but also a chronicle of the struggle that has been ongoing in Croatian society since the beginning of its independence, the end of which is not yet in sight.





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## **Integral Ecology, the Church and Theology**

### **Abstract**

The Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, published by Pope Francis on 24 May 2015, has deeply impacted the life of Christians, and especially those who are connected to the Catholic Church. All over the world, new interdisciplinary centres have been created for the study and the teaching of integral ecology. Research in the field of 'ecotheology', or the theology of ecology, has been stimulated, complemented by an ongoing renewal of the social teaching of the Catholic Church, most notably through Pope Francis's initiative in Amazonia. This shows how integral ecology is a vision of both Christian life and an efficient pontifical policy deploying many resources to address the numerous challenges our contemporary world faces. The enthusiasm with which people have become involved in this vision all over the globe, and the seriousness with which numerous Christian institutions both readily accepted and were deeply inspired by the subject of integral ecology, bear witness to a forthcoming paradigm shift. From theology to economic life through Catholic educational systems, universities, and NGOs, integral ecology and *Laudato Si'* are now among the fundamentals required for the building of the new world. This paper, through the experience of its author mainly situated in the context of France but connected to several international initiatives, attempts to depict the impact and the germ of renewal for both the Church and the inhabitation of our common home.

### **Keywords**

Integral Ecology, *Laudato Si'*, Church life, theological insights, reception

## Introduction

It is very difficult to assess the impact of the Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* (*LS*) both from the perspective of the Church and in the field of theology, and the reader should not, therefore, expect an exhaustive assessment in the present paper. The assessment is limited, for example, by its focus on France, thus reflecting the author's own position. Readers are also reminded that the primary assessment, though published in 2023, was undertaken in preparation for the 2020 conference on the subject and is therefore already somewhat outdated.

In the five years since the publication of *Laudato Si'*, there have been two phases of its reception within the Catholic Church. The first was an explosive movement of interest with an abundance of lectures, events, reading groups, conferences and the first wave of comments and reactions published in Catholic mass media and academic journals<sup>1</sup>. Those events had many different faces and were hosted by every kind of community from within the Church in parishes of all sizes, in Catholic schools, scouting movements, universities, colleges, dioceses, national conferences of bishops, chaplaincies, monasteries and so forth. Even protestant communities participated in this first phase of widespread interest (Revol, 2017, p. 13-31). One could even go so far as to conclude that the text was received more positively outside of the Catholic Church than within. For example, in France most of the leaders of the grassroots and national ecological movements explicitly invited their members to read and embrace the text (Lipietz, 2017, pp. 55-79).

The second phase involved both a lowering of the excitement and a deeper examination of the meaning of the Encyclical's relevance for the life of different ecclesial communities. In that period, the organized events typically consisted of programmes of study and reflection for the application of integral ecology within the institutions. This second phase coincided with the publication of the apostolic constitution for ecclesiastic universities *Veritatis Gaudium* (Pope Francis, 2017), a treatise on the application of integral ecology on the scale of university teaching and research, the realization of the Synod of Bishops of Amazonia (Pan-Amazon Synod, 2019; Pope Francis, 2019), and—in France—the appropriation by the bishops of a three-year programme of reflection.

I have identified five impact levels of *Laudato Si'* on the life of the Catholic Church: (1) at the level of pontifical policy; (2) at the level of theological research; (3) among Christian

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<sup>1</sup> I was both a witness to this first movement and a dedicated participant within, zealously disseminating the message of the Encyclical (Revol & Ricaud, 2015; Revol, 2017).



NGOs; (4) in daily church life; (5) and I will conclude with one example from the field of economic life.

### **At the level of pontifical policy**

Five years after *Laudato Si'*, we are now able to see the well-established deployment of a pontifical policy. The entire programme was already laid out in the first homily pronounced at the pontifical election of Pope Francis on 19 March 2013: each Catholic should be like Saint Joseph, that is, a good guardian of Christ. For us today, Francis explains that this implies being a good guardian of the Church, of our neighbour and of Creation, a steward of all God's gifts. And yet no one really discusses this text even though it contains the embryo of what would eventually grow into integral ecology (Pope Francis, 2013). The more evident starting point of the aforementioned deployment was the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, wherein Pope Francis outlined the foundation and theoretical principles of his policy. The latter is indeed oriented toward a global understanding of the Church's mission for the preaching of the Gospel with topics such as:

- The enculturation of faith and the Gospel;
- Social justice as a means of evangelization;
- The impossibility to disconnect social justice from environmental issues associated with a “throw away culture” (EG 53) applied both to social exclusion and pollution.

The latter is inspired by the young tradition of the theology of the people that has been developing in South America since the 1970s, especially in Argentina with the gathering of Medelin and Aparecida (see also the commentary of Juan Carlos Scannone SJ (2017), on the theological roots of Pope Francis).

*Evangelii Gaudium* also contains what we refer to today as the four rules of integral ecology (Lasida 2018, 86ss), which are the fruits of Bergoglio's study of the Italo-German philosopher and theologian Romano Guardini (1950)<sup>2</sup> (Scannone, 2017, p. 242-243): “the whole is greater than the part” (EG 237); “realities are more important than ideas” (EG 231); “unity prevails over conflict” (EG 228); and “time is greater than space” (EG 222).

In addition to the aforementioned core ideas that shaped Pope Francis's thinking, I want to emphasize four important theological inputs from *Laudato Si'*, but once again, they are by no means exhaustive.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the English text most quoted in *Laudato Si'*: Guardini, R. (1998). *The End of the Modern World*. Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books (see, for example LS 203). The original edition was published in 1950.

(a) As Pope Francis wrote, *Laudato Si'* is not an Encyclical on ecology but on social issues, which include ecological issues as well. This text belongs explicitly to the field of the social teachings of the Church (LS 15)<sup>3</sup>. But, and here is a major 'but': through the concept of integral ecology, we do not yet offer another concept for social teaching alongside the 'common good', 'subsidiarity', 'universal destination of goods', 'preferential option for the poor' and so on. Rather, integral ecology is intended to be a whole new paradigm through which all of the Church's social teachings must be reconsidered. This should actually be conducted through three major principles ingrained in scientific ecology, the theology of people and the theology of creation. The principle from ecology is "everything is connected" (LS 16). Philosophically speaking, it implies a new ontology based on the importance of interdependent interactions for the very essence of natural beings. Indeed, as Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'*: "Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop" (138). This is the very definition of the word 'ecology' given by Ernst Haeckel (1866, p. 286).

(b) The theology of people shows that social justice issues and ecological issues cannot be clearly distinguished. Given that the Creator's Word is expressed in all of Creation, these issues are interconnected. Our way of life is always influenced by the natural environment in which we live. Therefore, in a given local culture of a people, there is a wisdom at work that comes from this meeting and intimate relationship between humankind and nature. When one is suffering, so is the other. The same structures that produce social exclusion also produce ecological degradation. When the cry of the poor is raised, that of Creation is also raised, and in both there is some expression of the Creator's Word (QA 39).

(c) The role of the theology of creation is fundamental. To grasp its importance, we need to go back to the ground-breaking article "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis" by Lynn White Jr (1967, p. 1203-1207). In this analysis, White accuses the Occidental Church of being responsible for the ecological crisis due to the Church's anthropocentrism. Echoing White's warnings in chapters two and three of *Laudato Si'*, the pope shows how inaccurate ideas about human nature, including those supposedly derived from Christian teachings, can result in extremely negative ecological behaviour. He denounces the tendency of many modern Christian authors to give non-Christian interpretations on the theme of the dominion of Creation in Genesis 1:28 (LS 67). Above all, he denounces the modern notion of nature as a resource stock given for the sole use of human beings. For Pope Francis, modern anthropocentrism is not and cannot be the solution of the ecological crisis simply because it is, in essence, the cause.

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<sup>3</sup> See the comment of Loïc Lainé in "L'évolution du rapport à la nature dans l'enseignement social de l'Eglise" in F. Revol (Ed.). *Penser l'écologie dans la tradition catholique* (pp. 23-37). Genève: Labor et Fides.

With this in mind, in chapter two Francis also provides alternative images derived from Christian Revelation that can generate an authentic Christian ethics of ecology, which is integral ecology. He does so not merely by repeating tradition, but by taking into account contemporary research in the theology of ecology and validating the new research work by North American theologians and ecologists in particular (Barbour, 1973). This thoroughness notwithstanding, Pope Francis would likely acknowledge that this chapter is only an initial sketch<sup>4</sup>. To contribute to these exciting new developments, my colleagues of the Chaire Jean Bastaire and I produced a considerable volume of collective research work as early as 2018. This volume, echoing Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, is centred around the idea that a fundamental conversion is required in the way we think about creation if we are to develop a genuine integral ecology. Without this conversion, our thought process regarding the relationship between humankind and creation as a whole will inevitably be flawed (Revol, 2020).

(d) For this cause we have a positive path of instruction, and this is the fourth point: it is the consecration of Saint Francis of Assisi as a model for integral ecology (Revol, 2021). Following Pope Francis's predecessors, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, this fact pertains to the confirmation of the Franciscan stream for theology and the spirituality of creation, along with the ethics of poverty reformulated in terms of universal fraternity (in the sense of cosmic) and joyful sobriety.

How will *we* achieve this conversion? In taking 'Francis' as his regnal name, Bergoglio is pointing the way: we should follow the example of St Francis of Assisi, who underwent a fundamental conversion embracing what we would now call an integral ecology. Building upon the theological groundwork laid by Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Pope Francis invites us to embrace the Franciscan spirituality of creation and adopt an ethics of reformulated poverty in terms of universal fraternity (in the sense of cosmic) and joyful sobriety. The phrase bears repeating. Two important documents must be mentioned here that appeared after *Laudato Si'*. Both can be understood as sequels to *Laudato Si'*. The first is the apostolic constitution for ecclesiastic universities called *Veritatis Gaudium* issued in 2018. It is important not only for theology, but for all Church teachings, and indeed all research, because of the epistemological impact of the principle 'everything is connected', which nowadays applies to more and more interdisciplinary methodologies. This new document reminds scholars that today's body of knowledge is the result not of connections but of separation through an endless array of disciplinary specialties and subspecialties. In contrast, an interdisciplinary approach aims at

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<sup>4</sup> See *Penser l'écologie dans la tradition catholique (Thinking Ecology within Roman Catholic Tradition)* (Revol, 2018).

reintroducing the complexity of the relationships within and among domains of knowledge. In this way, human knowledge is more faithful to the complexity of the realities of our world<sup>5</sup>.

The second text is the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (QA 66ss). This document is based on input from the Synod of Bishops of Amazonia and the episcopal conference of South America, and then combined with ideas already captured in previous documents such as *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'* (as though Amazonia were the synthetic and exemplary place for the application of the pontifical policy!). Indeed, in that location, through *Querida Amazonia*, we can find the interdependency of social and environmental justice, connected with the enculturation of Christian faith by a theology of creation enriched by Amazonian wisdom<sup>6</sup>, which can be understood as preparation for the Gospel, according to the ancient doctrine of the *Semina Verbi* within the Great Christian Tradition, especially in the works of Saint Justin the Apologist (De Pautigny, 1904, No. 11).

Not long after the publication of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reformed the organization of the dicasteries and created an additional one to which the social teaching of the Church is attached: the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development<sup>7</sup>, including the late pontifical council for Justice and Peace, which had undertaken the preparatory work for *Laudato Si'*. This new dicastery has already organized several conferences and published an informative and interesting document on the use of water (Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, 2020) based on input from *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Laudato Si'* and *Querida Amazonia* in 2020.

## **At the level of theological research**

### **New institutions and projects**

In a sense, *Laudato Si'* plays the role of enhancing what has already, and yet quite discretely, existed in the field of ecotheology since the 1970s. Those of us who have been working in this area for many years did not learn a great deal on reading the Encyclical. It is a field that has been alive since the 1970s even though it came mostly from Anglo-Saxon countries, with the Latin world joining a little later in the process. Among the authors currently writing in this field we should perhaps mention the Anglo-American theologian Caelia Deane-Drummond (2017), the reformist South African Ernst Conradie (Conradie & Koster, 2019), the late and much

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<sup>5</sup> The principles of this approach are provided in the long foreword, p. 1-10.

<sup>6</sup> See QA 66ss.

<sup>7</sup> More on this topic is available at *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Fratelli tutti The Encyclical of Pope Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship*: <http://www.humandevlopment.va/en.html>.

missed Father Denis Edwards (2004, p. 199-210), the American Quaker Philip Clayton (et al., 2021), the Irish Father Sean McDonagh (1990) and, more recently, the French Catholic Loïc Laîné (2018). For ecotheologians, *Laudato Si'* had a three-fold effect: first, we felt confirmed in our efforts and in the direction of our works due to the fact that *Laudato Si'* displays a great depth of knowledge and shows that inspiration has indeed been drawn from current research in ecotheology (Revol, 2015); second, doctoral theses on integral ecology and *Laudato Si'* are now being defended (Laîné 2018); third, it provided an added impulse for research in theology, but with an interdisciplinary approach, in the very spirit of the Encyclical. Permit me to share some significant examples.

The first is the Chaire Jean Bastaire<sup>8</sup> in France, which is dedicated to integral ecology and the position I myself have been holding since January 2015. It was even established six months prior to the release of the Encyclical. Through this chair, there is a four-day seminar held every year, one that is open to all francophone theologians studying ecotheology: 'The Ecumenical and Francophone Seminar on Theology and Ecology' (SOFTE). Moving beyond this chair, in 2019 a research project in ethics at the Catholic University of Lyon took a sharp turn toward integral ecology with an interdisciplinary pole of research dedicated to this field<sup>9</sup>. A second example is the Collège of Bernardins in Paris. It has turned integral ecology into the principal orientation for all its activities, especially research, by creating a chair on integral ecology<sup>10</sup> in 2019. Thirdly, the aforementioned Caelia Deane-Drummond was employed by the Jesuits' Campion Hall, a private college of the University of Oxford, to create the 'Laudato Si' Research Institute' in Oxford. Its declared mission statement reads as follows: "To conduct cutting-edge transdisciplinary research for societal transformation at the intersections of theology, ecology, and the social and natural sciences on the most pressing environmental issues of our day." Inspired by Pope Francis's vision in the Encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, the LSRI's research seeks to develop an *integral ecology* that responds to 'the cry of the earth' and 'the cry of the poor', and thereby a) resources the academy and practitioners in a variety of spheres (including business, development, etc.), and b) influences policies and decision making in national and global governance."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> More on this topic is available at UCLY. Chaire Jean Bastaire: <https://www.ucl.fr/la-recherche/les-8-poles-de-recherche/developpement-integral-ecologie-ethique/chaire-jean-bastaire/>.

<sup>9</sup> More on this topic is available at UCLY. Développement intégral, écologie, éthique: <https://www.ucl.fr/la-recherche/les-8-poles-de-recherche/developpement-integral-ecologie-ethique/>.

<sup>10</sup> More on this topic is available at Collège Des Bernardins. DANS LE SILLAGE DE LAUDATO SI': <https://www.collegedesbernardins.fr/recherche/dans-le-sillage-de-laudato-si/>.

<sup>11</sup> More on this topic is available on the CAMPION HALL webpage: <http://www.campion.ox.ac.uk/?q=lsri>.

There is no ambiguity here – the purpose cannot fit more into the project of integral ecology: transdisciplinary work, the taking into account of ecological urgencies (LS Ch.1), the reference to LS 49, ‘the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor’. This brings us, fourthly, to the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome, which started a programme on the Franciscan theology of creation for integral ecology three years ago<sup>12</sup>. And, last but not least, we should also mention the CRO *Laudato Si’* Project located in Zagreb.<sup>13</sup> Its goal is stated as follows: “To point out the importance of the Encyclical letter *Laudato Si’*: *On Care for Our Common Home* (2015) from the Holy Father Francis, and by following the instructions stated in the Encyclical letter to inspire the members of the Franciscan Third Order and all interested individuals to complete the activities planned as part of the project.”<sup>14</sup>

These examples show the reactions of Catholic institutions to go forward and answer the call to deepen the theological and ethical directions given by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’*. This is also true in the field of education, to which we turn next.

### **In the field of higher education**

A prime example of the renewed focus on ecology spurred by *Laudato Si’* is the diploma offered jointly by all the Pontifical universities of Rome (around ten of them), which is a historical first in terms of cooperation<sup>15</sup>. It offers twelve European Educational Credits distributed in six modules following the six chapters of the Encyclical for students from different faculties of the respective universities. This latter point clearly shows how the interdisciplinary approach is an organizing principle of this curriculum.

The Franciscan Pontifical University Antonianum of Rome, which is also a member of the previous initiative, went several steps further with a one-year master’s programme dedicated to integral ecology; a two-year programme is currently being developed<sup>16</sup>. It is presented as a professional programme in integral ecology by the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Father Giuseppe Buffon: “We believe the search for an interdisciplinary approach, involving experts not only in the theological-religious and ethical-philosophical sciences but also the empirical

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<sup>12</sup> More on this topic is available at *OFM. Towards an Integral Ecology*: <http://www.ofmjp.org/en/towards-an-integral-ecology/>.

<sup>13</sup> See more on this topic at *Facebook. Cro Laudato Si’*: <https://www.facebook.com/HRLaudatoSi/>.

<sup>14</sup> The document “Basic information about the ‘CROLAUDATOSI’ project” is available on the webpage: <http://www.unicath.hr/laudato-si-conference-2021/about-project>.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Pontificia Università Gregoriana. JOINT DIPLOMA IN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY 2019-2020*: <https://www.unigre.it/en/events-and-communication/communication/news-and-press-releases/joint-diploma-in-integral-ecology-2019-2020/>.

<sup>16</sup> See more on this topic on the webpage *Pontificia Università Antonianum. Percorso professionale in Ecologia integrale*: <http://www.antonianum.eu/ppei>.

sciences coming from non-pontifical university centres, is the indispensable prerequisite for adequately reflecting on the environmental crisis.”<sup>17</sup>

This programme also provides twelve ECTS and is built around contributions from the fields of anthropology, geography, economy, interreligious dialogue, law, ecology, philosophy and theology, and is led in partnership with companies offering field experience and internship.

But there is an even more interesting example. The most audacious initiative I know of has taken place, surprisingly perhaps, in Madagascar. The Catholic University of Madagascar created ISAE, the ‘Superior Institute of Anthropology and Ecology’<sup>18</sup>. Its goal is to support a full curriculum dedicated to integral ecology from undergraduate level to the master’s degree. They began with a master’s programme in 2017, and in September 2019 opened the first year of their bachelor’s programme. When I visited them in January 2020, I found the programme’s leadership to be acutely aware of the importance of embracing integral ecology and using its tools to face the challenges in their own country effectively, including a disastrous imbalance in human activity, a severely threatened biodiversity and a poor population. Anthropology is at the heart of their initiative. In following Pope Francis on this issue, they are aware of the wealth of their traditional wisdom and culture. For the master’s degree, they provide 1, 200 hours of courses and seminars from an interdisciplinary perspective. The goal of this programme is to provide well-educated participants a role in the development of Madagascar by placing them in strategic positions in Malagasy society.

These developments have been particularly inspiring, and I must confess that my own university has been somewhat late in this process of opening new curricula that correspond to the strengthening vision of integral ecology. However, it will be noted that we are indeed planning to open a university diploma in Lyon on integral ecology in September 2021. It should be a degree aimed at pastoral agents whose mission is to develop actions and projects around integral ecology in their dioceses or institutions.

### **There are also many interesting events in surrounding universities and academia**

(a) Outside the university system, there are also academic centres, both those that have been active for years and those recently created after *Laudato Si’*, which propose programmes of education or research that integrate the vision of the Encyclical. Even centres that were always dedicated to social justice but had not delved into ecology suddenly turned their attention to

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.ofmjpg.org/en/towards-an-integral-ecology/>, consulted 14/10/20.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this topic, see the [authentika-ucm.net/formation/institut-superieur-d-anthropologie-et-d-ecolo](http://authentika-ucm.net/formation/institut-superieur-d-anthropologie-et-d-ecolo) webpage, consulted 21/07/22.

*Laudato Si'*, one such centre being CERAS<sup>19</sup> (Centre de Recherche et d'Action Social), a rather seasoned Jesuit institution near Paris with engaging, interesting programmes on education and the journal *Revue Projet*<sup>20</sup>, which is dedicated to research in the field of the social teachings of the Church.

(b) There are also new networks being created: The *Laudato Si'* Research Institute is currently engaged with the soon to be released '*Laudato Si'* Research Network', based in Oxford and initiated by Professor Deane-Drummond at Campion Hall, which is, of course, associated with Oxford University<sup>21</sup>.

(c) In the United States, we find the creation of a deeply ecumenical network based on the impulse created by and through *Laudato Si'*: the 'EcoCivilization Movement'<sup>22</sup> and network. It is founded on the legacy of the protestant theologian John B. Cobb, the famous process theologian at Claremont College in California. It includes a strong Whiteheadian inspiration and an interesting convergence with traditional Chinese culture and its worldview. It must be noted that this is a non-confessional movement whose members are acutely aware that religion belongs to human behaviour, which is instrumental in empowering people to change the world. Acting on this principle, the EcoCiv movement taps into the intellectual and spiritual resources of different traditions, but among them *Laudato Si'* is well-situated (Clayton & Schwartz, 2019, pp. 73-75). The Quaker and process theologian Philip Clayton<sup>23</sup> is among the leaders of this movement. Indeed, integral ecology finds an astounding echo in thoughts already in process due to the emphasis *Laudato Si'* places on the interconnectedness of all things.

(d) In the international field of science and religion, several well-known personalities have singularly shifted towards the theology of ecology and ecological commitment, such as the aforementioned Roman Catholic Celia Deane-Drummond.<sup>24</sup> There is also the previously quoted Philip Clayton<sup>25</sup> at Claremont for the Ecocivilization movement. Father Denis Edwards from Australia, who provided a discrete inspiratory work on Bonaventurian thoughts present in *Laudato Si'*<sup>26</sup>, should also be mentioned.

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<sup>19</sup> More on this is available on the CERAS webpage: <http://ceras-projet.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> More on this topic can be found at *Revue Projet*: <https://www.revue-projet.com/>.

<sup>21</sup> The Global *Laudato Si'* Research Network: <https://lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/global-laudato-si-research-network>.

<sup>22</sup> More on this topic can be found at *EcoCivilization*. Info: <http://www.ecocivilization.info/index.html>.

