



A planet to be cared for, a cry yet to be heard

Marking the seventh anniversary of the encyclical Laudato si', we look at what fruits it has yielded so far and at how Pope Francis' prophetic words have set processes into motion in every field referred to by the text. It has challenged leaders as well as children, and transformed an "urgency" into a "habit": caring for our Common Home and for all of its creatures.

By Cecilia Seppia

If Planet Earth were a person, she would probably be lying in some hospital bed today with a morphine drip attached to her arm to relieve the many excruciating pains that afflict her. In the past four decades in particular, man himself has been attempting to play doctor, taking stock of the patient's medical history, subjecting her to specialized clinical tests, and formulating an ominous diagnosis: pollution; climate change; the disappearance of biodiversity; ecological debt between the global North and South linked to economic imbalances; anthropocentrism; the dominance of technocracy and finance and a rampant "culture of waste" that leads to the exploitation of children, the abandonment of the elderly, the enslavement of vulnerable people, the organ trade, blood diamonds. In one word: "last-stage cancer," which is perhaps even scarier than the above-mentioned diseases, but that leaves us indifferent because it has not affected one of our family members or long-time friends. That same doctor, however, so thorough during the diagnostic stage, has forgotten to find a cure, or at least to administer it daily, with perseverance and love. Seven years ago, on May 24, 2015, with the encyclical Laudato si', Pope Francis highlighted the need for an urgent and targeted therapy to heal the Earth's ailments. His appeal was directed not to professional doctors, but to "all men and women of goodwill": 221 pages, an introduction, 6 chapters, and two final prayers that have left their mark not only on the Social Doctrine of the Church, but also on the political, economic, and ecological processes of our globalized societies.

Prophetic words

Today, also in the light of the dramatic experience of the pandemic that has brought us to our knees and the war that continues to sow terror and destruction, the "prophetic" insights and the power of Pope Francis' text have become increasingly clear. On the one hand, they are as simple as the verse in the Canticum of the Creatures from which the encyclical takes its name; on the other, they are just as effective like every word addressed to God with faith. In fact, the fruits of Pope Francis' encyclical, the second of his pontificate, have set in motion many a fruitful process, some of which are still in the making. The text touches on a range of fields challenging world leaders as well as children and asking us all to "dig our heels in" and do our part. The cultural and magisterial background in which the Pope's reflection is rooted is vast and well documented: from Paul VI, who referred to the ecological issue, presenting it as a crisis that is a "dramatic consequence" of the uncontrolled activity of human beings, to St. John Paul II, to Benedict XVI, who with concern invited us to recognize that Creation, is compromised "where we ourselves are the ultimate demand, where the whole is merely our property and we consume it for ourselves alone." Yet in God's marvelous work there is no predator, no selfishness, no masters or slaves, no environment to be exploited at will, but a place, a home to be shared in harmony. Pope Francis says "The Bible teaches us that the world was not born of chaos or chance, but by a decision of God who called it and always calls it into existence, out of love. The universe is beautiful and good and contemplating it allows us to glimpse the infinite beauty and goodness of its Author. Every creature, even the most ephemeral, is the object of the Father's tenderness, which gives it a place in the world."

Everything is connected, even crises

The first, valuable fruit of *Laudato si* is its ability to connect aspects that were previously treated in a sectorial manner. It is no coincidence that among the most frequently quoted expressions are "integral ecology," which is at the heart of the document, and "everything is connected," which has become almost a slogan, as well as the reiteration that "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental": the Planet is hurting, and humans are certainly no better off, forced by famine, starvation, landslides, floods, wars, corruption, to leave their homes, not knowing if they will ever find another. This year too, on Vatican News we told and published so many stories inspired by *Laudato si*, from Rome to the Solomon Islands, crossing the five Continents thanks to the testimonies of those who put their names and faces to them. Action in favour of the environment cuts across cultures, peoples, geographical contexts, and faiths, although it must be said, the Church has been, right from the beginning, a huge hothouse of ideas and projects, thanks to which the Pontiff's words have not remained a dead letter.

Some of the projects

In Ghana, for example, members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference are working to plant one million trees, a concrete action that complements and supports the government's 'Green Ghana' project launched in June 2021.

In Kenya, they started last year, with the planting of seeds in Kakamega Forest, the only remaining rainforest in the country. Five hundred people from different Christian denominations participated in the programme, which also promoted awareness-raising initiatives for a more respectful use of the earth's resources.

"Planting a tree," Pope Francis said during his visit to Kenya in 2015, "is first and foremost an invitation to continue the battle against phenomena like deforestation and desertification. It is also an incentive to keep trusting, hoping, and above all working in practice to reverse all those situations of injustice and deterioration which we currently experience." With this in mind, the young people of the *Laudato si' Movement*, in a special way, have taken action in the urban sphere to address, both symbolically and concretely, one of the greatest challenges that cities face: that of the immense production of waste. And so, in collaboration with the Nairobi Recyclers NGO (NAREC), they have initiated a recycling project that aims to clean up part of the capital. In addition to picking up trash and protecting the environment from pollution, the Nairobi Recyclers team has also identified 17 schools and five Religious Children's Homes where they plan to plant more than 1,000 fruit trees and trees of other species.