<sup>23</sup> See one of the manifestos at <http://www.ecocivilization.info/index.html>.

<sup>24</sup> See note 31.

<sup>25</sup> See note 33.

<sup>26</sup> See note 32.



(e) Remaining in the field of science and religion, as a fellow of the International Society for Science and Religion<sup>27</sup> (I.S.S.R.), I can see a significant shift in the new ‘recruits’ in the last three years, most of whom have now attained a strong ecological profile<sup>28</sup>.

(f) Finally, the literature in the field of ecotheology has exploded of late. I am unable to provide a comprehensive survey at the present moment, but if one book must be mentioned, it is the recent and rather comprehensive *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change*<sup>29</sup>, edited by Ernst Conradie from South Africa. This significant book contains over seven hundred pages and a large number of contributors with a wide scope of ecumenicity.

## Christian NGOs

*Laudato Si'* has had a strong impact on the life of Christian NGOs. Among them ‘The Catholic Climate Movement’<sup>30</sup> warrants mention. The movement is a direct outcome of St Francis’s Encyclical, emerging as early as 2015. It insists that the “Global Catholic Climate Movement works within the Catholic Church to better care for our common home. Our founding document is Pope Francis’s Encyclical on climate change and ecology<sup>31</sup>, *Laudato Si'*.” Their networking actions aim at transforming lifestyles, but also at developing public policies through advocacy.

At present there is also a branch of the ‘Divest from Fossil Energy Movement’<sup>32</sup>, which pertains to the congregations of religious orders and dioceses (Roewe, 2020). Initiators have organized conferences addressed to these institutions as a means to inform and encourage exemplary actions of divestment while also addressing a faithful testimony of engagement for integral ecology<sup>33</sup>.

For several years now there have been numerous spiritual centres dedicated to integral ecology. Here I limit myself to some significant French examples, primarily because I am associated with them and may speak with first-hand knowledge. First there is the ‘Academy for Integral Ecology’<sup>34</sup>, which was created as early as 2016 in the north-west part of France. It organizes retreats, conferences and educational sessions that at times include very practical,

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<sup>27</sup> More on this topic can be found at the *INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR SCIENCE & RELIGION*: <https://www.issr.org.uk/>.

<sup>28</sup> More on this topic is available on the *INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR SCIENCE & RELIGION*. *Meet Our Fellows* webpage: <https://www.issr.org.uk/fellows/>.

<sup>29</sup> See note 31.

<sup>30</sup> More on this topic is available at the *LAUDATO SI' MOVEMENT*: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/>.

<sup>31</sup> More on this topic is available at the *LAUDATO SI' MOVEMENT*. *LAUDATO SI' MOVEMENT STRUCTURES*: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/introduction/>.

<sup>32</sup> More on this topic is available at *DivestInvest*: <https://www.divestinvest.org>.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, *JESUITS IN BRITAIN*: <https://jesuitmissions.org.uk/jesuits-in-britain-are-divesting-from-fossil-fuels/>.

<sup>34</sup> More on this topic is available on the *Académie pour une Ecologie Intégrale* webpage: <https://www.academie-ecologie-integrale.org/>.

earth-oriented actions in their garden. The ‘Campus for Transition’<sup>35</sup> near Paris should also be mentioned. Run by the Assumptionist nuns in partnership with the Jesuits, the campus is a centre for students of every background and discipline that offers a complementary curriculum based on *Laudato Si’*.

Numerous associations with a national outreach programme were established before the publication of *Laudato Si’* and yet found a new energy from within this text. One can mention ‘Chretien Unis pour la Terre’<sup>36</sup>, which proposed climate fasting on a nationwide scale in France. The association ‘Oeko-logia’<sup>37</sup> was created in 2009 for reflection on Christianity and ecology, education in integral ecology and the celebration of Creation. There are associations working at an international outreach level, such as ‘The Climate Pilgrimage’<sup>38</sup>, the goal of which is not only to make people walk to the location of the next COP, but also to reach people and raise awareness of the issue of climate change; the Filipino and Catholic activist Yeb Sano occupies a leading role. People from all over the world can share their prayers for the actual pilgrims online.

Here we must also mention a new phenomenon, the emergence of a new kind of community life within the church: the ‘Little brothers and little sisters of Creation’. Christians from all walks of life, radically desiring a new manner of living according to the principles of *Laudato Si’*, gather together for full or partial community life in the midst of Christian eco-villages or eco-hamlets. By way of example, a group is now gathering in the diocese of Cahors, in the west of France, in a small village lost in the woods but active at the level of the diocese<sup>39</sup>. There is a sanctuary near Lyon that has been entrusted to such a fraternity: the eco-hamlet ‘La Bénisson-Dieu’; they also participate in liturgical animation<sup>40</sup>. Clearly, there is an articulated connection between these new groups and the ecclesiastical institution, which is also active on different levels.

## **What changes have occurred in regular church life?**

The first outcome of *Laudato Si’* was the initial flourishing of groups focused on reading and reflection on the Encyclical. This is not unique to this particular Encyclical: at every publication

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<sup>35</sup> More on this subject is available on the *Campus de la Transition* webpage: <https://campus-transition.org/>.

<sup>36</sup> More on this subject is available on the *CHRÉTIENS UNIS POUR LA TERRE* webpage: <https://chretiensunispourlaterre.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>37</sup> More on this subject is available on the *OEKO-LOGIA* webpage: <https://oeko-logia.org>.

<sup>38</sup> More on this subject is available on the *CLIMATE PILGRIMAGE* webpage: <http://climatepilgrimage.com/>.

<sup>39</sup> More on this can be found at <https://petitsfreresetsoeursdelacreation.fr/>.

<sup>40</sup> More on this can be found at *Facebook. Eco-hameau de La Bénisson-Dieu*: <https://www.facebook.com/Eco-hameau-de-La-B%C3%A9nisson-Dieu-910877545749469/>.

of an Encyclical letter there is invariably such a phenomenon. But several of these *ad hoc* ecology groups changed their structures and aims and grew into diocesan or parish teams dedicated to integral ecology in a pastoral perspective, as in the diocese of Cambrai and the ‘*Laudato Si*’ Network’<sup>41</sup>.

We have already seen that numerous lecture series have been organized, mostly in the two years following the publication of *Laudato Si*’: each parish, each diocesan centre, each theological centre or large Catholic movement organized its own event. Curiosity drove many Catholics to these events because they had a hard time believing that a pope could write an Encyclical about the dialogue between ecology and the Christian faith. In some places, with curiosity satisfied, attendance of these events diminished, while in other locales, *Laudato Si*’ groups were able to sustain interest.

Numerous sessions, colloquiums and conferences on *Laudato Si*’ occurred immediately following the appearance of the Encyclical, two years after and five years after. Most were aimed at pastoral workers, chaplains, Catholic teachers and religious communities. Some gave rise to proceedings (Danroc & Cazanave, 2017). Catholic educational systems likewise paid serious attention to the new Encyclical.

After the first two years of infatuation, a new kind of reception of the Encyclical took place. It is what I call the ‘institutional rooting’ of *Laudato Si*’ and integral ecology. Actually, the Catholic educational system in France is a very good illustration of this shift because of its multiple layers of organization. As an initial step at the level of individual schools, several of them reworked their pedagogical project according to the principle of integral ecology. At the same time, the training programmes of the headteachers of these schools began to include these principles. At the diocesan level, one must mention the initiative of the diocese of Lyon, which organized a full year programme on the “foundation of integral ecology” (Veillas, 2018) with pedagogical documents, videos, websites and even eco-cups! Finally, at the national level, the General Secretariat of Catholic Education organized a two-day session to reflect on the position of education in integral ecology. There are many more events of this nature to anticipate in the future.

In France, we had a rather pleasant surprise in 2019: the National Conference of Bishops decided to discuss the topic of integral ecology for the next three years on the occasion of their yearly plenary assembly in Lourdes. It happens that I was in attendance for their first session in November as this was the first time that bishops were invited to bring along two guests, mostly

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<sup>41</sup> More on this subject can be found at *Facebook. Réseau Laudato Si’ - Diocèse de Cambrai*: <https://www.facebook.com/R%C3%A9seau-Laudato-si-Dioc%C3%A8se-de-Cambrai-107115264466757/>.

lay persons, to join in with the ecology session. The auditorium was overcrowded, and a very interesting discussion arose (De Féligonde & Hoyeau, 2019). More recently, the Conference of French Bishops even released a website dedicated to integral ecology<sup>42</sup>; this is a most useful resource with tools to help the Catholics of France to get involved in the subject.

In France we remain, but here as an echo of what has already been accomplished in the United Kingdom ('The Global Catholic Climate Movement', 2016), Canada<sup>43</sup> and Germany<sup>44</sup>, an eco-church label, '*Label Eglise Verte*'<sup>45</sup> in French, was created in 2017. Known as the 'Green Church' in English, this is a very interesting initiative because it came to be released two years after *Laudato Si'*, underscoring the reality that the vision of the label is directly inspired by the Encyclical. This new initiative shows that ecology is not simply to be added to whichever pastoral activities are already in action; rather, integral ecology is to be understood as a means of surveying the entirety of community life from liturgy to social care, through economical life, transport, energy, preaching, Catholic education, research in Catholic universities and so on.

Today, there is a reflection on the adaptation of this label for monastic life, for diocesan houses, for Catholic schools, for scout groups, for Catholic hospitals and so forth. On my most recent inquiry, there were already four hundred and twenty-five labelled French communities<sup>46</sup>. It is interesting to note that the label has been proposed as an ecumenical action. Among the initiators, there are the French Catholic Bishops Conference, the French Federation of Reformed Churches and the French Orthodox Bishops Conference. Occasionally, as is the case in my own diocese, ecumenical labels are given when a protestant parish collaborates with a Catholic one. One person may even be salaried in order to coordinate the movement; in this particular case, a Catholic woman was remunerated by a protestant administrative structure.

This label was the opportunity to develop a new ministry within dioceses: the episcopal delegate for integral ecology in the form of green churches. Today, almost all the dioceses in France have nominated either a priest, a deacon, a religious or a lay person from their teams missioned for a ministry dedicated to integral ecology. The peculiarity of the time has made it such that this ministry has yet to be instituted and formalized. Not two separate dioceses have

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<sup>42</sup> More on this topic can be found on the *Tout est lié. le chemin de l'écologie intégral* webpage: <https://toutestlie.catholique.fr/>.

<sup>43</sup> More on Green Churches can be found on the *Églises Vertes* webpage: <https://eglisesvertes.ca/>.

<sup>44</sup> See "Der Grüne Gockel Umweltmanagement in der Kirche" in <https://www.umwelt.elk-wue.de/arbeitsfelder/umweltmanagement-der-gruene-gockel/>.

<sup>45</sup> More on this topic can be found at *Eglise Verte. Label "Eglise Verte"*. <https://www.egliseverte.org/>.

<sup>46</sup> 499 on October 19, 2020. More on this topic can be found on the *Eglise Verte* webpage: <https://www.egliseverte.org/communautes-eglise-verte/>.

the same kind of nomination, primarily because each has a different ecological reality with which to cope. But we live in an exciting time of experiencing possibilities in this area<sup>47</sup>.

## **The field of economic life**

*Laudato Si'* has also had a strong impact on the economic behaviour of some companies, especially those with a Christian background. As we witnessed previously, several companies are partners of the curriculum developed by the PUA in Italy. This means that professionals invest in the education of those able to implement and sustain a project of integral ecology for the ultimate purpose of reducing the environmental footprint of their company.

One company worth mentioning in this regard is a purchasing cooperative dedicated to Catholic communities: '*Le Cèdre*'<sup>48</sup>. It was established at the beginning of the present century and was founded by Catholics for Catholic communities, more precisely, to help them acquire and hold onto savings. *Laudato Si'* was a turning point for them in their practices. As a result of its activity, *Le Cèdre* has acquired a profound knowledge of and respect for French churches (Chevallier, 2020). The company has launched an integral ecology department with three full-time employees. This department has three goals: to raise the awareness of the personnel of the company with regard to integral ecology; to propose education sessions for both customers and furnishers in the field of integral ecology; and to help Catholic communities work out their own individual ecological conversion. The owners of the cooperative created a company foundation dedicated to the funding of projects explicitly inspired by *Laudato Si'* and its integral ecology in France. The selection criteria of the projects are most explicit and detailed when it comes to their inspiration<sup>49</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

Several months after the publication of *Laudato Si'*, I happened to overhear priests, even nuncios, opine that integral ecology was just a fashion trend initiated by the pope, that it would last for a little while and we would then return to more interesting matter, the 'business as usual' supposition being implicit. Recent facts indicate otherwise, even if the steady growth of integral ecology within church life and church communities is somewhat subdued in its development.

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<sup>47</sup> See, for example, the *Laudato Si'* network of the diocese of Cambrai at *Réseau Laudato Si'*: <https://reseau-laudatosi.cathocambrai.com/> and the Diocesan Observatory of Ecological Realities of the diocese of Valence at *Diocèse de Valence - l'Église Catholique*: <https://valence.cef.fr/categorie/webtv/ecologie/>.

<sup>48</sup> More on this topic can be found on the *Le Cèdre* webpage: <https://www.lecedre.fr>.

<sup>49</sup> More on this topic can be found on the webpage: *Le Cèdre. Fondation*. <https://www.lecedre.fr/fondation/>.

A new generation is arising, the ‘*Laudato Si*’ generation’<sup>50</sup>, just as there was a *Pacem in Terris* generation with the Justice and Peace movements. This brings hope. The challenge to come is not only grounding *Laudato Si*’ in the daily life of the Church; it is to ensure that the theological and philosophical foundations of integral ecology do not appear as a weak set of maxims, but rather the genuine fruit of the entire Christian Tradition flowing from Revelation. Much work has been done since the theologians of the 1970s paved the way, bringing theology in dialogue with different areas of ecology. And yet much work remains to be accomplished.



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<sup>50</sup> More on this topic can be found at *LAUDATO SI*’ GENERATION: <https://laudatosigeneration.org/>.

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## ***Laudato Si'*: A Rudder for Just Development, Recovery and Resilience**

### **Abstract**

In the Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis addresses every person on the planet, not just Catholics but all people, regardless of their age, status, faith or profession. It is a call to action in their individual lives, a call that extends to the related issues of socio-economic and political engineering. In particular, he emphasizes inclusive dialogue as the first step towards setting ethical goals at different levels and stages of expertise, which should be accompanied by the implementation of concrete activities. *Laudato Si'* is an important guide for the various stakeholders at both the European and the broader global level of decision-making. The pertinent issue of social justice, which is the result of different circumstances and political decisions, is inevitably linked to the environment and other issues. It seems that politics has decided for many years to ignore equity and progress in climate challenges and social justice. Therefore, designing structural changes has proven to be extremely complicated. Such major changes could lead to extreme reactions across a broad range of interest groups that ultimately disagree with any change in the status quo. This suits large, robust corporations, stakeholders, and strong interest networks. Interconnectedness is the most important facet of the Encyclical, for there is not just one crisis, but several, and one inevitably leads to another. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that any change should strive to enact comprehensive policies that include an environmental, social, economic and spiritual dimension of knowledge and expertise, and that this should be complemented by moral awareness at the individual, local, national, and global levels as the momentum of the crisis we are facing is further confirmed.

### **Keywords**

*Laudato Si'*, justice, ecology, crisis, Europe, Croatia

## Introduction

The objective of this paper is to show how the Encyclical today is more relevant than ever as we face a pandemic that is shaking our fundamental values and rousing humankind from a passive and reckless dream. Therefore, this paper will attempt to shed light on the following hypotheses:

1. *Laudato Si'* is more relevant today than five years ago, which is visible through the current circumstances and required responses;

2. The European Union has considerable potential for the constructive implementation of this Encyclical, and Croatia could be one of the countries that adopts its positive practices.

Nowadays it is more important perhaps than ever to take the Encyclical that Pope Francis has given us as an alarm for change, and a warning of the possible all-encompassing crises that humankind will assuredly face. The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* was published on 25 May 2015 as a pastoral message, not only to Catholics and other Christian believers worldwide, but to all, and especially to those in a position of responsibility who are therefore given an opportunity to effect change. The pope sought to awaken the consciousness of every person in a laudable manner and present himself as a spokesperson for the environment and Mother Earth, which has been entrusted to our care. Furthermore, Pope Francis is to be seen as a conscientious guardian and messenger of He who created everything – God himself. After all, this *is* the pope's role as the head of the Catholic Church, a role that he expanded on this occasion while being acutely aware of the importance of the document and the meaning of the words he sought to convey.

Nevertheless, he remained humble and aware of the ecumenical approach, freely quoting “statements made by the beloved Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with whom we share the hope of full ecclesial communion” (LS 7). Through various activities, including the Encyclical itself, Pope Francis wanted to show how important it is to take care of our common home, of everything created that we encounter on Earth, with a particular emphasis on people and nature. In this regard, he sent an important pastoral message on how, in this context, it does not matter to which religion we belong, which country we live in or the work we do because we are all explicitly called to account in the care of the environment and even more to God the Creator, and indeed, to every living person and creature on the planet.



### ***Laudato Si'*: what Pope Francis reminded us of and instructed us to do five years ago**

The Encyclical is named after St Francis's words *Laudato Si', mi' Signore*, found in *Praise of the Creatures*. These words remind us that the Earth is our common home, like a sister with whom we share existence, and like a mother who receives us in her arms (LS 1).

The content of the Encyclical is given and developed through six chapters. It begins with a presentation of the current state of our world, based on the best scientific knowledge available (Chapter 1); the present position is contextualized through an overview of biblical and Judeo-Christian tradition (Chapter 2), and then followed by the identification of the roots of the problem in the technocracy and the excessive egocentrism of humankind and its self-serving analysis (Chapter 3). As a means of working towards a solution, the Encyclical proposes integral ecology (Chapter 4), which clearly recognizes that both human and social dimensions are inextricably linked to the question of the environment. From this perspective, Pope Francis proposes the initiation of an honourable and open dialogue and calls for the participation and involvement at all levels of social, economic and political life, which would build a clear path to constructive decision-making (Chapter 5). Recalling that no endeavour can be effective if it is not first imbued with a mature and responsible conscience (Chapter 6), he suggests ideas that would, in this sense, assist in growth and maturation on the educational, spiritual, ecclesiastical, political and theological levels. The text ends with two prayers, one for all who believe in God the almighty Creator (LS 246) and another for those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. The Encyclical begins and ends with the now familiar refrain "*Laudato Si'.*"

The letter is interspersed with key themes, which are treated in different ways and under different perspectives, which contributes to the coherent unity of the Encyclical. These are the close and intimate connections between the poor and the fragility of the Earth, the belief that everything in the world is interconnected, a critique of new paradigms and forms of power arising from technology, a call for other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the intrinsic value of each living creature, the human meaning of 'ecology', the need for honest discussions, the tremendous responsibility of both international and local policy, a culture of rejection and a proposition for a new way of life.

We are faced with the fact that our Mother Earth is abused and plundered, that she is complaining and that her cries are joined with the cries of all the forsaken in the world. Pope Francis invites us to listen to those cries alone and together as families, local communities and peoples, as well as an international community. He calls for an ecological conversion in the voice of Saint John Paul II. This implies a comprehensive change in direction, protecting beauty and bearing responsibility in the care of our common home.

At the same time, Pope Francis acknowledges that the awareness and sensitivity to the environment and care for nature is growing, which could be a clear and hopeful message to all that humanity is still capable of working together to build that common home (LS 13).

Borrowing on the previous words of St John Paul II, Pope Francis addresses Catholics and indeed all Christians, warning them about the duties concerning Creation, and encouraging them to enter into dialogue with everyone (LS 3). The pressing need for dialogue is emphasized throughout the Encyclical, and in the fifth chapter, it becomes an instrument of confrontation and problem solving. From the very beginning, Pope Francis reminds us that all churches and Christian communities, together with other religions, are deeply concerned in their reflections on the topic of ecology (LS 7). Therefore, the pope calls all people around the globe, regardless of their beliefs, to preserve our common home through action, because action is not in God's but *our* hands, and we should be mindful to protect future generations (Peppard, 2015).

Moreover, we must all ask ourselves: 'What kind of world do we want to leave to those who will come after us, to the new generations?' We cannot ignore the fact that this question is at the heart of Pope Francis's concern for our common home, and it does not refer only to a separate environmental issue. If we do not ask ourselves these fundamental questions, the pope believes that our environmental efforts will not yield significant results.

On numerous occasions, the pope thanks the protagonists of this endeavour: the many individuals, associations and institutions, while acknowledging that the reflections of countless scientists, philosophers, theologians and social organizations have enriched the Church on these issues (LS 7), each in their own way offering an integral ecology for the full development of humankind (LS 62).

### **Integral ecology: everything is interconnected, and progress calls for the joint work of all who have acquired expertise**

At the heart of the Encyclical is integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice. It is a holistic view that emphasizes how everything is interconnected and exists in a mutual correlation. This premise explains how society's institutions impact the environment and the quality of human life and why a violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the whole human well-being. We cannot, in fact, consider nature as something separate from us, as a mere scene in our life (LS 139). This applies to different areas, to the economy and politics, as well as to disparate cultures, especially those that are the most vulnerable, and ultimately, to every moment of our daily lives.

This ecology of wholeness is inseparable from the notion of the common good, but it needs to be understood in a concrete way. It must be placed in today's context, in which so many inequalities clash, and where there are more and more rejected people who are denied fundamental human rights. Welfare and the common good means making a choice and taking a stand in solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable in our collective society (LS 158). The best way to hand the world over to future generations is not merely by promoting these truths but by engaging in the care of today's poor, as Benedict XVI had already pointed out. In addition to faithful intergenerational solidarity, there is an urgent need for moral-based and renewed intra-generational solidarity (LS 162). The pope substantiates his statements with numerous concrete examples, explaining how the studies of environmental problems are inseparable from the analysis of man, family, work and the urban context, as well as from the relationship of the human person to himself (LS 144). Ultimately, it is not a question of there being two separate crises—an environmental and a social crisis—but only one of a complex nature: the socio-environmental crisis (LS 139).

Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of each profession, the collaboration of science and religion, and the necessity of change at all levels of society, from the individual to the local, national, regional and global levels because we all share the Earth as our habitat. 'Dialogue' and 'cooperation' are words that run throughout the document: the Holy Father wanted to instil in our hearts the need to share the same concerns, to have the time and will for conversations that seek to find comprehensive solutions. The Church, as an institution that cares about the moral development of its believers, and the pope as a person who is open to all, have together shown a commitment to any constructive cooperation that will lead to the recovery of society, our planet, and to human well-being. Thus, we were reminded of how much Catholicism and Christianity as a whole has always offered a kind of renaissance in its early anticipation of a turning point in human moral development.

## **The relevance of the Encyclical in the European and global context**

### ***Laudato Si'* as an answer to all crises**

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly shown how reckless and insufficiently ethical man has been in his thoughts and actions. On the other hand, the crisis itself has shown that we are only as strong as the most vulnerable member of society, and through this we have shown solidarity. This should be recognized fully and expressed in an initiative, the concerns of which must transcend Europe itself and, in the long run, encompass the entire world.

As Pope Francis pointedly observed, *Laudato Si'* is an important Encyclical for several reasons, precisely because it calls on various political, economic and other experts and active participants from different levels of government and society to look at the irresponsible world created by humankind. Individuals, groups and organizations on a local, national and global level should be aware of the path they are pursuing, regardless of religion. That path must be reflected in the Creator because everything around us is created by Him.

The Vatican has made it quite clear that environmental problems, social inequality and economic paradigms are inextricably linked, and that the solution lies in moral leadership. This was confirmed by Cardinal Peter Turkson, the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in an interview with 'journalist' Christiane Amanpour (Peppard, 2015).

Moreover, the significance of the Encyclical is also apparent in the fact that Byrne referred to it as a 'tragic document' not because it is bad, but because there is so much good. He emphasized the value of *Laudato Si'* as an upgraded document on the writings of Pope Benedict and St John Paul II (Byrne, 2015).

Numerous problems reveal how scientific conclusions set an epistemological paradigm that further shapes the lives of each of us as individuals and society as a whole. Unfortunately, such a manner of living has not only led to a deterioration in the environment that surrounds us, but also in our lifestyle. Significant emphasis is placed on the fact that growth and the advancement of humankind over the last two centuries have not led to full integral development and an overall improvement in the quality of life but to social decline. It is visible in the quiet rupture of the links between integration and social cohesion due to rapid change and the pace of life. Repairing this rupture requires a heartfelt period of recovery, which is the beginning of a fight against everything that has become 'normal' in recent decades, that sense of 'normalcy' that has increasingly captured our consciousness and reduced our autonomy.

The dialogue between the Catholic Church and philosophical thought is confirmed as an excellent solution to the crises currently faced by humankind, a synthesis of science and faith as a response to the Church's more inclusive approach to social doctrine. Although science regularly opposes any interference by religion, man should never deny the fact that he is a creature of God, and not just one in a series of creatures. He bears responsibility as God's co-creator and interlocutor, for all of that which is entrusted to him. Communion and cooperation can provide a form of moral recovery to those of us who may have misplaced our objectivity through, among other circumstances produced by society, global capitalism and technological developments that have rendered us less and less free. Everything that is created by humankind should serve the community and true brotherhood; the development of a healthy society should

ultimately result in peace, justice and the preservation of the created world – for man is the crown of God’s creation.

## **Climate changes and solutions at the European level**

The area of climate change is one of many in which a comprehensive approach, cooperation at all levels of government, expertise and a strong moral foundation are required to bring about a fruitful outcome. To ensure the sustainability and survival of the Earth, this question demands urgent answers. If something does not change systematically and soon, this century will witness extraordinary climate change and rapid destruction of ecosystems, which will result in serious repercussions for us all. The eloquence of *Laudato Si’* is rooted in warnings of this impending crisis and pertinent questions regarding the natural heritage we will leave to future generations.

Given the fact that the economies of the developed and developing world are based upon fossil fuels, the process of global warming is unlikely to shrink without concrete and global measures (Reno, 2015). In this sense, *Laudato Si’* also serves as a moral guide for shifting the climate control debate beyond national borders and private interests towards an international discourse for the common good (Formicola, 2015).

Reichart noted that he was surprised by the realization that a man who has dedicated his life to religion knows so much about the impact climate change is having on the planet. It is notable that he has previously criticized Pope Francis based on the fact that he and his entourage probably use fossil fuel vehicles while travelling. He has also commented on the provision of clean water and sanitation services to the poor, which the pope had emphasized in the section on social justice, observing that social debts could not be repaid with money (Reichart, 2016).

Politicians are aware of the debate. The European Green Deal, with the associated and relevant legal documents, strives to implement further development of its sustainable solutions. However, *Laudato Si’* seems to be its perfect supplement in terms of a broad approach to social justice as it gathers together all the important participants and pays close attention to a global approach that filters down through society to each and every individual. More than ever before, the world deserves and is in need of a new perspective on leadership. Sustainability should become a primary goal and the new investment standard of the European Union as a global leader in sustainable investment with a significant distribution of capital. Based on the circular economy, the European Green Deal is looking at decoupled economic growth from resource use and environmental impact as part of a larger picture of economic, societal and cultural transformation.

## **Global action at different levels: the holistic approach to problem-solving**

Pope Francis referred to global capitalism as a force similar to Shiva, the great destroyer, and a catalyst for global warming. He also observes that small steps in combating the greater ethical and spiritual issues posed by global capitalism allow the rich and powerful to conceal their unjust advantages and further encourage the global oppression of the poor (Reno, 2015).

It is increasingly shown that action at international level is necessary for different areas not only as a global approach but also with emphasis on the particular circumstances and specificities on the ground at the local level. This is especially true nowadays as for many years we have been witnessing the inevitable connection of all parts of the world as a result of globalization.

Cooperation at all levels of government and respect for the specific contribution of each profession (political, economic, environmental, religious, etc.) can enrich a society that is changing rapidly due to technical developments and changes in lifestyle. It is a matter of some urgency that we return man to his essence and to a healthy and humane way of life, a life that must not become a mere medium of economics. Economics should serve him; the environment should serve him. Unfortunately, man is yet to use these two resources with the requisite degree of gratitude.

The period only recently behind us has confirmed that the pope's message is more than prophetic: it is also very practical. To forestall the impending crisis and provide something resembling a 'normal' life, it was necessary to cooperate with all those involved with politics, religion, economy and society, but also with other areas of human activity at different levels. The European Union, as a community based on Christian values, finally offered a proposal for a common response to the crisis and a path to recovery entitled 'Europe's Moment: Repair and prepare for the next generation', which was recently updated to 'Next Generation EU'.

## **Man without a moral background: questioning the neoliberal economic model**

Roepke highlighted two great evils that strike reality: big government and dominant businesses. He spoke about the trap of capitalism that dehumanizes and belittles man. The Encyclical emphasizes that local individuals are the ones who must offer a well-conceived economy that takes good care of and manages the environment. We all have to participate and are jointly responsible for these global actions. What matters most is the strong sense of community, a willingness to protect others, the deep love for the Earth and the spirit of creativity.

Before the publication of *Laudato Si'*, Rick Santorum, a former Catholic senator from Pennsylvania, opined that the pope should leave science to scientists and not get involved in

the debate on climate change. But this was an unjust dismissal. Pope Francis paid significant attention to the challenging problem of replacing capitalism as an economic model and warned of the potential for negative ecological and social effects. He naturally advocated for the poor and the hungry and offered a much broader picture of the problem globally. The Encyclical mirrors his advocacy. The pope transcends all limits and tries to reconcile science and religion with the moral imperative for the achievement of social justice for all (Formicola, 2015).

Therefore, he talks about the increasingly present individualism and a desire for economic prosperity and progress, which has distanced man from the community to which he belongs both internationally and locally. Everything we do reflects upon others around us, which means that everyone, including those who make political decisions, should not only take care of our brothers and sisters around us, but also those who live on the other side of the world.

The pope's views are neither political nor ideological but will inevitably be interpreted as the views of a globally recognized authority by both liberal and conservative public officials for the purpose of legitimizing their specific approaches to public policy. *Laudato Si'* has radically criticized the irresponsibility of those who should be responsible and are usually the ruling elite. There are numerous different types of oligarchs whose sole interest is in preserving the system rather than safeguarding its sustainability in a responsible manner. For those with more resources, economic and political power is unfortunately covering up the problems rather than treating the symptoms (Löwy, 2015).

It is therefore necessary to question the economic model that characterizes a liberal society that is rapidly expanding its ideas to the international level. The Vatican Declaration, adopted on 24 November 2017, attempted to present the important question of historical levels of inequality, which together with digitalization and climate change raise a whole new range of troubling issues (Vatican Declaration, 2017). These include a weakening of labour legislation and state regulation, unfair trade, the financialization of the economy and the blind belief in technology as a comprehensive solution to the problems of social organization. Increasingly pronounced automation, individualization, inequality, precariousness, mass unemployment, poverty and the phenomena of the exclusion and rejection of people call into question the common home. These trends pose serious challenges for social and institutional stakeholders, and in particular the world of workers.

The end of the Cold War provided an opportunity for capitalism to develop as the dominant global economic system. It is not harmful in and of itself but nonetheless causes many environmental and social damages. One of the biggest problems is that global capitalism is not entirely under the control of governmental and regulatory institutions. As a result, it poses a

challenge to existing governmental and regulatory institutions and facilitates the presence of the technocratic elite in political and cultural debates. These facts are precisely why creating an alternative economic system to global capitalism is practically impossible (Reno, 2015).

### **Employment and the bottom-up perspective in the fast-growing world of technology**

Employment is an important issue from several perspectives: economic, social, psychological and political. Given this broader viewpoint, it is necessary to promote an economic model that will benefit the development of the economy as well as business creativity, productive diversity and an improved quality of life. Encouragement of a small business will not only achieve the aforementioned objectives but will naturally contribute to less environmental pollution. This is especially seen in farmers with small agricultural plots, gardens, orchards and so forth. The economies of scale stifle small businesses and thus hinder traditional and more sustainable methods of conducting business; this also applies to manufacturing. However, it is wrong to claim that favouring free markets also implies a focus only on profit and by that measure a disregard for the environment. It is the many free-market supporters who have dedicated their entire lives to implementing economic activities that care about the environment (Gregg, 2015).

The responsibility of the state is to support small producers through various long-term, clearly defined measures, and to provide society with the economic freedom required, which is manifested in greater opportunities for entrepreneurs and employment (Byrne, 2015).

*Laudato Si'* continued the Encyclical tradition that began in the late nineteenth century with Leo XIII. It combines a theological critique of the modern context while encouraging those aspects of secular modernity that strive to promote human dignity (Reno, 2015). The Encyclical welcomes the rapid development of technology and does not imply a rejection of technology; however, it serves to emphasize the importance of a healthier, more holistic, more humane and a more social use of technology. There are various advantages of modern technology that have improved a person's life (Montgomery, 2015), but technology is also a mentality or paradigm that has become increasingly problematic. A technological mentality seeks dominance over nature; through the use of science together they form an ideology of godless modernity (Reno, 2015). It is important to observe that St John Paul II emphasized the dignity of work, declaring that people have a vocation to be gainfully employed; he criticizes technological developments aimed at replacing workers rather than improving the lives of all (Byrne, 2015).

Taking its cue from this contentious subject, the EU 'Work-life Balance Directive' has proven to be of some importance, although its different applications at the national level could lead to deeper problems and differences among member states. Those cleavages assume various



perspectives on the presented interests at the European level and imply the complicated position of the EU on the international stage, along with the challenges faced in the everyday lives of its citizens. This could also stimulate debate on the moral dilemma and importance of the family as the smallest institution in which the individual is moulded into a person who will contribute to society with acquired worldviews and values. The question is by which means will particular attention be paid to families as centres of investment together with new institutions that will teach individuals how to build mutual trust and seek cooperation on a local, national, regional and international level. The British philosopher Roger Scruton has long been a proponent of ecoconservatism, and in the eighteenth century Edmund Burke discussed a form of ecological conservatism as it pertains to the sustainable society. The role of the family is indescribably important because in that first community the most important values are learned: the purpose of and proper use for all natural things, regard for all the creatures around us and respect for the local ecosystem (Byrne, 2015).

### ***Laudato Si'*: more than ever a relevant guideline for a new leadership perspective**

As the largest of the pandemics thus far, the Covid-19 health crisis has shown that, as a habitat, the Earth is small and is rapidly being marked by unethical activities in one part of the world. Social justice has become more necessary, while the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath has shown that every individual, country and alliance—and indeed the whole world—is only as strong as its most vulnerable individuals and groups. Jesus Christ spoke and testified to the need for living in harmony with our brothers, sisters and the created world, and we have shown through our activities how prone we are to the enslavement and abuse of all the knowledge and gifts entrusted to us. One virus, the occurrence of which is morally questionable, has cost many lives and confirmed that urgent transformation and a rethinking of the paradigm it has created and in which it lives are now required. The health crisis has also triggered an economic and political crisis in freedom of movement, day to day life and ultimately the freedom to share in a certain and secure future. Let us hope that the solidarity we have shown towards one another during the quarantine and everything we have accomplished will result in a surer togetherness, solidarity, cooperation and dialogue between different stakeholders and professions.

Therefore, a morally grounded and restructured leadership is what Europe and the world itself urgently requires. In this sense, and by promoting implementation of the comprehensive European Green Deal programme as a special response to environmental challenges, and with the joint programme ‘Next Generation EU’ for its recovery, Europe is setting an imperfect but positive example for the entire world. Man has an infinitely great responsibility and is asked to

question his deeds, not only rationally, but also through a continued dialogue with God, who we ultimately encounter best in all that he has created and that we are called upon to preserve.

### ***Laudato Si'* at the European level: initiatives and concrete actions**

The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* is recognized globally, but the question remains: How many people in European countries are generally willing to hear the messages from the Encyclical and in which areas have good practices and effective operational models been implemented? Different events prepared at the European and world level, which are difficult to enumerate in a single discussion, are tangible proof of the considerable interest people now have in preserving the messages from *Laudato Si'*. The reason for this is that these messages resonate as a prophecy, particularly at a time when we are facing ever greater climate change that significantly affects biodiversity and the preservation of a fragile ecosystem. The path that humanity has taken is unsustainable; this means that a transformation is absolutely essential, not only in relation to the environment but also in relation to all of humankind.

One of the largest initiatives that appeared before this health pandemic in late 2019 is the 'European *Laudato Si'* Alliance'. This is an alliance of Catholic Church institutions and organizations that have joined forces in Europe to promote climate reform and social justice. The members of the alliance drew their inspiration from Pope Francis's Encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The initiative came as a continuation of the two-year cooperation of members in organizing *Laudato Si'* Reflection Days in Brussels. The organizations and institutions that are currently members of ELSiA have different backgrounds, but what they have in common in their broad spectrum of work is dealing with the issue of climate justice and a shared commitment in promoting the Church's social doctrine. As there was no Catholic platform in Brussels that could deal with advocating for the effective focus of the European institutions on these topics, this shortcoming was recognized and a remedy actively sought. The aim was not to create a new organization based in Brussels, but rather to unite those already in existence. As a response, the Vatican Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development supported the creation of the European *Laudato Si'* Alliance in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

The goals that ELSiA wants to pursue in its future work can be grouped into four areas. One is advocating the Catholic Church's message on holistic ecology related to environmental and social justice issues. A second is to promote the exchange of the finest practices across Europe for a more environmentally responsible and sustainable lifestyle. Theological reflection on the issue of ecological conversion while encouraging the creation of appropriate spiritual content is another important objective. The last goal of ELSiA is to develop a wide network of

Catholic participants in Europe to contribute to the development of climate, development and environmental policies. Appropriately, the European *Laudato Si'* Alliance has announced its official presence by organizing events on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

On the fifth anniversary of the release of the Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, the 2020 *Laudato Si'* Reflection Day Webinar – ‘How the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* could steer the EU’s role in a just recovery after the Covid-19 crisis’ was held on 28 May, 2020. It was organized by ELSiA (the European *Laudato Si'* Alliance). The realization of the necessary collaboration of science and religion could be observed through the presence of the two main speakers: Mariana Mazzucato, a professor and economist at University College London (UCL), where she is the founder and director of the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP), and Monsignor Bruno-Marie Duffé, a Vatican Representative and Secretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The pope’s words confirmed what his predecessors had been warning us about over the last fifty years, and yet he goes further by articulating a broader crisis. However, he does not merely criticize the shortcomings of human action but offers crystal clear guidelines for further action while emphasizing the importance of cooperation as a key element for the future good of society. The European *Laudato Si'* Alliance is guided by the principle that this message bears profound meaning and seeks the cooperation of various experts at all levels of society. ELSiA plans to develop cooperation with numerous partners and build a fairer Europe in social and environmental terms, and Croatia is an interesting country due to the fact that some progress is already visible there.

### ***Laudato Si'* at the Croatian level: initiatives and concrete actions**

The society to which we have grown accustomed is becoming something that destroys us within and without, and it is not uncommon to see family lives being devalued through the need to follow labour market paradigms. Without additional research and precise statistical analysis, at present it is difficult to enumerate the countries in which the steps of adopting and implementing the pope’s recommendations on the path to a better society and a more sustainable environment may be seen to have taken root.

But what can an ordinary believer do in terms of providing support and care for our common home? This is a frequent question. To begin with, the individual is called to action. This is measured in small steps and activities. It is important to be aware of the food we eat, the clothes we wear and how we use means of transportation; but perhaps of greater importance,

action is measured in the manner in which we treat our neighbour and in behaviour that reflects the best interests of our own community. Every person is called upon to contribute what he or she can give – the resources, knowledge and opportunities at their disposal. For a person to be on the right path, it is important to engage in spiritual questioning and to have a firm foundation in various individual and joint spiritual activities. We must never forget that we are called upon to learn from one another, to share the resources we have with those who are less fortunate and to work with others. It is precisely the current pandemic that has shown us that the knowledge and experience of all professions and all levels of decision-making and support are needed to make positive decisions and to take forward steps. Let us not forget that we are called upon to act locally, but we are also advised to think and strive to act globally because all the people on Earth are our brothers and sisters.

At the Croatian level, awareness is also being raised about the importance of *Laudato Si'*, especially at the present moment in time. On 22 May 2020, the Catholic University of Croatia and CRO *Laudato Si'* organized an online scientific conference with international participation entitled “Five years after *Laudato Si'*. Where are we now?” The dialogue and reflection on where society currently stands and where it should go was enhanced by Croatian contributors and internationally recognized scientific names along with those from within the Church’s institutions.

About a hundred participants from Italy, France, Poland, Montenegro, Austria and Croatia attended the conference and discussed the importance of the Encyclical. The conference aimed to mark the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, but the letter proved to be a prophetic text that gave us a deep insight into the state of humanity. Pope Francis—guided by the power of the Spirit of God—called for a conversion, a new relationship with God, with people and, in a special way, with nature.

One of the speakers was Luigi Bruni, the Professor of Economy from the LUMSA University of Rome, who gave an introductory lecture entitled ‘*Laudato Si'*, Economics and Covid-19’. The conference highlighted globalization as a reality in which borders do not really exist, and therefore we are all one world and one society. In that respect, this is a new time of cooperation and togetherness, and the European response is extremely important as billions of euros in recovery are crucial. An awareness has been raised: the crisis could have taught us that caring for others is more important than GDP, that a fair distribution of wealth is much more important than creating wealth; after all, one can become rich and yet remain highly vulnerable. In regular situations, wealth may certainly be of help, but in emergencies, fair and equitable distribution is much more important.

In the 'home' context of awareness and distribution, the fact that Croatia has a television company called Laudato TV, which has been broadcasting various Catholic content for the last five years, is of profound significance in the rooting of the principles of *Laudato Si'* within the broader community; of particular note, Laudato TV has also been organizing large annual concerts attended by thousands of people. It is perhaps too early to assess how much *Laudato Si'* has been implemented at the individual or parish level across Croatia, but the outward signs that results may be surprisingly good could be substantiated through continued research.

In the meantime, let us believe that in the last five years we have all learned something significant from the pope's words and that, now that the pandemic has eased, we have truly awakened not only to faith and the realization of the responsibility we carry but also to the activities in which we engage at all levels.

## **Conclusion**

Today the pope's Encyclical is more important than ever, primarily because it serves as a moral call to save Mother Earth and humanity, especially in times of great crisis. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis has warned us of the numerous present and potential future crises at various levels. He has presented us with a clear and yet detailed guide as to the means of successful navigation through these crises. Appropriately, the Covid-19 pandemic crisis has validated Pope Francis's prescient concerns and confirmed that the cooperation of experts at different levels is required to combat any global threat.

The European Union must deal with many different national approaches to the Covid-19 measures, but at least some understanding of the broader problem has been established and there are indeed some common agreements. As Pope Francis advocated in *Laudato Si'*, this ability to attain common ground shows how necessary the collaboration of stakeholders at the political, economic, religious, local, regional and international level has become.

Some participants contend that development of the economy, markets and technology will solve the problems of environmental protection, global hunger and even poverty, but it is mindful to consider the fact that growth itself induces poverty and environmental damage. It is necessary to build the right moral, cultural and institutional environments for humankind, which includes more equitable distribution of wealth, care for the environment and the rights of future generations. The market alone cannot guarantee full human development and social inclusion (Gregg, 2015).