In addition to its reforestation projects in Africa, the Church has given life to many other projects dedicated to decarbonization, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, the supply of drinking water, cleaning the seas from plastic, environmental education and awareness. All this, never forgetting the dignity of the individual and the protection of human life.

In this regard, one cannot fail to mention the work of the U.S. episcopate and the Diocese of Chicago, which under the leadership of the city's Cardinal, Archbishop Blase Joseph Cupich, has the merit of having established the world's first *Laudato si'* ministry, calling to action so many Catholics, young and old, who have put their profession or 'charism' into caring for our Common Home and defending the weakest.

A special mention also goes to the Diocese of Burlington, which has engaged the faithful in raising awareness and action toward greater ecological justice by initiating projects to counter the culture of waste (composting in gardens and vegetable gardens, exclusive use of recycled materials beginning with paper, circular models of food production and consumption), along with the request to start monitoring diocesan real estate and demanding that energy supplies be converted to forms that are renewable or have low environmental impact.

The Church is also deeply involved and working alongside local communities in their efforts to save the Amazon, the lungs of the world, that are increasingly in danger of

collapse due to deforestation, corruption, intensive land use and the annihilation of biodiversity.

The fruits of a tireless appeal

"There is a clear link between the protection of nature and the building of a just and equitable social order. There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature, without a renewal of humanity itself," the Pope said during a Meeting with Kenyan Authorities during his Apostolic Journey in November 2015, a journey which also took him to Uganda and to the Central African Republic, just a few months after the publication of the encyclical. His appeal has been tireless: "Protect the Planet so that it does not react with destruction," do not devour the Earth, but restore dignity to it, listening to the cry of suffering peoples that continues to resound in everyone's ears. This year too, we have witnessed a vital blossoming of *Laudato si' Communities*, which originated from an idea of the bishop of the Italian city of Rieti, Domenico Pompili and of the founder of *Slow Food Italy*, Carlo Petrini: whether in the silence of prayer or in the clamour of social mobilizations, they have launched a series of concrete initiatives on the theme of integral ecology aiming for that conversion of heart and of action that runs through and radiates from Pope Francis' text.

Since 2020, despite the pandemic, *Laudato si' Circles* have increased by nearly 300 percent. The encyclical has permeated the political and scientific debate since the UN'S Paris Climate Change Conference in 2015 and Glasgow Climate Change Conference in 2021; it has resulted in the inclusion of care for our Common Home among the works of mercy; and it has planted the seeds of the "Economy of Francesco."

Without that document, it might have been more difficult to hold a Synod such as the one for the Amazon (whose connection with *Laudato si'* was evident beginning with its theme: "New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology") that resulted in the apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, with its four dreams - social, cultural, ecological and ecclesial - which indicate a path of integral ecology that is capable of challenging the conscience of the whole world. This is something Pope Francis himself referred to when, in the wake of the work of the synod, he spoke of "ecological sin."

The 2018 Synod on Young People and the "Document on Human Fraternity," signed on February 4, 2019 in Abu Dhabi, by the Pope and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, al-Tayyeb, are also fruits of this text that was initially perceived as a "green encyclical," then better understood as an innovative perspective and the motor of a cultural revolution, which crosses society permeating its every crack, to the extent that during WYD in Panama in January 2019, there was talk of a "Laudato si' Generation."

It is a fact that the paradigm of integral ecology has spread internationally like wildfire, due in part to the efforts of the [Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development](#). In Italy it has found fertile ground, thanks also to the awareness and sensitivity for environmental issues demonstrated by the Italian Bishops' Conference and by individual

dioceses.

Pope Francis' document has given new life to reflections and requests voiced by agricultural trade associations and trade unions. At an ecclesial level, it has been grafted into national initiatives such as the "Catholic Social Weeks" and it has inspired spiritual events, such as the "Time of Creation" that runs from September 1 - the World Day of Prayer for the Safeguarding of Creation - to October 4, the festivity of St. Francis. It has enabled the establishment of the *Laudato si Week* scheduled this year for May 22-29; it has nurtured music, art, culture, and even cinema. " We are part of a single human family, called to live in a common home whose disturbing degradation we see together," were Pope Francis' words in a text delivered to French environmentalists, whom he met on September 3, 2020. But, he added, "We welcome the fact that an awareness of the urgency of the situation is now being felt everywhere, that the issue of ecology is increasingly permeating the ways of thinking at all levels and is beginning to influence political and economic choices, even if much remains to be done."

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