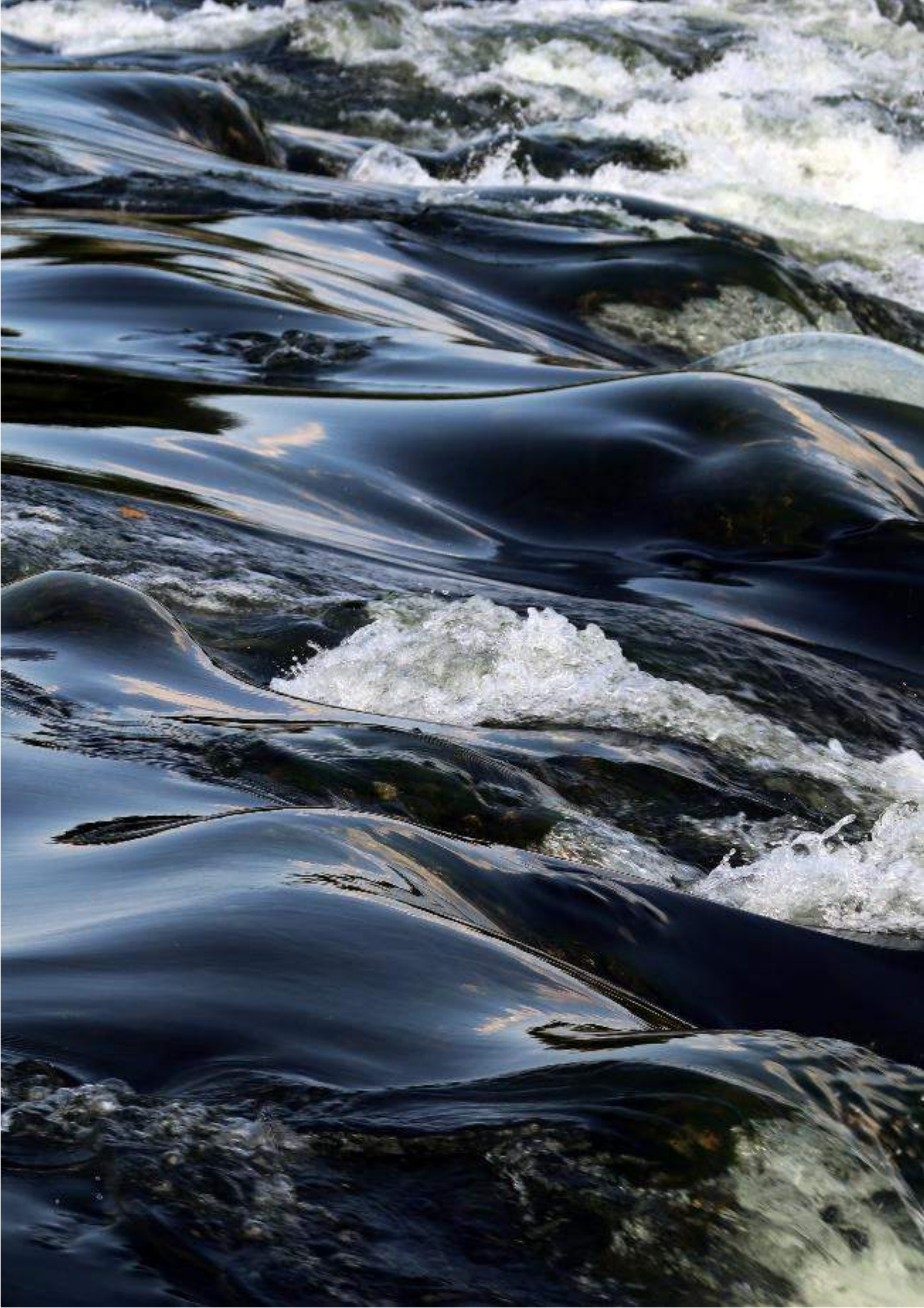
The promotion of specific environmental projects paired with the need to strengthen the spiritual dimension delineated in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* is the solution for comprehensive

change. Particular emphasis is placed on Pope Francis’s call to all humankind—believers and non-believers alike—to contemplate and reflect upon the Creator who gave us a common home, Mother Earth, and to embrace all our brothers and sisters around us. Nature itself offers us the source of the greatest inspiration through all the beauties that our Almighty Father has given us and through which he shows his abiding love. The observation of all the blessings and benefits He has bestowed upon us, which are most visible in the natural beauties and increasingly rare resources we ourselves will never be able to create, makes us acutely aware of why the Creator calls upon us now to show the same love and commitment to our neighbours.



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## **The Social Doctrine of the Church and the Social Encyclical *Laudato Si'*: A Theological Perspective**

### **Abstract**

The Church calls on us as individuals to build human communities. Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, which needs to be contextualized within current space and time. The Church does this through its social doctrine, which is a crucial aspect of the Christian message since it presents its direct consequences for social life, which include working with commitment, promotion of justice and active involvement. Society is about the human being, while social coexistence often determines quality of life. Pope Francis's first social Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home* from 2015 is the first social document of the Church's Magisterium, one which is entirely dedicated to the topic of integral ecology and all of Creation. Through this Encyclical, the pope has positioned himself within the text corpus of the social doctrine of the Church. *Laudato Si'* establishes an effective means of analysing, recognizing and putting into practice the steps that follow the example of the Church's social doctrine method. While linking his reflections on the dignity of the human being with care for all Creation, especially through issues of integral human development and solutions for poverty, Pope Francis also points towards possible ways of finding a paradigm in resolving the existing crisis. A Christian knows that principles for reflection, criteria for judgment and directives for action can be found in the social doctrine of the Church, and that this is the starting point for the promotion of an integral and unified humanism. Through this Encyclical the pope sought to enunciate its explicit confirmation.

### **Keywords**

social doctrine of the Church, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, caring for all creation, integral human development, option for the poor

## Introduction

The Church has actively participated in enculturation and plurality while adapting to the diverse opportunities present in society at any given moment in time. It has achieved its mission guiding humanity through history by caring for the integrity of the Gospel and its message of salvation. Through the power of argument and persuasion, there are numerous topics that should be taken into consideration and discussed patiently and in a committed manner within the Church and in church life if we are to discover their causes, entanglements and goals. Among these topics we include the dignity of each individual and their associated rights, freedoms and tasks, solidarity, mutual responsibility and connectiveness, the importance of the family for both the individual and society, employment and a fair working wage, our relationship with climate change, waste and human impact on everything in Creation and the associated ecological obstacles we face as a result of this impact, the role and challenges of the political community on society and the individual, an awareness of the need for joint action based on evangelical principles, subsidiary relations and their meaning, justice and peace. Consequently, the initial impression left by the social Encyclical of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si' . On Care for Our Common Home* (2015) in the ecclesiastical sphere—and the Catholic sphere in particular—is somewhat surprising as it seems to have had a greater influence outside the Church than among the Catholic faithful themselves. Greeted with enthusiasm in secular society from the date of official publication on June 18, 2015, as well as among scholars, policy makers and others in positions of responsibility, the Encyclical was heralded to the extent that some regard it as “the most important environmental text of the twenty-first century” (Jamieson, 2015, p. 19).

As Christians, Catholics are occasionally called upon to study current social challenges, to find new solutions inspired by the message of the Gospel. Therefore, at a limited distance, the content of the social Encyclical *Laudato Si'* began to be read, accepted and acted upon within the limits of what is possible within the *entire* Christian community, not merely in part but in whole. It reached its fullness by declaring the Jubilee Year “*Laudato Si'*” (May 24, 2020 to May 24, 2021), which was proclaimed for all Catholics by the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development.

The topic of caring for our common home and the consequences of the deteriorating condition in which it currently finds itself has a profound and immediate impact on our life and happiness. This is a topic of great social relevance, which is—in a special way and as part of church doctrine—entrusted to its social doctrine. Deeply involved in and connected to historical

events, the social doctrine of the Church is constantly renewed and opens itself to the changes and developments from within which modern life takes place. It is a dynamic that includes the Church and her social doctrine in the processes of actualization and popularization. Therefore, in the first part of this reflection, the properties of the social doctrine of the Church will be briefly discussed, with an emphasis on its active character. The second part will provide a brief chronological overview of some of the most important documents of the Church and its topics throughout the history of social doctrine. The thematic development of caring for all creation during the period from the Second Vatican Council to the publication of the Encyclical itself is discussed in the third part of the paper. The fourth part focuses entirely on the social Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, with special emphasis on two significant topics pertaining to the social doctrine of the Church: integral human development and an option for the poor. This section does not aim to provide a systematic treatment of these two topics, but rather to point out the more relevant aspects raised by Pope Francis in his first social Encyclical.

## **The social doctrine of the Church: what is it?**

### **Term, sources and method**

The term 'social doctrine' goes back to Pope Pius XI's social Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) and refers to church teaching that includes topics of social importance, starting with the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII (1891) through the Magisterium of the Roman Pontiffs and Bishops in communion with them. Although social welfare did not begin with this document, logically because the Church had never shown itself to be uninterested in society, Pope Leo XIII's social Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* marks a new beginning and a significant development in learning within the social field of day-to-day society.

The social doctrine of the Church is not an ideology or a pragmatic system but, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "rather the *accurate formulation* of the results of a careful reflection on the complex realities of human existence, in society and in the international order, in the light of faith and of the Church's tradition. Its main aim is to *interpret* these realities, determining their conformity with or divergence from the lines of the Gospel teaching on man and his vocation, a vocation which is at once earthly and transcendent; its aim is thus to *guide Christian behaviour*" (John Paul II, 1987, no. 41). Over time, the Church has developed some of its closely interrelated fundamental principles: the dignity of the person, the common good, a privileged commitment to the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity, the general purpose of goods and caring for all creation, which "can help us move forward in preparing the future that we need" (Francis, 2020).

The sources of the Church's social doctrine are the inspiration for Christian action. These sources include the Scriptures, the teachings of the fathers and great theologians of the Church and the Magisterium itself. The fundamental source of the social doctrine of the Church is God's revelation as contained in the Holy Scriptures. It encompasses both the theological dimension, which provides guidelines for a relationship with God, and the anthropological dimension, which provides guidelines on how to connect with one's neighbour (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, no. 66). The great Church fathers and theologians were concrete in their guidelines of and calls to action. Thus, for example, Basil the Great (330-379) gives instructions on how to treat those in need: "The bread you keep for yourself belongs to the one who is hungry; the suit you keep in the laundry closet belongs to the one who is naked; the shoes that rot in your house belong to the one who is barefoot; the money you keep underground belongs to the one who is in need" (Biškup, 1992, pp. 95-96). The social doctrine of the Church is the work of the Magisterium, which teaches the authority given to the pope and bishops by Jesus Christ. The Magisterium determines the direction and development of social doctrine and translates and actualizes teaching, all the while taking into account the specific properties of different parts of the world.

The nature of the social doctrine of the Church is moral-theological: it is a science, the purpose of which is to guide human behaviour. In fact, it "reflects three levels of theological-moral teaching: the one on which reasons are based; one that directs the norms of social life; and one that is decisive for consciences, which are called upon to mediate objective and general norms in concrete and special social circumstances" (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, no. 73). It is the well-known method of '*looking, judging and acting*' from the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Léon Cardijn (1882-1967), founder of the International Young Christian Workers ('Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne'). Cardinal Joseph Léon Cardijn dedicated his priestly vocation to the transmission of the Gospel, especially among the working youth, asking them to live the Gospel—the 'Good News'—in concrete life situations. The method of *looking-judging-acting* discussed in the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961) by Pope John XXIII, presumes, on the one hand, sufficient knowledge of the content of the Church's social doctrine, and on the other, takes into consideration those professional and educated individuals who are able to apply this content to specific occasions and a specific society. *To look* refers to the act of perceiving things. It means studying real problems and their causes and includes analysis that is entrusted to the social sciences and humanities (anthropology, psychology, economics, sociology, philosophy). It also includes an analysis of the 'signs of the times' as well as their recognition. *To judge* is little more than an explanation of the results obtained in the light of the

sources of the social doctrine of the Church. This refers to the shaping of attitudes about social phenomena and their ethical consequences. *To act* pertains to Christian practice; in other words, it is a concrete action based on previously acquired attitudes and choices.

### **An instrument of evangelization**

The Second Vatican Council describes the Church as *the People of God* (Second Vatican Council, 1964, no. 9), a community of those chosen from all nations by Jesus Christ. The Church comprises people gathered from the diversity of the world and includes their cultures, experiences, thoughts, customs, mentalities and spirituality. In the person of Jesus Christ, the Church is a sign of the closest and most intimate union with God as well as unity with the entire human community. Its mission is to proclaim the Good News, the Gospel to every person (Mt 28:19-20) as a means of attaining salvation. Jesus Christ called this message the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15). It is a message that does not close questions and does not impose them, but if it does seek to raise them, then it brings peace and hope. It is a message of communion with God and among people, a message of establishing new Christian communities in which people have not yet heard of Christ. The salvation of man is the primary and only goal. Salvation refers to the whole person, who is involved in that salvation with each action. The salvation of every person, which is proclaimed by this message, embraces all people and will be fully realized in the age to come in God the Father. As an instrument of proclaiming the message of salvation, through the Gospel the Church offers its social doctrine. Saint John Paul II was the first to speak about the social doctrine of the Church as an “instrument of evangelization” three decades ago in his social Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II, 1991, no. 54). Emphasizing that social doctrine proclaims God and the salvation of Christ to every human being, this Encyclical also shows care for situations and problems concerning human rights and freedoms, the family and upbringing, the obligations of the state, economic and cultural life and development, the promotion of peace and dialogue and respect for all life, from the moment of conception to natural death (John Paul II, 1991).

### **Presentation of the Gospel to a concrete human being in concrete circumstances**

The social doctrine of the Church is the actualization of the Gospel, that is, the presenting of the message of salvation to a concrete human being in concrete life circumstances. Nothing that concerns the community of men and women—situations and problems regarding justice, freedom, development, relations between peoples, peace—is foreign to evangelization, and evangelization would be incomplete if it did not take into account the mutual demands

continually made by the Gospel and by the concrete, personal and social life of every person (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, no. 66). In this case, it is not just a matter of conveying that message to a person in society who is the recipient of the Gospel proclamation, but also a way of enriching the society itself with and through the Gospel. Therefore, caring for a human being for the Church means including society in its mission.

Social coexistence often determines quality of life. For this reason, the Church is not indifferent to everything that is chosen, produced and acted upon in society. In other words, the Church is not indifferent to inherent moral quality, that is, the authentically humane and humanizing quality of social life. Society and with it politics, economics, labour, technology and communication, law and culture do not represent a purely secular and worldly sphere, which would therefore exist on the periphery of or outside the message of salvation. To be succinct, society, with all that is achieved within, concerns the human being.

To evangelize socially, to evangelize society itself would mean “infusing into the human heart the power of meaning and freedom found in the Gospel, in order to promote a society befitting mankind because it befits Christ: it means building a city of man that is more human because it is in greater conformity with the Kingdom of God” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, no. 63). In the process of caring for human life in society, the Church cares about the quality of social life through social doctrine. Due to the importance of the Gospel in the public domain, the Church cannot remain indifferent to social events whenever it comes to human dignity and the fundamental, inalienable rights of every individual or the salvation of the individual in the world of work, entrepreneurship, trade and finance, law, politics, culture, social communication and more.

The words of the Gospel should not only be heard but lived in practice. This means to say that it is not enough to respond only with partial, abstract or verbal consent, but throughout our lives and toward all the relationships that concern us and that we have built. It should be remembered here that the central message of the Christian faith is its deep sociality: a person is also a being of human relationship. Only in relation to others can a person grow and realize their potential. Our union is connected with the salvation of the other – the others. Therefore, the social doctrine for the Church, for every individual Christian, is not a privilege; it is not something incidental or optional, a benefit or an interference. The right of the Church, the right of the individual within the Church, is to evangelize socially, that is, to make the liberating word of the Gospel resonate in a complex world within the numerous segments in which a person lives. The social doctrine of the Church is the key to understanding Catholic identity.

## Review of Encyclicals and the social doctrine topics of the Church

The popes, in communion with the bishops, fulfilling their teaching ministry, taught through their letters, circulars and epistles. By illuminating the social questions of their time with the light of the Gospel, they fulfilled a task which belongs to the very essence of their ministry. Over a period spanning 130 years, over forty documents on socially significant topics have been published.

**Table 1**

*An overview of important social Encyclicals, apostolic letters and documents by topic*

POPE	TITLE	KEY TERMS
LEO XIII	<i>RERUM NOVARUM</i> <i>On Capital and Labour</i> (1891)	on work and worker conditions; the right to private property
PIUS XI	<i>QUADRAGESIMO ANNO</i> <i>On Reconstruction of the Social Order</i> (1931)	the principle of subsidiarity; condemnation of greed
JOHN XXIII	<i>MATER ET MAGISTRA</i> <i>On Christianity and Social Progress</i> (1961)	on Christianity and social progress
JOHN XXIII	<i>PACEM IN TERRIS</i> <i>On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty</i> (1963)	on peace and good; call for disarmament; the dignity of the human person and a ‘catalogue’ of human rights
SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL	<i>THE PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD OF TODAY GAUDIUM ET SPES</i> (1965)	the ‘Sign of the Times’; creating Structures for Justice and Peace; the Role of the Church in the Modern World
SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL	<i>DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DIGNITATIS HUMANAЕ</i> <i>On the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious</i> (1965)	recognition of the right to religious freedom and tolerance
PAUL VI	<i>POPULORUM PROGRESSIO</i> <i>On the Development of Peoples</i> (1967)	on the progress and overall development of the people; ‘Development is the new name of peace’; condemnation of actions that impoverish the individual and nations

PAUL VI	<i>OCTOGESIMA ADVENIENS</i> Apostolic Letter (1971)	a call to action, specifically to political action given the economic injustice in the world
JOHN PAUL II	<i>LABOREM EXERCENS</i> <i>On Human Work</i> (1981)	on the dignity of work and workers; affirms the right to work
JOHN PAUL II	<i>SOLLICITUDO REI SOCIALIS.</i> <i>For the Twentieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio</i> (1987)	on the social welfare of the Church; an option for the poor; the need for solidarity; ‘structures of sin’
JOHN PAUL II	<i>CENTESIMUS ANNUS.</i> <i>On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum</i> (1991)	‘Man is the way of the Church’; reaffirming the social doctrine of the Church principle; indicates the negativity and then the collapse of socialist and market economies
BENEDICT XVI	<i>CARITAS IN VERITATE</i> <i>On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth</i> (2009)	human development in love and truth; rights and duties; environment and technique
FRANCIS	<i>LAUDATO SI’</i> <i>On Care for Our Common Home</i> (2015)	moral crisis of man and care for all creation
FRANCIS	<i>FRATELLI TUTTI</i> <i>On Fraternity and Social Friendship</i> (2020)	the universal dimension of fraternal love; recognize and love every person without boundaries

## **Caring for all creation**

### **Biblical aspects**

Man’s relationship with the world is an integral element of human identity. In the world around him, the Christian being recognizes the traces of God’s closeness and friendship, and in the sounds of nature he hears a creature’s call to glorify the Creator. From the very first pages of Scripture, it is evident the Earth and all its goods have been given to man as a gift, and that he is called upon to treat them as their steward (Gen 2:15). From the Old Testament it can be clearly read that the faith of the people of Israel lives in the time and space of this world, which is understood as a gift of God and not as a hostile world or an evil to be striven towards. In the beginning God the Creator, after creating all things and all creatures, “saw that all things were good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The people of Israel have always responded to God’s Creation through praise and thanksgiving: “How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you



made them all” (Ps 104:24). In the New Testament, God offers final salvation to all mankind through his Son, Jesus Christ. It is realized not outside but inside this world. Awareness of the existence of discord between nature and man should be accompanied by an awareness that in the person of Jesus Christ there has been a reconciliation of man and the world with God. Thus nature, created by the Word, is reconciled to God precisely by the Word incarnate (Col 1:15-20).

### **The path of development to the Encyclical *Laudato Si'***

The greatest event of the Catholic Church in the last century was the Second Vatican Council and its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today. Gaudium et Spes* (1965). Number 69 emphasized the principle of the general purpose of earthly goods with the words “God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner” (Second Vatican Council, 1965), and in this way indirectly observed the need to preserve goods and all Creation. The Council Fathers positively emphasized the results of science and technology as well as their application in the natural environment, calling them “the triumphs of the human race” (Second Vatican Council, 1965, no. 34). However, they also stressed the connection between human power and strength and responsibility, emphasizing the fact that every human action should be in accordance with the true good of humanity.

Pope Paul VI elaborated upon environmental issues within the content of his numerous speeches and documents in the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) both during and after the Second Vatican Council. For him, the ecological crisis already evident during that period in time represented a dramatic consequence of the uncontrolled actions of individuals; he points directly to the cause-and-effect relationship between the overexploitation of our natural resources—and to the risk of becoming a victim of that abuse—and man himself. According to the letter, this is “a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family” (Paul VI, 1971, no. 21). He seeks a radical turn in human behaviour and the need to take responsibility, observing that all those great and good things, including inventions and advances that, at the same time, do not accompany the social and moral progress of man, eventually turn against him. Although written firmly in his own voice, Pope Paul VI presented *Octogesima Adveniens* as a moral imperative through strong expression for overlooked issues which, during that particular period, concerned environmental problems such as, for example, the threat of ecological catastrophe that has become readily apparent in our present-day society.

The imperative is therefore not merely reduced to a specific moment in time. In his discussion on our responsibility towards the environment, Pope Paul VI directed his thinking towards future generations: “We are under obligation to all men. Therefore, we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations” (Paul VI, 1967, no. 17). Through this cogent reflection, Pope Paul VI encouraged intergenerational and intragenerational solidarity while providing a stern warning that the degradation of everything in Creation cries out for and demands responsible behaviour.

Building upon this premise, Pope John Paul II repeatedly emphasized the connection between true human development and an orderly system. He therefore called for a personal awareness of each individual’s own actions as they stand in relation to “the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate—animals, plants, the natural elements—simply as one wishes, according to those with economic needs” (John Paul II, 1987, no. 34). Underscoring the deeper connection between environmental and human ecology, the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* emphasized maintenance of the moral conditions of authentic human ecology and called for ecological conversion on a global scale (John Paul II, 1991, no. 38). The environmental problem is most directly related to the deep moral crisis within today’s society; issues related to caring for all of Creation include a moral responsibility that applies to all. Saint John Paul II was aware that any pursuit of the protection of the world and in making it a better place in which to live entails the demand for profound change. It requires a change of lifestyle, new ways and models of production and consumption, economic systems and activities, but also a change in the structure of governance. Such a change must always be in accordance with the original gift of God and in the spirit of the Good News.

In his pontificate, Benedict XVI also placed a certain emphasis on issues related to the environment and its protection. He articulated the need to correct growth models that threaten the environment, noting that humanity has been given the knowledge, resources and means to do so (Benedict XVI, 2007). In his social Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), the pope linked the degradation of nature and Creation with all segments of modern society and even with the degradation of man himself (Benedict XVI, 2009): “The environment must be seen as God’s gift to all people, and the use we make of it entails a shared responsibility for all humanity, especially the poor and future generations. . . . Whenever nature, and human beings in particular, are seen merely as products of chance or an evolutionary determinism, our overall sense of responsibility wanes” (Benedict XVI, 2009, no. 48). He also pointed out that each decision that pertains to development and economics brings new moral challenges which, if

they do not aim at man and his well-being, leave consequences behind (Benedict XVI, 2010). The consequences can be seen in the nature that surrounds us, and they are the direct effect of our irresponsible behaviour or neglect of duty that arise from our relationship with the natural environment. Pope Benedict XVI contends that “the book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development” (Benedict XVI, 2009, no. 51). He thereby extends the responsibility for all creation to the Church which, by protecting the earth, air, water and other gifts—gifts that belong to us all—at the same time protects man himself.

### ***Laudato Si'*: a social Encyclical on the care for our common home**

In the social Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis addresses all people who are of good will and who care about the planet through open dialogue, which is the main element of the Encyclical itself. In the tradition of the social doctrine of the Church, this is the first time that a social Encyclical is fully dedicated to the care of all creation. At the heart of the Encyclical is an integral ecology as a new paradigm of justice; the precondition is ecological conversion. Complete ecology includes the place that man, as the crown of creation, occupies in this world, as well as his relation to everything created that surrounds him. From land suitable for life to life-giving water, from fruit-bearing trees to animals sharing a common planet with humankind, everything is sweet and good in God's eyes: this created world is offered to all of humanity as a precious gift to be cared for and preserved. It is tragic that the human response to this gift is marked by sin, confinement in one's own comfort and a covetous desire to possess and exploit. Egoism and vested interests of various kinds have reshaped the living world, which was once a place of communion and encounter, and have made that world a place of misunderstanding, intolerance and conflict. The immediate consequence is a threat to the environment itself, the destruction of which takes on “global environmental deterioration” (LS 3). Man thus becomes a witness to perverted values. Namely, the environment, that is, everything created as good in God's eyes, has become in man's hands, regrettably, only a means to be used (Francis, 2019).

Pope Francis confirmed that this Encyclical, with its theme of man's commitment to the environment and his relations with the realities that surround him, is a contribution to the social doctrine (LS 15). This is certainly true, primarily because it responds to the difficult, completely unpredictable and yet at the same time dangerous challenges of today, challenges accompanied by the crises and insecurities in which our common home presently finds itself. The pope noted that the moral crisis and concern for the dignity of man form the centre of his reflection with regard to topics of care for all of Creation. Namely, he brought the issue of the environment

and the human condition into direct correlation in a tangible emphasis of his own position; complemented by support from numerous sources and examples, this position contends that an objective analysis of the environment is inseparable from the analysis of man, his family, work and the urban context as well as man's relationship to himself. This follows precepts inscribed long ago by St Ambrose, the great teacher and father of the Church who described the general purpose of earthly goods: "You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich" (Paul VI, 1967, no. 23). The Lord God wanted this land to be in the common possession of all people and to bear fruit for all. However, selfishness and a narrow view exclusively honed to individual desires and pleasures have led to a discord that has put the future of everything in Creation, including ourselves, into question.

Of the more important issues that Pope Francis emphasizes in his reflections on the planet and the care for our common home, together with the related topics that comprise the central corpus of the Church's social doctrine, two of them in particular will be mentioned here, albeit briefly. The first concerns integral human development; the second pertains to the poor and the excluded.

### **Integral human development**

Pope Francis continues to reflect on the words of his predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Pope Benedict XVI, on the great theme of integral human development. Thus, he agrees with Pope Paul VI that men and women have "the capacity to improve their lot, to further their moral growth and to develop their spiritual endowments" (LS 127). By living this way, they are able to hope for the development of the whole person, and indeed, of all men, thereby passing from less human to more humane conditions of life. In the social Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* on development, Benedict XVI observed that everything that exists to the detriment of man always entails economic cost and has a negative effect on all Creation; conversely, adverse economic circumstances and a wounded natural world always reflect poorly on man as a person (Benedict XVI, 2009). Relying in part on the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* of Benedict XVI, Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* calls for an economy of love and self-giving to promote solidarity and fraternal relations between peoples and nations (Francis, 2013). In the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the pope spreads the idea of promoting a kind of planetary solidarity with the earth, its inhabitants and all creatures: "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God

has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (LS 92). Interconnectedness and a threaded wholeness permeate the entire *Laudato Si'* Encyclical. The integral approach adopted by Pope Francis in the social Encyclical requires a necessary broadening of the perspectives of conversation and reflection but also urges action on environmental issues. While ecology and its related topics have so far dealt with the ‘environment’ mainly from the outside, which means to say, issues such as the protection of exotic plant and animal species and the preservation of intact ecosystems, Pope Francis is asking readers, believers in particular, to adopt a new approach. He states that a society that ignores the cries of the most invisible groups in society, whether “a human embryo, a person with disabilities” (LS 117) or any other unseen person, will also be equally deaf to the cries of Mother Earth. Therefore, part of the indictment addressed to modern society can be inferred by his tone, namely that this society has declared itself the master of all Creation and has thus questioned the foundation of its very existence, provoking a rebellion against nature. Emphasizing the interconnectedness of all that God has created, the pope calls for uninterrupted remembrance and cohesion between a genuine concern for one’s own life and our relationship with nature, and their connection with brotherhood, justice and fidelity to all.

As Pope Francis recalls in number 67, every person has an obligation to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15), but he also emphasizes 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, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things” (LS 83). In this way, the pope established his thinking on environmental protection in relation to the Creator of all Creation: the Triune God. In this context, one can read the significance for Pope Francis of man’s return to God. Namely, the man of today has almost severed the ties that once connected him with God. From this follows the pope’s message that it is not possible to live in harmony with the created world if man is not at peace with the Creator, the source and origin of all things. Unfortunately, there are too many examples that testify to the fact that the reckless use and utilization of Creation begins where there is no God and where matter for man has become only material and means.

In *Laudato Si'*, the pope also speaks of an ‘authentic development’, which refers not only to the vital importance of sustainable systems but also to a comprehensive understanding of the coexistence of economies, human rights and dignity. On the one hand, authentic development includes the existence of fulfilling the task of the existing economic system; on the other, the existence of the spiritual and material goal of the human person and their dignity. The pope claims that social love is the key to true development, quoting the words of the

Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church: “In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life—political, economic and cultural—must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005, no. 582). Continuing further, he also points to the importance of small, everyday gestures with the words “social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a ‘culture of care’ which permeates all of society” (LS 231). The ultimate success of the effect depends on the amount of tenderness, compassion and care for other human beings that any given person carries inside their heart, but also on their unwavering commitment to solving social challenges.

In his Encyclical subtitled *On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis opposes the ideological conviction that ‘reproductive rights’ aimed at reducing population growth are the correct response to climate change, which is a serious threat to human development to the extent that the existence of humanity itself is now in question. He observes that, on the contrary, the main generator of the crisis threatening man does not lie in population growth on a global scale but in excessive consumption. Stressing that the climate is “a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” (LS 23) towards which the principle of goods and their general purpose continues to speak, the pope calls for an awareness of “the need for changes in lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it” (LS 23). Pope Francis shows the interconnectedness of the many problems he ponders and addresses on the one hand, while on the other he contemplates the primary answer for which he still retains hope: a profound and radical change in both life and lifestyle. In theological vocabulary, the pope called on each individual to convert his heart and, on that basis, to take concrete action.

### **Options for the poor**

In his interview on economy and social justice in 2015, Pope Francis stated that men and women cease to be persons and begin to become the means of rejection the moment at which man is replaced by money at the centre of social and economic systems (Tornielli and Galeazzi, 2015). Indeed, today’s world is increasingly threatened by this moral wilderness, by the anxiety and fear that stem from a complacent and covetous heart. Figuratively speaking, this heart is compassed by the lure and taste of money as well as the quest for superficial and transient pleasures. In a situation where life is solely focused on personal interests and concerns, space for anything else is missing. One loses the zeal for doing good and a lack of time and space for the concerns of the poor becomes ever more apparent. From a Christian perspective, however,

consciousness of the existence of poverty should never leave a person in a state of indifference. In the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis speaks of a profound interconnectedness between the poor and the fragility of the planet, reiterated in a Christian prayer in union with Creation towards the close of the Encyclical: “The poor and the earth are crying out” (LS 246).

The topic of the poor is highlighted at the heart of this Encyclical as a theme deeply rooted in the intensely personal mission of the pope himself, which can be traced throughout his pontificate in his numerous speeches, thoughts and texts devoted to this topic. When he discusses the worsening of the quality of human life and the erosion of its social dimension, Pope Francis observes that in the uninhabitable conditions of the urban neighbourhoods in many contemporary cities, poor people live in exclusion from society and are thereby most affected by the decline and fragility of the environment. The pope emphasizes a fact that affects billions of people, namely that in a global arena a “clear conscience of problems which particularly strike the excluded does not exist” (LS 49). Through powerful imagery, he reasons that the poor are faced with comfortable oblivion or simple ignorance. They are reduced to “an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage” (LS 49).

It is interesting to note that in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which is primarily a social Encyclical on climate and ecological issues, the word ‘climate’ is mentioned fourteen times while the word ‘poor’ appears almost sixty times (or fifty-nine times, to be precise). Merging the discourse of the environment with the poor seems to be the breaking point. It is a certain novelty in Catholic social doctrine when it comes to the treatise of concern for Creation. The pope reminds us that when it comes to ecological crises, the true cost of the damage is not mainly in the extermination and extinction of exotic and rare animal and plant species, but rather in the distress of millions of our less fortunate brothers and sisters – members of our common home. He argues for a reasonable and sustainable use of world resources not only because it would be the best response to the crisis caused by climate change, but also as any genuine concern for the environment necessarily includes care for and solidarity with the poor, especially those from developing countries around the world. The mutual interconnection between concern for the environment and solidarity with the poor countervails the flawed economic premise that good governance of the environment and protection of human dignity of the poor create conflicting interests. Pope Francis argues that it is the poor and the excluded who suffer material loss from the decline of the planet; in a commitment to and respect for the sustained dignity of the poor he finds “an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining common good” (LS 158). This is especially relevant for true believers in Christian doctrine. In

accordance with the message from the Gospels, it is the poor who themselves carry Christ's mark and in their own sufferings recognise the sufferings of Christ. Therefore, they do not and cannot represent the problem; on the contrary, they are the prospective agents of a new and more humane future for the entire world. They reveal the Gospel as a message of deliverance that applies to all people, one which is capable of radically transforming human consciousness as well as the social structures within which we either flourish or perish, thus siding with all those who suffer any kind of iniquity or injustice.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of the numerous challenges faced around the world and from within society, the Church calls upon us all to build more humane human communities and thereby amend our present position in history. The establishment and development of human community according to the requirements of the message of salvation brought about by the Gospels are not predetermined as final and absolute within concrete economic, cultural and political frameworks. We must learn to adapt. Moreover, this need for adaptation is a task entrusted to Christians, who time and time again have in turn been inspired by the Gospel message to generate new solutions for ever emerging challenges. The abovementioned task is entrusted to the Catholic social doctrine and the rich range of topics it has inherited. Catholic social doctrine is not merely a secondary activity or something added to the Church's mission; on the contrary, it is no less important than the mission itself. According to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church in number 67, this pursuit is a crucial aspect of the Christian message since it presents its direct consequences for social life, which include working with commitment, the promotion of justice and an active involvement (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005). In everyday events and through the search for truth under the lens of its social doctrine, the Church explores and discovers new 'signs of the times' (Mt 16.4); it attempts to understand and interpret them in a contemporary context while providing a trustworthy witness serving with love. Therefore, it must immerse itself in everyday life with the aim of changing social realities in accordance with the message of salvation. The Church does not set Christians apart from social life and their affiliation to their people, but rather teaches them to follow with patience and care in their growth while committing them to the service of the common good.

Pope Francis is aware of the role the Church currently plays in modern society and that it is not up to the Vatican to come up with final solutions (LS 61). However, he is also aware that planet Earth and the whole of Creation are exposed to precipitate decline (LS 231). He sends his message to help people become aware that they are not created to be self-governing



individuals who submit everything to themselves and their pleasures; rather, they are created to live at the centre of the network of life that consists of millions of diverse species created out of love by God their Creator.

The plight of the Earth and the poor in recent years has become increasingly prevalent and painful. More than ever, it is important to conceive long-term operating plans of action in the area of integral ecology, both on a macro and, perhaps even moreso, on a micro level – in families, parishes, religious orders and their associated communities, schools and universities. Growth in our own awareness that the whole of humankind shares in one common home as members of one and the same family has become imperative. In light of this task, Pope Francis has called upon all people of goodwill to explore and analyse their current situations as well as to take positive action in seeking new ways to improve their relation to Creation. This is in line with the fact that from within the rich heritage of Catholic social teaching, the Christian believer can find guiding principles for thought, criteria for better judgement and directions for action that could serve as a starting point in the promotion of an integral and solidary humanism. The existing steps must necessarily be followed by gestures of generosity, concern and solidarity. Pope Francis’s social Encyclical *Laudato Si’* sincerely and explicitly confirms this premise.



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## **The Biblical Perspective on Land in the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'***

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to draw attention to the theme of land as one of the fundamental components of biblical faith. The accounts of Creation in the Book of Genesis contain powerful, profound teachings on human life and its interrelatedness with the life of God's other creatures. Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour, and with the Earth itself. Christian understanding of the responsibility towards the Earth, based on biblical texts pertaining to land, does not stop at an ecological perspective. This paper therefore also refers to other biblical texts that indicate the complexity and depth of the biblical doctrine on the subject of land. In the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, given to us by Pope Francis, biblical faith is offered to contemporary members of the Church through the theme of human relationship to land. It is perhaps the most important biblical theme, one that has the power to weave and shape the systematic theology and social teaching of the Church. Our relationship with land, based on biblical faith, provides a realistic basis—in every form of a practical, everyday Christian way of life—for an engaged implementation of the theological, political, economic and social doctrines of the Church. Daily living is not merely theoretical but a genuine, real activity on Earth, which occupies a tangible place in the Christian faith. In the present discussion, the relationship between Earth and the earthly community of all living creatures is the fundamental principle in a correct understanding of the human relationship with God and with other human beings. It is difficult to come to an understanding and awareness of the injustices that humanity is inflicting upon the planet and the creatures that exist alongside us without understanding and experiencing the importance of the interrelationship of human beings with the land itself. Active ecological care and a sense of responsibility begin with the emergence of an awareness driven by biblical faith. This faith confirms that the Earth—the land we share with other people and other creatures—is a space that was given to us all by God the Creator as a common ground for our existence, a space in which to build a common home.

### **Keywords**

ecology, biblical theology, theology of the land, ecological responsibility, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*

## **Introduction**

An ecological crisis is the best-known and most popular initiator of the various studies on the subject of land in biblical and theological science. Modern believers require a religious and theological foundation for endeavours pertaining to ecology. Discovering the ground rules of ethical behaviour towards a world marked by ecological crisis and inhabited by those schooled in contemporary living is essential. Both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, our most recent popes, spoke on the environment and observed the need to raise environmental awareness in Christians (Dent, 1997; Morandini, 2008). However, Christian understanding of land and the theological discourse on Creation cannot be limited to ecology alone. Therefore, Pope Francis went a step further in explaining Christian doctrine on the land and all its inhabitants. Although in recent decades, biblical theologians have insisted on the importance of the biblical theme of ‘the land’, it was only recently presented to the Christian theological and religious public in Pope Francis’s Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* as one of the most important components of biblical faith.

Biblical accounts show that the theme of land runs deeper and is far more complex than it might seem at first glance. And yet for a very long time, this subject had been left out of the Christian religious consciousness. Pope Francis insists that environmental care should be one of the fundamental Christian duties. In *Laudato Si’* he posits the basis for this claim not only in biblical texts that speak on the close and unbreakable connection between God and man and the land on which he dwells, but also in the universal human experience, which tells us that a human being and the maintenance of life are intrinsically connected to the Earth. The Earth is a place for all living beings, the source of food and the space in which all God’s creations find their home. In view of this fact, Pope Francis sounds an urgent call—directed towards the entire human race and not only to the faithful—to rethink our present position on the harm we are causing and reflect upon the manner in which we are treating our common home.

## **A quest for a way out of the ecological crisis**

### **An ecological crisis is here: who is to blame?**

As early as the mid-twentieth century, it was already clear that considerable industrial progress came at a price. By this time, the unwanted by-products of the industrialist approach to reality had already proven to be harmful to humanity and many other forms of life on Earth. What was attested to be harmful for people was also confirmed as a dangerous threat to nature, birds and animals, which means to say, to the entire planet (Carson, 1963). Elucidation on this state of human relations to nature in Judeo-Christian theological thought surfaced from the American

anthropologist and historian Lynn White (1967), who explored the subject in *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*. The author contends that the Judeo-Christian interpretation of biblical texts on Creation was the primary cause of our ecological crises. White's accusations triggered an apologetical and ecological response by Christian scientists from various fields, including from within the field of theology.

It was quickly observed that there was a need to embrace Christian theology and form an alternative understanding of Creation together with the necessity to build an awareness of Christian responsibility for the Earth (Lohfink, 1977). Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and numerous others emphasized an urgent need for the adoption of more responsible behaviour towards all of Creation. Christian leaders and scientists argued that an ecological crisis is not simply a problem of science, economics and politics, but also an indicator of something that is deeply wrong with human attitudes and actions (Barker, 2008, pp. 192-193). Seeking justification, they regarded Christianity as a solution rather than the problem from which the causes of ecological crises had arisen. Nevertheless, objections to the Christian faith cannot be disregarded entirely. South African theologian Ernst M. Conradie (2006, pp. 65-67) claims that the cause of the ecological crisis is not the biblical message or the Christian faith, but the destructive legacy and long-standing justification of misinterpretation, and indeed, the frequent misinterpretation of biblical texts in particular. Moreover, the palliative acts of encouraging people to behave differently through overt condemnation of human greed, arrogance, domination, possession, manipulation and the overexploitation of the Earth and its resources are merely partial solutions to those issues that have arisen from our concept of land through biblical faith and theology (Pardon, 2014). The only practical religious and theological response to the present ecological crisis is to consider environmental issues an integral part of the process of addressing the questions regarding the overall attitude of the Christian religion to land and all earthly matters.

### **The issue of land in Christian theology**

The theological problem in grasping the theme of land is closely related to the understanding of the relationship between materiality and spirituality in Christian theological thought. Given the lack of a clearly articulated Christian approach based on the Bible and original theological teaching, it might have been anticipated that superciliousness, arrogance and the contemptuous attitude of Christians towards nature would have grown with time. From within this restricted framework of thought pertaining to the environment, cruel domination and brutal governance of the Earth appears to have been the only possible response of man within the created world

(Schaefer, 2005). Everything that was corporeal and earthly, as Reinhold Niebuhr observes, was regarded as negative and even evil and so had to be subordinated and subjugated to the spiritual and to the otherworldly, which were considered the supreme and eternal values. From within this thought process, contempt for the environment and a sustained arrogance towards nature and all other creatures is considered acceptable and justified. Moreover, 'the will of God' served as a pretext to promote the 'just and noble deeds' that man is obliged to carry out to salvage the world and save his soul, to separate eternal values from those that are perishable and transient (Niebuhr, 1966). Nature and creatures were thought of as 'things' and thus below man on the scale of dignity and worth. Creatures were perceived as having no value unless man perfected and ennobled them through his actions and use. Nature and creatures who, unlike man, have either no soul or a soul of lower category, were considered perishable and worthless, destined for destruction (Stipičić, 1967).

Christian alienation from the land, which Christian theological thought accepted and applied to the interpretation of biblical texts on Creation, is the fruit of the influence of other theological endeavours conditioned by the historical development of theology. In yearning to emphasize the dignity of man and his spirit as a link to the divine world, and by emphasizing man's ability to be part of God's reality, of resurrection and eternal life, the attitude towards nature and all other creatures as creatures of God assumed secondary importance. Therefore, our comprehension of nature, Creation and the land was reduced to the degree that they were not considered important elements of human religious life. To build a proper religiosity and faith, it was sufficient to cultivate only the man-to-God and man-to-man relationship. The God-man-earth relationship has not yet been sufficiently illuminated and valued. The Earth and its creatures have not been regarded as worthy in themselves (*in se*), but rather without intrinsic worth, as *matter* and *things* that have value only if they contribute to the benefit of man.

Contrary to these extant and even popular Christian views and attitudes towards the land and all earthly creations, Christian theologians have sought ways and means to offer humanity credible guidance on the search for human identity as an earthly being in the life system of all the creatures on Earth with a foundation upon biblical texts and biblical experiences of faith.

### **Land as a fundamental element of religion**

The present situation in which humanity finds itself requires a more comprehensive definition of the purpose of human existence and its fundamental task in the created world. To respond to these anthropological questions, the approach to biblical texts on the Creation of the world and us as human beings must be reconsidered. This new approach also requires a new method of



hermeneutics, primarily because it is not possible to analyse the topics of ecology without the proper anthropology (Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 118). The conclusion of biblical anthropology when compared with the conclusions of general anthropological research reveal that the Earth is a unifying concept in explaining the givenness of human life. Anthropologist of religion Mircea Eliade emphasizes that the Earth plays a major role in understanding the identity of its people, and that the experience of the Earth is essential for shaping a human person as a religious being (2002, p. 13). In every context and in every culture, land is a dominant reality. Land plays a crucial role in understanding the world, both on a personal and social level. Land is a central value within the world in which we live. "Understanding and experiencing the connection with the land we live on affects the way we express our existence, either in words or in deeds. The land is the ground and the foundation of our being" (Hann, 2002, p. 321).

Land pertains to the entire network of ideas in understanding and explaining human life, not only in the field of anthropology but also in other scientific fields (Inge, 2003; Wynn, 2007). Land is a comprehensive category that provides deeper insight into sociological, economic, political, environmental and religious contexts in addition to other manifestations of life (Trakakis, 2012). As a result of its timeless and all-encompassing presence in the existence of the human race, land manifests itself as one of the unavoidable concepts that shapes both the existential and theological views of all humanity (Wenell, 2007). Observing and studying the meaning of land in one category of life inevitably impinges upon our understanding of other forms of life and thus affects the behaviour of both individuals and human society as a whole. Anthropological studies of religious attitudes towards land among other peoples and cultures confirm that connection to the land and the experience of its sanctity are in complete harmony with biblical faith (Ryle, 2010). Consequently, contemporary Christianity, which ought to be based on biblical faith and the biblical understanding of the Earth, should also seek to inherit such an enlightened notion of the land or, at the very least, a similar religious perspective that may facilitate a more enhanced discovery of its meaning for modern man (Conradie, 2006).

### **Finding biblical ground for Christian ecological responsibilities**

Although the content of *Laudato Si'* goes far deeper and is more significant, Christian and non-Christian alike received the Encyclical Letter as an *ecological* Encyclical. It is important to observe that Pope Francis presented it as a social Encyclical aimed at raising a collective awareness of the need to care for our common home, for the Earth and all its creatures as well as for the environment in which we live. However, the primary purpose of this Encyclical Letter was to present the new teaching of the Church as it pertains to the challenges that ecological

and social crises pose to modern Christians, and indeed, to all the many peoples of Earth in a contemporary context. The Encyclical is primarily an elevated discourse on the social issues of the modern age. It establishes and affirms the views and teachings considered by Pope Francis to be useful not only for the benefit of the faithful who belong to the Church, but also for the good of all humankind (LS 63).

The doctrine presented in *Laudato Si'* relies not only on the historical experience of the Church in finding new ways to live the faith of many of its members, but also leans on the rich heritage of the Old and New Testament texts, which the Church considers the source of its wisdom. These written accounts by the chosen people of Israel and the believers of the first Church represent the foundation on which today's experience of faith is built and upon which the practical life of modern believers is based. Present-day believers still consider this biblical faith and the heritage from which it is drawn to be applicable and worthy of implementation in contemporary historical and social circumstances (*Dei Verbum*, 12).

### **Rediscovering biblical theology on the subject of land**

In circumstances of ecological crisis, Christian theology aspires to develop a Christian doctrine that will provide clear instructions for Christian living. Theological teaching has therefore been amended as a response to the current ecological situation. Insofar as possible, this new updated perspective should be grounded on biblical faith. In its search for the root cause of the present ecological crisis and in the wish to discover new forms of action to reduce further development of the harmful effects on the Earth and its system of life, Christian theology rediscovered the biblical doctrine pertaining to land. The research in biblical theology on land was considered a valuable starting point from which to develop the possibility of a stimulating, just, healthy, fair and undeniably positive theological attitude towards issues relating to the Earth and ecological welfare (Schwarz, 1991, p. 6.)

The general conclusion of this research suggests that in biblical faith the subject of land is presented as a fundamental and unifying theological concept. From the Book of Genesis all the way through to the Book of Revelation, land is viewed as a fundamental concept and a point of reference everywhere in the Bible. Although its meaning varies from one book to another, from one period of biblical history to another, from the Old to the New Testament, “the term ‘land’ still leaves the impression of complete coherence and stands out as an extremely dynamic concept” (Marchadour & Neuhaus, 2011, p. 11). Land stands in the very fundamentals of the relationship between God and man. Indeed, only through the identity of an earthly being does a person express faithfulness to God's word, submission to God's will and the glorification and

worship of God's majesty. Human identification with the Earth and the earthly community is a fundamental principle of a correct understanding of the interrelationship between God and man, and between man and other earthly creatures. Only in nurturing these interrelationships can we as human beings develop an understanding and awareness of the relationship between God and human connectedness to the land (Habel, 2008, p. 5).

In the search for a sage lesson that could lead the Christian people out of the ecological crisis, biblical theologians have discovered that there are three great traditions in the narratives of Scripture: the tradition of God, of man and of land. The study of the tradition of land and its creatures allows us to accept the fact that the land, along with God and all people, is an active participant and the subject of religious relations. Biblical faith is not only a living testimony of the relationship between God and man, but also a testimony of the relationship between God and his people and their land. In biblical accounts, land is not presented as an object, but rather as a subject: it is a living Creation of God and plays an active role in the Revelation. In the description of biblical history, land is presented as a matrix of biblical faith, from within which and on which the relations among God, man and all living creatures take place, attain form and are sustained or broken apart. Our contemporary biblical theologians are therefore placing an increasing emphasis on the belief that to discover ecological doctrine, it is important to look for the "voice and speech of the land" in biblical text and to read those texts from the perspective of the land itself (Habel, 2008, p. 7).

Insofar as possible, when addressing the various texts of the Bible it is necessary to identify ourselves with the land and the earthly community. This means we ought not to regard ourselves as mere readers within the hierarchy of creatures, but rather as associated members of the earthly community. We should approach the biblical texts that speak about Creation and the Earth as relatives and cousins within the earthly community, and not as governors and usurpers of God's deeds of Creation (LS 2, 11, 220, 229).<sup>1</sup>

The message imparted by biblical text is not addressed to us as travellers and pilgrims passing through Earth. This message is relayed to us as an earthly species of living beings that live among other creatures beneath the common layer known as the Earth's atmosphere. This approach to a biblical text might open our consciousness and sharpen our ears to hear the 'voice of the Earth' and understand the many languages in which Earth expresses her message about people, about other members of the Earth and about God through gestures, signs, images or

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<sup>1</sup> This approach to the world of creation relies on the theology of St Francis. See, for example, "From *Laudato Si'* toward a Franciscan Eco-Spirituality: Textual Limitations and Interpretive Possibilities" by Giuseppe Buffon. Any insinuation or 'scent' of pantheism in such interpretation of biblical texts is strictly excluded.

sounds (Habel, 2001, p. 23). Reading biblical texts from the perspective of the land can provide us with an understanding of biblical history as an experience of the relationship of the people of Israel with their land and their God. In the historical moment we face today, biblical faith as it pertains to land can serve as a guide as to which course we should take when we feel and experience that the survival of the Earth—the common home of all creatures—is under threat.

### **Relationships with God, our neighbour and with the Earth in biblical accounts**

Pope Francis's Encyclical *Laudato Si'* takes note of the results of recent biblical-theological research that sheds light on the land as an important component of the Christian faith (LS 64). In his discourse on environmental issues, the pope refers not only to the text of the Book of Genesis, but also considers other biblical texts that emphasize the value of the land and its creatures. From these biblical accounts, Pope Francis draws upon the wisdom required in an attempt to solve the problems we face and the world we inhabit (LS 65). The Encyclical clearly states that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (LS 66). Thus, the fundamental phrasing of biblical accounts—that the earth is a key component of biblical faith—has been rescued from oblivion and given to contemporary Christians as an inherited treasure of biblical faith for life in today's world.

The Encyclical explicitly acknowledges that “Christians sometimes misinterpreted the Scriptures” and drew the wrong conclusion “of man's absolute dominion over other creatures” due to a poor interpretation of various biblical texts (LS 67). However, it would appear that the rediscovery of biblical theological principles on land encouraged the pope to open the door to a different approach towards biblical tradition and interpret it in the light of other, older biblical texts on land (Exod. 23, 12; Deut. 10:14; 22:4, 6; Lev. 25:23; Ps. 24:1; 104, 31; Prov. 3:19). Emphasizing the importance of the context of biblical texts and correct hermeneutics, Pope Francis emphasized the intrinsic value of Creation and the Earth. Such an act condemns the distorted anthropocentrism, which is unfounded in biblical theological science, and promotes respect for all creatures on account of their intrinsic value and the goodness that they, each in their own way, possess in and of themselves, according to God's will (LS 68-69).

Based on extensive reading of biblical accounts, Pope Francis clearly articulates that the disturbed relationship among peoples at present is a result of the separation of people from God, but also a consequence of the separation of people from the Earth. Nurturing a relationship with others is inseparable from nurturing a relationship with the Earth. In the example of Cain and Noah, the pope observes two opposing attitudes towards the land, one of which leads to

destruction, while the other brings salvation to the entire world of Creation. A just attitude towards the Earth, as confirmed by the numerous biblical texts to which the pope refers (Gen. 2: 2-3; Exod. 16:23; 20:10; Lev. 19: 9-10; 25: 1-6; 25:10), opens the door to renewal and a hope for the possibility of a new beginning after enforced captivity and separation from the land (Jer. 32:17, 21; Isa. 49:28b-29). Change, which is sufficient context to open the door of hope, does not necessarily possess the character of multiplicity and comprehensiveness. Even a minor personal change in the behaviour of just one person towards the Earth is enough to return hope (LS 71). Pope Francis sees the way back in the “return of man to his right place” (LS 75), which God ordained for him by Creation – to be a creature, not a god. Man was created to understand his dependence on the Earth, to care for other creations and cherish their interconnectedness, to realize his task as one entrusted with the protection and monitoring of this world through a sustained vigilance from within a responsible reciprocity with nature (LS 67). By caring for all creatures, man cares for himself and his own existence (LS 86).

### **Returning to the land as a cure for uprooted humanity**

Although Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’* has been accepted as ‘ecological’ and ‘social’, the scope of its message is by no means either solely ecological or social. Above all, it is theological and practical. In the Encyclical, the theological and practical are returned to the land; all that earthly life entails is seen as the central message of the faith. This essential component of faith, which has often been forgotten throughout the long history of Christianity, was revived in *Laudato Si’*. In our contemporary world, where one of the most pressing issues we face is the problem of eradication and landlessness, insufficient contact with the land, both in the conceptual and metaphorical sense, and especially in a concrete and material meaning, the biblical message on land is not only necessary now but indispensable. In terms of content as it pertains to land, the proclamation of biblical faith evident in *Laudato Si’* can therefore be characterised not merely as ‘highly significant’ but as a profound theological step forward in this moment of time.

The need for ecological conversion is directly based on biblical accounts pertaining to land inscribed during the hard times of exile. Pope Francis recalls the biblical experience of the enslavement of a chosen people and from within this context considers the ecological crisis as a time of salvation (*kairos*) in which the meaning of land for the human race must be recognized once more so that all the many peoples can live on Earth in prosperity and well-being (LS 74).

Beginning with the premise of a potential eradication of modern man, Pope Francis interprets the present ecological crisis as a direct consequence of broken and disturbed relations between God and man and the Earth (LS 70). In biblical terms, the period of being distanced

from one's own land is precisely understood as the time of a renewal of love for that land – and for God. As a spiritual crisis, slavery and the experience of eradication is the abiding image and symbol of all other crises of the relationship between God and man. The current situation of ecological crisis brings the entire human race into a moment of grace (*kairos*). It is from within this moment that an opportunity arises for us to extricate ourselves from this crisis by rethinking our collective actions and by understanding the biblical message about the Earth. The weight of responsibility to reach a new definition and to find a new understanding rests on the shoulders of this generation (LS 81-82). Finding a renewed dignity as part of the acknowledgement that we are but a part of the web of life of all creatures (LS 83) will lead to a new understanding of human communion with the other beings with which we share God's Creation (LS 89-92). This eschatological vision is not a task restricted to the 'end times' of the world but it is unlimited in its scope, open for this day and indeed every day of human existence, both before and after the moment of personal death – *before*, rather than thereafter.

And yet notwithstanding this eschatological vision of the Kingdom of God, one which emerged during the difficult times of captivity as a theological response to the impossibility of living in a real and tangible land, Judaism has never relinquished a concrete understanding of the connection with a territory promised by God, one given to the ancestors of their people. As Davies contends, "Israel has never, even for a moment, given up hope of regaining Palestinian soil. They have never given up their right to Palestine, nor have they ever given up their demand for it in their prayers and teachings" (1974, p. 74). Israel has never forgotten what is to them a real and 'promised land': this belief in 'connection' has never completely fallen into oblivion. Although the hope of possession was threatened by the hardships of cruel historical events and the feelings that accompany 'unearthliness' (Marchadour & Neuhaus, 2011, p. 78), rather like the embers slowly burning beneath the ashes, this sense of belief smouldered and constantly fuelled the hope of the fulfilment of God's promise (Großmann, 2003, p. 81). As interpreted by the Jewish rabbi and theologian Martin Buber, it was not the eschatological land, but precisely this concrete and tangible one that was the central tenet of the Jewish faith (Zimmerli, 1985, p. 259). A return of the land and the return of the chosen people to their land has been seen as another proof of the fulfilment of God's promise, a proof of God's faithfulness and closeness to his people. The sufferings of slavery were accepted as the fulfilment of God's will and are part of his plan for salvation (cf. Jer 29:1; 4-9; 24:8-9; 38:2; Ez 17) (Davies, 1982, p. 23). Although in times of captivity the faith and hope of returning to the land seemed unattainable, "Israel never understood or desired its relationship with God in a vacuum, but only in the land" (Brueggemann, 1977, p. 188).

Pope Francis draws these views to a close with the New Testament's biblical message. The emphasized eschatological feature of the New Testament conception of the Kingdom of God, however, does not exclude an earthly reality. Jesus interprets the Kingdom of God with vivid images and parables that point to tangible relationships in the real world and on the real earth and in *this* time, rather than in an eschatological future. The Gospel accounts speak of an understanding of the land as the place where the work of salvation begins and ends. Pope Francis emphasizes the incarnation of Christ, his harmonious life with the created world, his immersion in the reality of this world and his daily contact with matter, which he himself skilfully shaped, as well as his resurrection in flesh and soul. The Christ's reconciliation of all creatures and the whole Earth with God is sufficient encouragement to Christians today to consider the creatures of this world, the whole earthly reality, no longer only as a natural reality, but as a reality in which God is present – "everything to everyone" (1 Cor 15:28) (LS 100).

## **Conclusion**

By correctly interpreting biblical traditions through a grounded observation of the issue of land, Pope Francis seeks a possible and plausible way to apply biblical and evangelical teaching in concrete reality, upon the Earth and in a world of crisis. Embedded in the text of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the basic message can be clearly discerned: the return of land is both the return of man to God and the return of man to man. The return to land in a world of ecological crisis leads to recognition of and acknowledgement by all members of the human family that the environment is a common good, the heritage of all humankind and the responsibility of us all (LS 95). Thus, the biblical theology of land, though not explicitly named, would appear to be the weft of the pope's thinking and theological teaching.

Although invisible at first glance, the biblical theology of land in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* is the thread that holds the whole theological teaching of Pope Francis together and shapes it into a systematically complex whole. The biblical theology of land provides the basis for the ecological and social message of the pope in his primary, introductory dictum: the Earth is our common home. Formed in this way, the message opens the possibility of thinking that the Earth is a common home not only to the peoples of the world, but to the entire created world, as well as the place of God's abiding presence.

It would appear that in the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis purposely follows the conclusions of biblical theology on the subject of land. Biblical messages on land have opened the door to a new method of proclaiming messages found in both the Old and New Testament.

Indeed, biblical faith comprises a solid foundation for Christian living and future behaviour in a contemporary world marked by ecological and social crisis.





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## **The Lockdown Awakening as a Source for New Economic Models**

### **Abstract**

The idea behind this paper is to reflect on the prevailing economic system as we know it in the context of the global pandemic lockdown and to consider alternatives. As such, it is envisioned as a concise review paper of discussion. The numerous shortcomings of the dominant capitalist economic model were well known before the Covid-19 lockdown: tax evasion through offshoring, globalisation as a run to the bottom of human rights, rising indebtedness as a consequence of financialization, plutocracy and cronyism, disregard for the collective and the environment, ignorance as the driving force of consumerism, etc. During the pandemic many came to a form of revelation, the flaws and weaknesses of the current model being more widely recognized. There is an expectation from economists to come up with alternative solutions swiftly. The key conclusion states that the novel coronavirus has brought us an unwarranted but much needed inflection point, one that can be utilized for a paradigm shift in economic modelling on a large scale. However, comprehensive and wide-ranging transformations of a prevailing economic system are infeasible without the accompanying changes of the society in general.

### **Keywords**

coronavirus, Covid-19, crisis, economic models

## **Introduction**

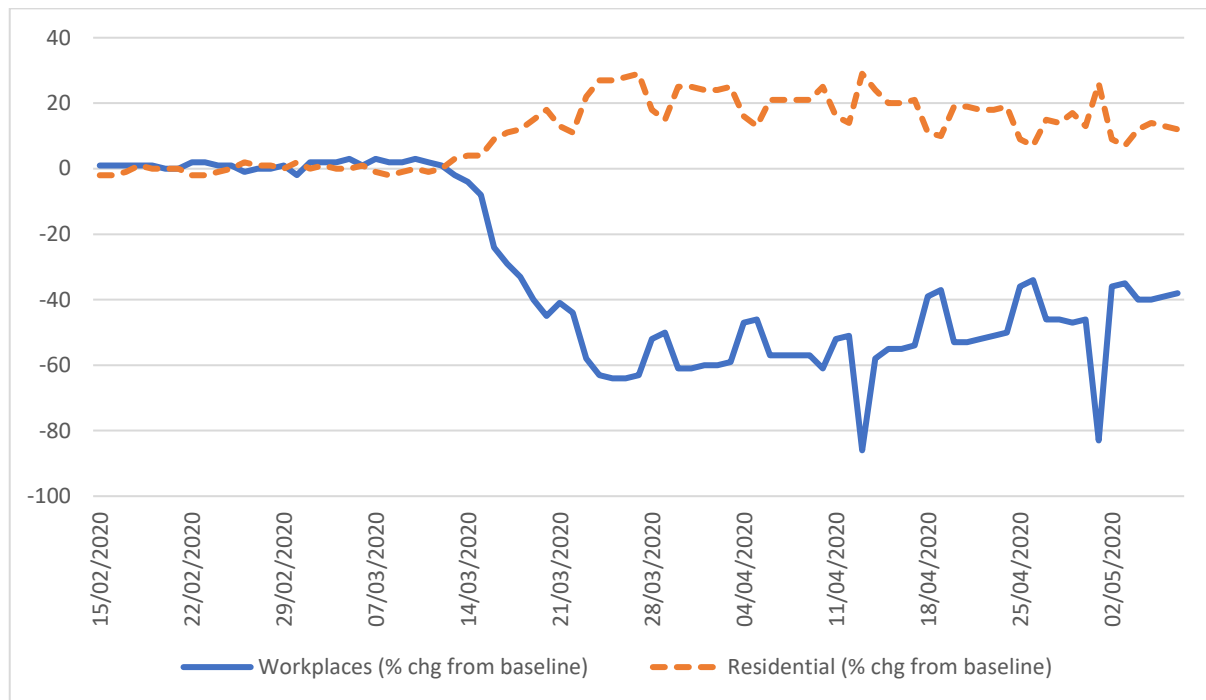
In a thought-provoking tale entitled “The Paradox of Progress,” Taleb (2018, p. 152) writes about a Wall Street banker in Greece (there are other versions situated in Mexico, but the point remains). An affluent Ivy League MBA on vacation looks at a local fisherman and asks him about his life. The native replies that it consists mainly of fishing, playing with his children, chatting and sipping wine with his friends – a modest but fulfilling life. The banker quickly switches to consultancy and offers help, stating that the fisherman should increase efficiency and production, buy a bigger boat and thereby increase revenue. After a few years he could buy more boats, cut off intermediaries and start his own production line: a fish-processing factory. He would control the production, processing and distribution, could leave this forgotten seaside village and move to the capital, eventually to New York City, to propel his business. There, a couple of decades later, he could do an Initial Public Offering (IPO), which means to say, sell his company shares to the public and make millions (excluding fees to his newly self-appointed advisor). After that he could retire rich, settle down in a small village by the sea, catch fish, play with his grandchildren and relax. The fisherman was stunned by the blindness of the economic ‘expert’: he already had the life that was being offered to him.

The story is here retold freely, as contextualized over the centuries and dating back to antiquity. Now, in the Covid-19 era, it seems only proper for it to resurface once more. For the first time in modern history, the entire human civilization had been forced to stand still, to stop, in the very literal sense of the word. To illustrate this phenomenon, the Community Mobility Reports published by the omni-surveillant Google need only be observed; these reports contain details of people’s movement trends in comparison to the pre-lockdown era (January 2020 is the baseline).

Figure 1 shows that Croatian citizens suddenly remained more at home and away from work (patterns are similar for other European countries and elsewhere).

**Figure 1**

*Mobility of Croatian citizens during the Covid-19 lockdown*



Source: Data from Google Covid-19 Community Mobility Reports (2020), processed by the author

The unsolicited confinement provided much needed time for people to reconsider their objectives and the never-ending run towards ever larger fishing boats. In this historical context, the purpose of this paper is to provide contemplation on the pre-coronavirus-crisis economy, some insight and recognition of issues and developments during lockdown, and to review some possible routes to an economy that is less fragile, remains stable for the longest-possible time, continues to be robust when its survival is threatened and is meaningful and fulfilling – a facilitative means for humankind to flourish.

There is an extensive body of literature concerning alternative economic models. Since the globalization protests at the beginning of the 2000s, Broad (2002) has explored proposals and initiatives from critics and has presented analysis from various sources. Callinicos (2003) analyses the development of the anti-globalist movement, differentiates between the different political forces within this movement and explores the strategic dilemmas that it confronts. Albert (2004) envisages ‘Parecon’ (‘participatory economics’) as a radical alternative to the core concepts of capitalism and central planning and market socialism through a vision derived from the tradition of anarchist economic thought. However, Park (2013) finds that many of those who have become discontented with globalization tend to converge on the idea that localization, economic descaling and political devolution would foster social conditions

favourable to a just and sustainable society. Park is sceptical of this notion and identifies a number of problems associated with a descaled, localized economy with a decentralized political structure. The debate is ongoing, with an ever-increasing array of participants.

In May 2020, as this paper is being written, the pandemic crisis is still unfolding. Many extreme uncertainties remain: threats of new waves of illness, a premature (or long overdue?) jump-start of the economy, pushing boundaries of the fiat monetary system by the central banks, ongoing climate change and lingering questions over the complex relationship of China with Europe and with the USA. This highly significant context of a frozen moment in time should be kept in mind when scrutinizing this paper with subsequent knowledge in the years to come.

### **Economics before the lockdown: running to a standstill?**

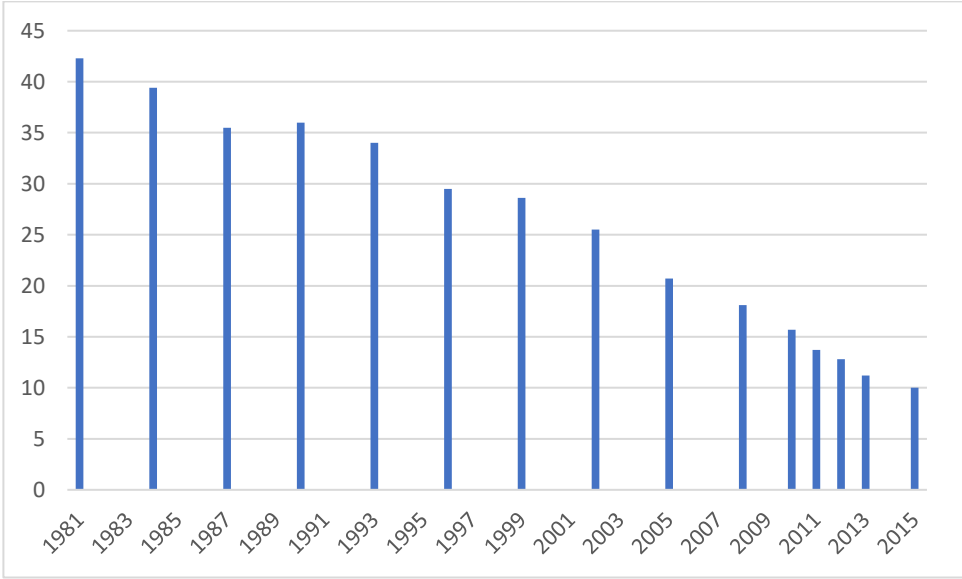
Long before the pandemic even began, there was growing dissatisfaction with the current state of economic affairs and mounting evidence of a dysfunctional—some would say broken—economic system. To be impartial, fair and accurate, it may be said that poverty and hunger (among other calamities) in the world were never less prevalent than they are today. The issue of poverty has been strongly and repeatedly emphasised by Pope Francis and his immediate predecessor (Benedict XVI, 2009; Francis, 2013; Francis, 2015; Francis, 2016; Francis, 2019; Francis, 2021), particularly as it pertains to shifting environmental factors that adversely affect the local economy. In the Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, the pope draws a clear parallel between climate change and increasing poverty: “It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry” (LS 25). The numbers support the projection.

The poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day—the percentage of the world population living on less than \$1.90 a day (at 2011 international prices)—is at an historical low (Figure 2). The global population that has a dietary energy consumption below the minimum, which shows the percentage of the global population whose food intake is insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements continuously, has a declining long-term trend, albeit one that has seen an increase somewhat recently (Figure 3). Maternal mortality ratio per 100, 000 live births (WHO, 2020b), average life expectancy at birth (WHO, 2020a), under-five child-mortality rate, which means to say, the probability of dying before age 5 per every 1, 000 live births (WHO, 2020c), and many other indicators show similar, declining trends.



**Figure 2**

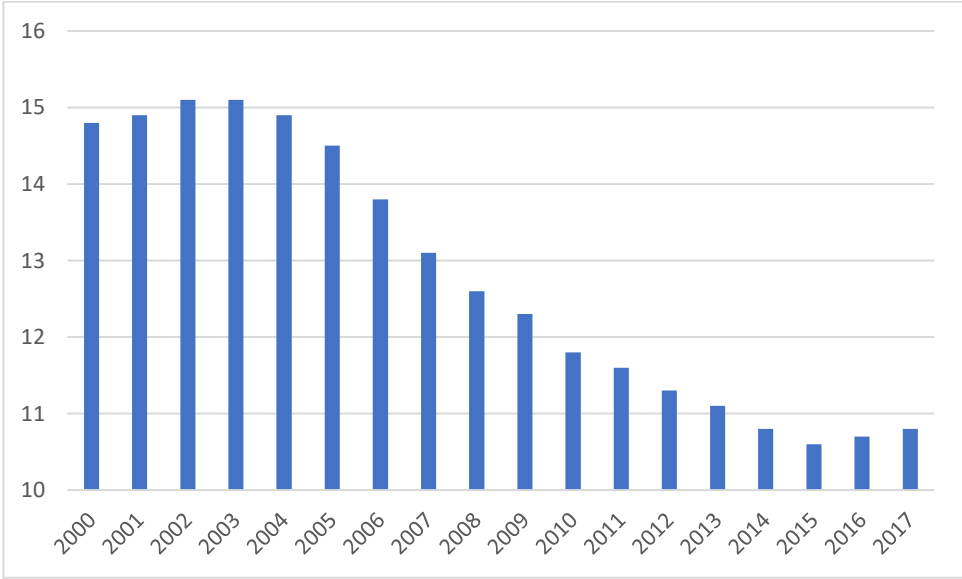
*Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day; 2011 PPP; % of world population*



Source: Data from The World Bank (2020a), processed by the author

**Figure 3**

*Prevalence of undernourishment, % of world population*



Source: Data from The World Bank (2020b), processed by the author

And yet, even though selected statistics may exhibit signs of progress, they can also be misleading since they do not display missed targets, unused potential, unkept promises and lost opportunities. The world has failed to deliver on eight key targets set up by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2020). It is appropriate to observe where we now stand objectively, but we can only imagine where we could have been.

Furthermore, statistics do not show the path civilisation has chosen to achieve its goals, and this path (the methods used) relies heavily on long-term unsustainable depletion of natural resources. The prosperity of present and future generations should be measured not only by the numbers of the hungry, needy and the physically or mentally infirm, but also by the quality of life, indicators that are less deterministic, ‘tangible’ and quantifiable. The Covid-19 quarantine has demonstrated that being healthy, well-nourished and safe, but nonetheless enclosed within four walls, is not a life that most people look forward to or find meaningful.

Many shortcomings of the mainstream global economic system (i.e., ‘the model’) have been identified in the past long before the Covid quarantine. In no particular order of importance or preference, a number of these shortcomings are presented in the following paragraphs.

### **Plutocracy, cronyism**

Capitalism and democracy go hand in hand, or at least they should, but it must be observed that affluent individuals together with prominent corporations and related alliances have exerted a disproportionate influence on policy making through direct and indirect lobbying. Through such means, they have acquired a greater say in the enactment of regulations that benefit them – the minority. Moreover, the electoral processes are biased due to the fact that policy makers receive abundant donations from their sponsors, who in turn receive favourable treatment when the recipients enter into office (e.g., cronyism, nepotism, etc.). All of this undermines trust in supposedly democratic institutions and thus the rule of law.

### **Promoting ignorance**

As a principal characteristic of capitalism, the driving force of consumerism is ignorance (here considered in the context of agnotology). Consumers are constantly being ‘anaesthetized’ by the media, so as not to think and to indulge in the purchase of whatever comes into their mind. ‘Enjoy the moment’ or ‘enjoy it while it lasts’ are widely accepted mottos that trigger ignorance, which in turn depreciate the value of self-sacrifice, devalue the suffering for a greater good or destabilise a long-term perspective. Markets ought to be areas for building relationships among people; they are not purposed for or limited to consumption alone. The absence of a structured, sustainable strategy with regard to supply chains, the intentions and behaviour of producers together with the growing tendency towards mindless shopping all have a powerful influence on what is produced, how, where and at what cost to society and the environment.

## **Tax evasion, offshoring**

The global economic system is based on a theoretical liberal ideology in which capital flows freely across borders. However, in practice this has resulted in a race to the bottom, with various jurisdictions competing to offer the lowest possible tax rates. This means that the largest and wealthiest global companies and individuals basically pay only what they wish to contribute in taxation, which can often be nothing or next to nothing; the ability to move their operations, accounting and headquarters offshore secures this severely reduced tax burden in perpetuity. Of course, most regular citizens are not afforded this luxury as smaller amounts of taxes must always be paid, whereas large amounts can be shuffled around at will by the wealthy. Taxes are the price of a well-maintained, orderly, good society: it is profoundly hypocritical not to pay taxes but to enjoy the benefits of a society paid for by others.

## **Globalisation and competitiveness: the run to the bottom**

Practically speaking, globalisation is a process of eliminating borders between jurisdictions so that capital can move quickly and unrestrictedly, but people cannot do likewise. This puts those who provide capital in a favourable position to those who supply labour. ‘Competitiveness’ is a key word in the partnership with ‘globalisation’, and it is mainly practiced as a reduction (or even the elimination) of privileges and rights. Those who have weak environmental, social, healthcare and worker protection rights are by definition more competitive and more attractive to capital holders. Their attractiveness, however, quickly fades as soon as someone else appears on the scene offering even lower taxes and requiring even lower commitments from investors.

## **Financialization promoting indebtedness**

Usury has been regarded as immoral during most of human civilization and was accordingly prohibited in numerous societies. Making money just because one had money has been subject to condemnation over thousands of years, across religions and continents alike. However, since the 1980s indebtedness (debt-to-equity ratios) has increased, and the share of financial services in GDP has grown. The financial sector shifted from serving the real economy to becoming the axis that governs the real economy; nowadays, the real economy serves the financial sector. Practices such as share buybacks, which give priority to shareholder value over research and development, are now becoming commonplace. Sovereign states, along with many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and the citizens on which they depend, are caught in a spiral of debt, struggling to finance compounded interests.

## **A moral hazard: TBTF ('too big to fail')**

Large companies, especially in the financial sector, continue to rely on TBTF – the ‘too big to fail’ policy. They are inclined to take risks because they know that if something goes wrong, they themselves will not bear all or even any of the consequences. Profits are held private while losses are shared: this destabilizes the political and societal structure of capitalism.

## **Disregard of the collective and the environment**

The focus on individual rights without an obligation to the collective, to society or to nature places the individual in a much weaker position when crises occur. The fabric of society—its institutions and policies—must be created and maintained in times of prosperity, if only because they cannot be built from scratch in an emergency. If the rights of the individual had been placed above the survival of the community, human civilisation could never have developed properly. ‘Economic optics’, which focuses on direct monetary payments, gives priority to the financial result and ignores all the non-measurable social and environmental effects of companies.

All of the abovementioned deficiencies, along with those that were not raised here and yet remain relevant to the broader discussion, depict an economic model that is ripe for change.

## **Alternative economic models**

An ‘economic model’ is a simplified description of reality, created to produce hypotheses about economic behaviour that can be tested and assessed (Ouliaris, 2011). As such, models can be theoretical (with the aim of providing qualitative solutions to specific questions) and empirical (with the aim of verifying the qualitative solutions of theoretical models and transforming these solutions into precise numerical results). Of note, those without formal education in economics often use this term in a less restricted way, as a “particular way of organizing an economy” (University of Cambridge, 2020). In this sense, capitalist, socialist and alternative economic models are often compared. Here we use the latter, looser notion of an ‘economic model’.

It should be evident that there is no universal, homogenous, standardised capitalist economic model or system; there are numerous variants of capitalism, with some features of the model visible even in modern communist China. As socialist economic systems in the post Second World War historical experiment have proven inferior, even though they may have had many positive elements, they are not regarded as viable alternatives to the capitalist economic model (at least not in this particular paper).

Some of the key elements that describe all capitalist models are as follows:

1. they are founded on private property and individual freedoms,
2. they are profit-motivated,
3. they are market-based (seeking less government intervention), and
4. they are competitive and innovative.

(It should be noted that these ‘key elements’ are not ranked in order of priority or importance, and that the list is by no means exhaustive.)

With some exceptions on competitiveness and innovation, there is a broad spectrum of definition and variation on what ‘private property and individual freedom’, ‘profit-motivation’ and ‘market-based’ mean in practice and how they should be approached. As a consequence of this wide spectrum of interpretation, there are no off-the-shelf, ready to implement ‘alternative’ economic models; the scope of limitations given to the previous elements can transfigure the mainstream model into an alternative.

As a result, we can scrutinize alternative economic models in terms of

1. the scope of constraints imposed upon private property and personal freedoms,
2. the demotion of the absolute power of profit and its priority,
3. limits of reliance on the invisible hand, and
4. some shift from competition to cooperation, with certain external limits and a framework to innovation.

The ‘alternativeness’ of a model is given by the size of the exceptions and by the longest distance of deviation from the given elements; it stems from the established premise that the liberal capitalist model was (and still is) touted as superior, as the only social, economic model worthy of commitment, “not perfect, but better than any available alternative” (Pethokoukis, 2015). We should acknowledge that capitalism excels in providing enough means to sustain the majority of its population, while dampening internal voices of dissent and existential boredom by filling everyday life with nonsensical clutter (gadgets, online ‘social networks’, etc.); these distractions are designed to ensure that social upheaval or revolution on a large scale remain, in most cases, virtually inconceivable. Nevertheless, it may be perceived that ‘alternativeness’ comes in different orders of magnitude and in many dimensions. Above all, prioritizing a long-term universal good clashes with sacrosanct private property and the priority of profit, while the constant undercutting of public institutions comes at a price, one that has proven to be past due in times of crises or pandemic.

The daily round of always being busy running after time to accumulate more money suddenly came to a grinding halt during the pandemic: time became available and broke the premise that time equals money. For many, this opened a window of opportunity to reflect on the larger scheme of things: who we are, what we do and why we do it. Some were afraid of a profound shift into the unknown and wanted to return to safety (to the time before) as quickly as possible, while others saw an abject pointlessness in the prevailing economic system, one that was shown to collapse immediately if people only buy what they really need.

As discussed in the previous section, a return to ‘normality’ is not necessarily desirable, even if it were possible, which is not the case. Liquidity assistance to companies (i.e., bailouts) are emergency measures based on the assumption that the economy is only facing a temporary, short-term interruption. This assumption is most likely incorrect. Without the restoration of the pre-coronavirus levels of demand for products and services, such as cars and air travel, that prevailed before the pandemic struck, the gigantic automaker and the air-travel industries along with their global supply chains will be fundamentally disrupted. Other sectors will also struggle with a reversal of the previous routine. This leaves us in an ongoing search for a sustainable, alternative model, a search aimed towards those who depart in some way from the key elements that describe capitalist models.

On deeper analysis, we could even argue that a new model is already on its way due to the many benefits brought about by the lockdown; these include but are not limited to (Bfinn, 2020):

- more leisure, reflection and family time
- more robust supply chains
- support for the local community and its businesses
- business continuity planning
- planning and preparation for other existential risks and future crises
- improving critical infrastructure
- improving the e-services of governments
- improved international cooperation with advances in virology, epidemiology and medicine in general
- hygiene improvements
- saving office costs, commuting time and its associated costs through remote work
- digital transformation of organisations, increasing efficiency
- more work for disabled people
- improved internet access
- business innovations to deal with new circumstances
- de-urbanization due to remote work
- lower urban property/real estate prices
- lower inequalities between regions of countries

- re-shoring
- less CO<sup>2</sup> and air pollution
- reduction/banning of wild animal capture and sale
- increased parental understanding of children's education due to home schooling
- improved distance learning
- more charitable donations, philanthropy and volunteering
- re-evaluation of life
- appreciation of essential services and key workers

All of these points, in addition to those that will only be realized later, could be regarded as the building blocks of an alternative economic model.

## **Conclusion**

The shortcomings of the dominant capitalist economic model were commonly known long before the Covid-19 lockdown. The most apparent deficiencies include tax evasion through offshoring, unchecked globalisation as a run to the bottom of human rights, rising indebtedness as a consequence of financialization, plutocracy and cronyism, disregard for the collective and the environment, ignorance as the driving force of consumerism and numerous associated shortfalls that await future discussion. In the midst of the pandemic-induced crisis, many experienced a form of revelation: the flaws and weaknesses of the current social and economic model were suddenly recognised and dissected. As a result, a good number of people have come to expect economists to produce alternative solutions, and swiftly.

Economic models are contingent upon prevailing worldviews, ideologies and beliefs, and they cannot be replaced or reinvented in the bat of an eye. It should therefore not come as a surprise that economic systems typically do not change overnight. Such an accomplishment requires restraint, pushback, perseverance and even stubbornness in standing behind principles, sometimes in opposition to power and the majority. It requires rethinking and reimagining the entire structure of society – not just the economy. The Covid-19 lockdown awakening may be a turning point, but in May 2022, it still seems like wishful thinking at this particular point in time; in simple terms, more effort needs to be made to make the transition.

The global economic freeze took most people completely by surprise. Even though the shutdown of business operations could not be attributed to the fault of any particular company, sector or industry, it is nonetheless apparent that large sectors of the economy do not have the minimum degree of robustness, resilience and financial strength to manage—at least partially—any type of sustained crisis, be it local or global. During the intense growth of the past decade, excess funds were invested into propping up stock prices through buybacks or other short-term

purposes, and yet almost none of this investment was ever set aside for ‘a rainy day’. If we assume that this crisis is only a minor disturbance on an incontestable trajectory towards the sole economic pursuit of ‘more money’, and if we double down on the perpetual run for GDP growth no matter what the consequences are and could be, then a future crisis or pandemic of any sustained duration could irreversibly endanger the entire course of human civilisation and its historical accomplishments.

And yet, conversely, the virus itself could become the basis for a new economic model. Ironically, the Covid-19 pandemic has approached each human being as an equal. Whether that person is a head of state or lives among the homeless, the coronavirus has touched the rich and the poor alike, regardless of colour or creed. To a virus each one of us has something to offer; every person is regarded as a valuable resource without prejudice or pride of placement. The coronavirus flattened the earth, filled valleys and laid low mountains as no person or thing in modern history ever had before. Perhaps there is something to be learned from this lesson that could yet benefit our advance towards an alternative economic model for the future.





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## **What Everyone Should Know About Agriculture**

***Laudato si, mi Signore, 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.***

**“Canticle of the Creatures” from *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 1:113-114.**

### **Abstract**

The primary goal of this paper is to identify the elementary features of agriculture: What is agriculture? What are its functions? Why it is still irreplaceable? What are the reasons behind the fact that this specific industrial branch receives the most subsidies in almost every country in the world? Readers will be introduced to some basic terms such as ‘agrobiocenosis’ (and the difference in definition from ‘nature biocenosis’), various types of agriculture and the ways in which agriculture can degrade the environment. At the same time, emphasis will be placed on the ways in which diverse types of agriculture can coexist with the environment. Food security and food safety have become increasingly relevant concepts, particularly in light of recent events pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic and its related food supply issues; these will be elaborated upon and their significance explained in the course of this paper. Subsequently, the term ‘ecological footprint’ will be defined, and an overview of the contrasts among the diverse ways in which different forms of agriculture can be a cause of environmental harm will be presented. Pope Francis’s vision regarding the role of agriculture in the protection of the environment as articulated in the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* will be addressed separately. At the close of this paper, we will attempt to analyse—through practical examples—the best means of applying the principles behind *Laudato Si’* in the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

### **Keywords**

agriculture, environment, food, *Laudato Si’*

## Introduction

Agriculture dates back to the very beginning of the history of human civilization. One of the basic human instincts is to eat and to drink. In its historical development, agriculture has gone through several stages. The first stage was the pre-agricultural age, which began approximately three million years ago with gathering, hunting and fishing. The next stage was the agricultural age, which began around 10,000 years ago. It is characterized on the one side by the beginning of tillage, and on the other by the fact that man had moved away from a nomadic existence and had begun to implement and practice a sedentary lifestyle. At that point in time humans started to destroy natural vegetation consciously and cultivate various plants that served as food. In the enclosures, man had started to hold cattle and to store hay, which provided food for the part of the year during which outdoor grazing is restricted or prevented by weather conditions. Through millennial anthropogenic influence, the natural habitat is gradually becoming more and more an agricultural biotope: a natural area modified by human hand. After the discovery of the New World, with a viable aim to fill certain gaps in crop rotation, humankind began to interpolate autochthonous plants, which during the last century have become domesticated species in other areas. The origin of individual plant cultures is shown in Figure 1. In the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis declares “Nature is nothing other than a certain kind of art, namely God’s art, impressed upon things, whereby those things are moved to a determinate end” (80).

**Figure 1** *Origin of food crops connects countries worldwide*



Source: Khoury et al., 2016.

At the end of August 2020, the world population was estimated to be almost 7.8 billion, whereas in 1950 the same population was approximately 2.5 billion. Predictions suggest that there will soon be 8 billion people in the world. We are witnessing a tripling of the number of mouths that need to be filled with food, drinks, water and other necessities. For these reasons, ‘food security and food safety’ have long been at the centre of attention of those in positions of responsibility (Dudeja and Sing, 2017). With this population expansion trend, each generation must double the production of food and the resource load, on the basis of which the main goal will be achieved (Gomiero, 2016). With that said, it is reasonable to discuss at length the forms of agricultural production that will satisfy both the environmental and the ecological footprint (Kisić, 2014). Pope Francis astutely observes, “never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used” (*Laudato Si’*, 104). The pope is concerned by the fact that “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well, because of our immense technological development in human responsibility, values, and conscience. It is possible that we do not grasp the gravity of the challenges that lay today before us” (105). For these reasons, he warns “once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment” (224). Modern civilization is full of developmental contradictions, which are also refracted in the field of nutrition; on the one side there is hyperproduction and food surpluses, and on the other there is hunger and malnutrition (Godfray et al., 2010). It is estimated that there are about 800 million malnourished people on Earth (FAO, IFAD, WFP and WHO, 2021); at the same time, there are approximately two billion obese people on the planet (Peng and Berry, 2018). While in the developed part of the world (i.e., the wealthy industrial north) all breeding interventions are aimed towards a higher quality, its undeveloped and malnourished part (i.e., the poor south) strives to maintain as much food as possible to sustain the bare necessities of survival (Pretty et al., 2010). Pope Francis states “we know that approximately a third of all food produced is discarded, and whenever food is thrown out, it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor” (LS 50).

Food overproduction is achieved through the application of environmentally risky processes and large amounts of agrochemicals, especially mineral fertilizers and various plant protection products. Due to this practice, modern agriculture has become a major diffuse source of environmental pollution, which affects water and soil in particular (Rohila et al., 2017). The problem with the excessive use of chemicals in agriculture is discussed in Number 34 of the Encyclical: “Often a vicious circle results, as human intervention to resolve a problem further aggravates the situation. For example, many birds and insects which disappear due to synthetic

agrottoxins are helpful for agriculture: their disappearance will have to be compensated for by yet other techniques which may well prove harmful.”

It is apparent that global agricultural production is at a crossroads in its development. At present, there is no viable alternative to the embedded, disturbed balance that exists between agricultural development and a clean environment, and indeed, that of a stable agroecosystem (Balmford et al., 2018). Over the last two decades, organic agriculture has been increasingly offered as a catch-all solution to these problems. Nonetheless, the critique that organic farming cannot meet all the stated requirements related to environmental protection while at the same time achieving satisfactory yields is frequently advanced in scientific and professional papers, notwithstanding the fact that the preservation efficiency of all the environmental components in organic agriculture is generally accepted. Moreover, all resources invested in organic farming will return in the future through environmental conservation and climate change mitigation (Scialabba and Müller-Leindenlauf, 2010). Contextual consideration of these points suggests we should not be limited to observing organic agriculture solely through the achieved yield.

Pope Francis gives voice to the broader picture: “Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (LS 49). This is a significant step forward in our understanding, a plausible approach to redressing the present imbalance. The pope advances elucidation on the problems we are all facing in today’s society. The words of the Encyclical serve as the guide: “It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems” (LS 139).

In its current development agriculture has changed ‘the face of planet Earth’ throughout the world. It has untangled natural vegetation, replacing species-rich natural ecosystems with an agroecosystem: agrobiocenosis (Miao et al., 2013). Moreover, some scientists claim that the human impact on the Earth is so great that the existing geological period deserves its name – Anthropocene, from the Greek ‘*anthropo*’ (man) and ‘*cene*’ (new) (Slaughter, 2011). Early in the Encyclical, in Number 23, Pope Francis points out the consequences of land use change, deforestation and the destructive acts required to bring these areas into suitable agricultural use. He then builds upon and expands the inherent danger: “The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses” (LS 32). The pope wants to remind us that “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of

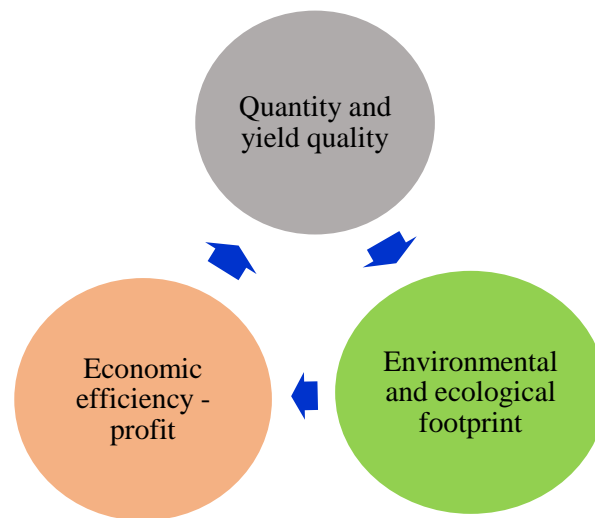


the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (LS 89).

At this point, a question arises: Is civilization at a dead end, or is it on the path of no return? The answer is considered to be ‘no’. There is no doubt that the achievements of modern science such as biotechnology (Persley and Doyle, 1999), computer technology (Ascough et al., 2002), and biological-genetic engineering (Bennet et al., 2013) have opened up previously unimaginable possibilities. There is little doubt that these achievements can be used in a new environmentally sustainable agriculture, one in which management systems will mimic the ecosystems of a free nature more than ever before (Pereira et al., 2018). However, the risk of side-tracking from this concept is not insignificant (Gerling-Elf et al., 2015). As commercial traffic, the exchange of goods and trade have made this planet a ‘global village’; any deviation from the concept of sustainability therefore brings risks and dangers on a global scale (Blasi et al., 2016). The realization of this fact—to which the term ‘environmental awareness’ can be justly applied—is gradually maturing at all levels, as well as creating new ethical principles in environmental management, as shown in Figure 2.

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis correctly observes the conundrum: “At the same time we can note the rise of a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and cheerful recklessness. Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis” (LS 59). Holy Father Francis accordingly suggests the concept of *integral ecology*, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions (LS 137). In the Encyclical, he states that “every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment” (LS 142) and continues with “the global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity” (LS 159).

**Figure 2** *The relationship between the components of plant breeding and animal husbandry in agriculture*



Source: Bogunovic et al. 2019.

The abovementioned terms apply all over the planet, primarily because agriculture is considered to be indicative of the ‘quality of life’ criterion used by every nation – the veritable ‘stamp’ of this quality. Although criteria for assessing the ‘quality of life’ are extensive and also dependent on geographical conditions, socio-economic circumstances, living standards, historical circumstances, age, gender, education level and social status, we can all perhaps agree on the quality-of-life requirements for the future (Gomiero, 2016). Pope Francis contends “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” (LS 48). Later in the Encyclical he elaborates on this premise: “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, and consequently the presence of human beings on the planet should be reduced and all forms of intervention prohibited. Viable future scenarios will have to be generated between these two extremes, since there is no simple path to a solution” (LS 60).

With its seventeen ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDGs), the ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ is a global objective that succeeded the ‘Millennium Development Goals’ on 1 January 2016. These SDGs will shape national development plans over the next

fifteen years. From ending poverty and hunger to responding to climate change and sustaining our natural resources, food and agriculture lies at the heart of the ‘2030 Agenda’ (Figure 3).

**Figure 3** *Food and agriculture in the ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’*



Source: <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/overview/en/>

### **Fundamental features of agriculture**

According to its origins, agriculture is divided into plant breeding and animal husbandry. In spite of this ‘division’, their relationship is inseparable: products of plant production are used, among other things, as raw materials or food in animal husbandry and are then processed and transformed inside the animal into products of more preferred forms and greater value. In contrast to animals, a plant is fully capable of using substances of mineral origin and processing them into forms that, among other things, serve animals to perform their purpose in life. Today, in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is believed that there is almost no plant on Earth that humans could not use directly or indirectly. If some plants cannot be used as a food source, they could be used as raw materials for footwear and clothing, household materials, furniture and tools, lighting oil, biopreparations, etc. Ultimately, they will serve as biofuels, firewood or mulch (Bašić and Herceg, 2010). If we begin our analysis from the point of view that the cultivation of plants is originally the subject of scientific observation, there is a need to present the three basic features: the roles and methods of plant cultivation; geographical location as a condition of plant breeding; and the relationship between man and cultivated plants.

## **Roles and methods of plant cultivation**

Humankind would be able to survive in the future without the multitude of industrial products that serve for the satisfaction of individual personal needs, which are unnecessary in the main. We must perhaps admit that life without a computer, a mobile phone, a television or a car would be almost inconceivable today, despite the fact that we lived contentedly without many of these modern gadgets and ‘necessities’ little more than twenty years ago. In contrast, agricultural farming has the fundamental task of providing raw materials or products without which survival of the human population would be unimaginable. This was especially evident throughout the coronavirus pandemic when supply chains from other continents were interrupted or severed.

In addition to their respective tasks, industrial and plant cultivation differ in the means of production. In industry, the basic means of production are machines or, more recently, robots. The machine’s main feature is that it is man-made and that it is controlled. Humans work with machines in certain cycles: they stop them during the day or night, during holidays, repairs, natural disasters, etc. In agriculture, humans have created machines that they operate, primarily to reduce the burden of their own work. (Figure 4). Nonetheless, in *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis draws attention to the hidden societal danger of technological reliance: “Although change is part of the working of complex systems, the speed with which human activity has developed contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution” (LS 18). He then expands upon the threat succinctly: “Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and sometimes solves one problem only to create others” (LS 20). The means of production in agriculture is based on plant cultivation, and it has been this way for thousands of years. How it may be in the near future is another matter entirely. Some scientists, especially proponents of GMOs, argue that the time ahead is a golden age of biotechnological discoveries (e.g., GMOs, breeding meat from stem cells, growing human organs from stem embryonic cells) and their application in everyday practices.

In hearkening back to the words of a beloved former pope, Pope Francis encapsulates his argument: “Here I would recall the balanced position of Saint John Paul II, who stressed the benefits of scientific and technological progress as evidence of “the nobility of the human vocation to participate responsibly in God’s creative action,” while also noting that “we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention to the consequence of such

interference in other areas”<sup>1</sup> (LS 131). The Encyclical goes on to sound an incisive warning: “The risks involved are not always due to the techniques used, but rather to their improper or excessive application. Genetic mutations, in fact, have often been, and continue to be, caused by nature itself” (LS 133). Pope Francis’s argument progresses in a logical, concise manner. On the topic of GMOs, he concludes: “It sometimes happens that complete information is not put on the table; a selection is made on the basis of particular interests, be they politico-economic or ideological. . . . Discussions are needed in which all those directly or indirectly affected (farmers, consumers, civil authorities, scientists, seed producers, people living near fumigated fields, and others) would participate” (LS 135).

**Figure 4** *Preparing the soil for sowing - tractor operated from the urban office*



Source: <http://volgabaikalagro.leuagro.com/?p=2425>

To receive the product, there must be a plant from which the raw material might be obtained (grain, leaf, root, tuber, grape, fibre), and in which the final product is made (fruit, bread, flower, juice, wine, beer, shoes, T-shirt, etc.). If you sow winter crops (wheat, barley, rape) in the autumn, the harvest will come in the summer of the following year. If you sow spring crops (maize, soybean, potato, etc.), the harvest will come in the autumn of the same year. These are simple facts. Whichever modern technique or science is now or could later be applied in the field, the growing season will remain the same: oilseed rape lasts about 300 days, wheat and sugar beet about 250 days and maize and soybeans about 200 days: the duration of growth is required by nature and cannot be shortened. Perennial or ‘permanent’ plantations begin with an active vegetation in the spring that ends in the autumn.

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<sup>1</sup> More on this subject can be found in *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace* by Pope John Paul II (1990) at [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html).

Plant growth and development refers to the passage of plants through certain stages of growth; these stages have been established for thousands of years by the laws of nature and cannot be changed. Even before Christ, wheat was sown in the autumn and harvested in summer in our part of the world, and this practice has remained with us until today with good reason. In this particular case, the wheel of civilization has hardly moved since the birth of Christ, while in other human activities crucial changes have taken place. With genetic material, humans have succeeded in the shortening and acceleration of certain vegetation stages of plant growth, but they cannot make them independent of one another nor can they omit them altogether. The first intervention is always tillage, after that comes sowing and caring and finally the harvest: one vegetation cycle of a certain duration. This is how it has been for thousands of years and will be for all those to come.

### **Geographical location as a condition for crop production**

With the notable exception of protected areas such as greenhouses, the growing of cultivated plants is primarily limited by climate factors. In the mountainous parts of Croatia, agricultural production is subordinated to livestock, whereas in the Pannonian part, plant breeding takes priority. In the Mediterranean, permanent and vegetable plantations are dominant. Considering these basic facts, the problem of climate conditions in agriculture must be addressed as part of the debate on limitation. While these conditions are not quite as important in industry (it has a stronger impact only in the case of natural disasters), in agriculture it is a limiting factor and a crucial indicator that is frequently moved to the forefront of the discussion (Kisić, 2018). Low temperatures in the flowering stage of permanent crops, floods, droughts, hail or summer fire and other natural disasters during the vegetation cycle will lead to the destruction of crop yield in just a few minutes. While in annual crops the loss of yield is restricted to the one season, damage by hail, wind or fire in permanent crops will destroy the plantation, leading to a loss of the anticipated yield over several years (Figures 5 and 6).

**Figures 5 and 6** *Burnt vineyards and olive groves, August 2019*



Source: Ivica Kisić, personal photo ‘gallery’

### **The relationship between man and cultivated plants**

The global population is entering the stage at which there will be more pronounced climate deviations from the average, which will make it even more difficult to grow agricultural crops in the open (Olesen and Bindi, 2002). According to some estimates, the financial harm caused by climate change over the next thirty years is estimated to amount to 74,000 billion dollars (Stern, 2006). Pope Francis again articulates the danger: “Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day” (LS 25).

Of the total number of plants on the planet, comparatively few are currently grown in agricultural production. One of the primary goals of alternative forms of agriculture (organic, permaculture, agroforestry) is to increase the biodiversity of cultivated crops, both within individual species and also by returning some crops that have been lost—for various reasons—from arable fields over the last fifty years. Rahman (2011) states that approximately 250,000 plant species have been described on Earth, of which 30,000 are edible and only a quarter (roughly 7,000) are used in human nutrition. Approximately thirty plants comprise more than 95% of human consumption. Martin and Leonard (1969) state that one hundred and ninety-nine cultivated plants originate from the Old World, while only forty-five species originate from the New World (Figure 1). The main forms of contemporary agriculture will be described briefly in the following section.

Butorac (1999) defines conventional agriculture as agriculture that includes the creation of high-yielding cultivars and hybrids, modern and intensive agrotechnics, and the application of pesticides and mineral fertilizers. Bašić (1995) states that in conventional agriculture an agricultural holding loses its traditional self-sufficiency and, to be sustainable, depends on input from outside the property boundaries (machinery, energy, mineral fertilizers, pesticides, etc.). To cover food requirements in market economy countries, massive farms have been created on which a single farmer aims to produce an array of products for the growing urban population. Through the profits created outside of agriculture, the urban population supports this trend as they themselves in turn receive food at a relatively reasonable price. In other words, the more agricultural workers cover the food needs of a larger urban population, the higher the cultivation per unit area, the greater the environmental footprint (Kisić, 2016). The terms ‘cultivation of plants’ and ‘livestock’ are excluded from current use, and the production of plants and animals has taken over. Agriculture now assumes some of the characteristics of industry and adds terms such as ‘production technology’ or ‘agrotechnics’ to its lexicon. From growers to biologists, agronomists have become technologists. Bašić (1995) posits that conventional agriculture has a high economic efficiency, while its ecological efficiency is highly questionable.

In the Encyclical, Pope Francis adds his own caution: “Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appreciate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur” (LS 114). He then elaborates on his message to us all: “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. . . . A misguided anthropocentrism need not necessarily



yield to ‘biocentrism’, for that would entail adding yet another imbalance, failing to solve present problems and adding new ones” (LS 118).

One of the conclusions to the conference held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Agenda 21) states that conventional agriculture is the industry with the most conflicting demands between developmental needs on the one hand and environmental protection on the other. Therefore, this form of agriculture must be corrected to reduce external inputs, which means to say, to leave an ecological footprint in the environment that is as small as possible. As a result, this type of agriculture is increasingly being abandoned and implemented into integrated farming. Pope Francis provides a deeper context: “A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water” (LS 164). The remainder of this ‘Dialogue on the Environment in the International Community’ goes on to clarify which forms of agriculture are environmentally friendly.

Organic agriculture is designed to protect soil, water, air, plants, animals and genetic resources. It is not environmentally degrading, but technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable. Unlike conventional agriculture, which is structured on large off-farm input, organic farming promotes as little off-farm input as possible. This is why some scientists claim that organic agriculture represents a marriage between ecology and agriculture (Kisić, 2014). One of the most interesting forms of organic agriculture is biodynamic agriculture, which is based on the principle of wholeness. This means that the soil, the land, the plants, the animals, the air and the people who provide the labour are a unified whole that must be viewed as a living body directly dependent on its own astral forces. What fundamentally distinguishes biodynamic agriculture from other forms of organic agriculture is the use of biodynamic preparations and a work schedule devised according to the lunar sowing calendar. It has already been stated that with the application of biodynamic preparations, the influence of the moon and the planets of the solar system is the foundation upon which biodynamic agriculture rests. Based on the sowing manual, exhaustive guidelines are set for each hour and day as to which work should be done together with that which would be undesirable if carried out on specified days.

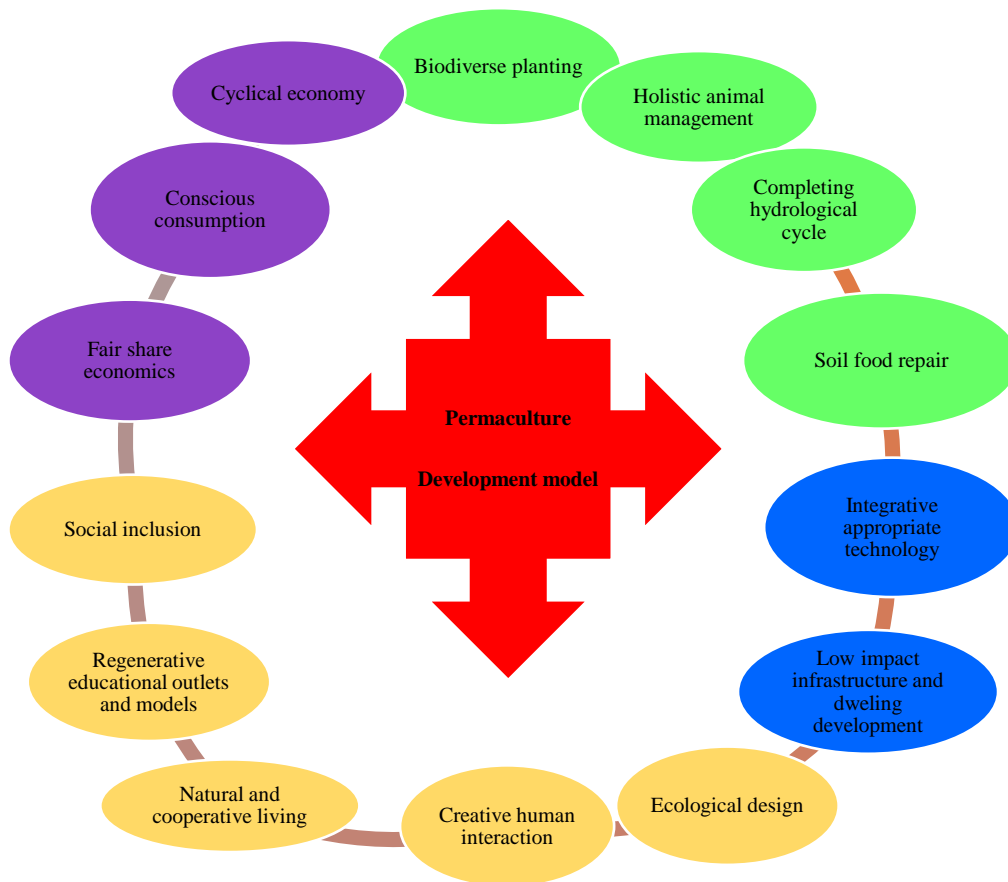
With reference to this subject, Pope Francis cited The Catechism of the Catholic Church in his Encyclical: “God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and

inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other” (LS 86).

### **Permaculture as a form of alternative agriculture**

In addition to the abovementioned biodynamics, an important, almost unavoidable role in alternative agriculture is occupied by the permaculture method of growing plants; or phrased more precisely, the permaculture way of thinking and living. Permaculture is a method by which sustainable human communities are designed according to the patterns of an untouched nature; this process includes various settings of organic agriculture, agroforestry, sustainable development and applied ecology. Permaculture deals individually with plants, animals, buildings and infrastructure (water, light, energy, road connections), but also with their mutual relations and impact, and the manner in which they are incorporated into the environment (Figure 7). Permaculture proponents are copying models from nature and pointing to the need to reorganize the current way of spending the planet’s resources. Within permaculture, local culture, lifestyles and climate should be taken into consideration; a basic knowledge derived from observing the specifics of landscape, climate, soil, flora and fauna, insolation and water should be presented and subsequently included in a holistic design tailored to a particular user or users (Burnet, 2004). In simple terms, permaculture is designed to reduce the consumption of energy and natural resources progressively.

**Figure 7** *Permaculture Development Model: Green – environmental; Blue – built environment; Yellow – social factors; Purple – economic environment*



Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/567664728011391543/>

Agroforestry is a collective term for land use systems and technologies, where woody crops (trees, shrubs, etc.) are grown advisedly in the same land management areas together with agricultural crops and animals (Figure 8). Cultivated agricultural and forest crops are founded in such a way as to provide mutual support, but at the same time they are devised to protect, preserve and maintain vital economic, ecological and natural resources. Agroforestry can also be defined as a dynamic, ecologically based management system of natural resources, which, by integrating trees into the agricultural landscape, diversifies and maintains production for greater social, economic and environmental benefits for land users at all levels. Agricultural forestry is crucial for the population of rural areas as it can improve their food supply, income and health. Moreover, agricultural forestry comprises multi-purpose systems that can provide a wide range of economic, sociocultural and environmental benefits.

In light of the demands for increased energy from renewable sources, forest species of short rotation are increasingly being planted on agricultural plots. Short rotation crops are woody species (poplar, willow, black alder, birch, hornbeam, chestnut, ash and acacia) that are

grown in short rows from a few to a maximum of ten years on agricultural land for energy needs through biomass production. In the last decade, agroforestry has played an increasing role due to its potential to mitigate climate change; more precisely, it mitigates the consequences of climate change through the storage of increased amounts of carbon in the soil.

### **Figures 8 and 9 Agroforestry**



Source: Ivica Kisić, personal photo ‘gallery’

Finally, it should be observed that the practice of urban agriculture has emerged as one of the alternative forms of contemporary agriculture. At the same time, indoor urban farming (one of the forms of urban agriculture) is gaining increasing relevance as a viable alternative to more traditional methods; this form of agriculture is likely to respond to the many challenges associated with the shifting relationship between agriculture and the environment (Kisić, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

It is important to note that, in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, agriculture must no longer be seen merely as an economic branch that is in charge of ensuring sufficient quantities of healthy food. Agriculture is acquiring new and expanding roles in modern society, primarily through the development and conservation of rural areas, conservation of biodiversity, climate change mitigation and reduction of the processes of soil desertification and greenhouse gas emissions.

The obstacles ahead are complicated and considerable. Pope Francis sounds the lament: “Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years” (LS 53). His elaboration on the challenges we face as a consequence of the unrestrained attack on the environment is a powerful condemnation of the hubris with which it has been practiced and sustained: “This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is

based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that 'an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed'"<sup>2</sup> (LS 106).

The Encyclical is a means of delivering a message that must be read as relevant to us all. Pope Francis ponders "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" (LS 160). His concern is based upon sound knowledge and a lived experience: "The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world" (LS 161). And yet the Encyclical is imbued with a positive outlook for the future, even as it acknowledges the mistaken steps of the past: "Although the post-industrial period may well be remembered as one of the most irresponsible in history, nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities" (LS 165). Indeed, the hope for a better future does not wane; the pope retains faith that a solution is yet attainable: "We believers cannot fail to ask God for a positive outcome to the present discussions, so that future generations will not have to suffer the effects of our ill-advised delays" (LS 169).

*Laudato Si'* serves as an instructional template to ensure a positive future for all. "We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family" (LS 52) is a continual refrain in one form or another throughout the development of the Encyclical. Pope Francis forewarns the rural peoples of the world that "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" (LS 146). We can each interpret this warning from within our own immediate context. Given the fact that Croatia still retains 50% of an intact natural area created by God's hand (LS 80), an area that man has not yet changed either through labour or destructive greed, we should do everything in our power to preserve these areas as worthy of life for our future generations. In the land of Croatia, we are still able to provide for that future; the only question is whether we have the strength and desire to do so.

The Holy Father concludes the Encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home* with two prayers. One is *A Christian prayer in union with creation*, and the other is *A prayer for our earth*. May these two prayers be for 'Our Beautiful Homeland' and all those who live within.

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<sup>2</sup> More on this topic is available in the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2004), *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 462.

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