

Towards a sustainable Creation



The Pope's document published this week is not just for the benefit of the faithful, but has been deliberately timed to influence decision-makers at a trio of key United Nations summits this year culminating in the climate-change conference in Paris in December

For the United Nations, 2015 is a key year. The challenge is to reach potentially transformative agreements following each of three summits that will deliver meaningful change for people living in poverty and protect the environment.

It is no coincidence that Pope Francis has chosen to release his encyclical ahead of the first of these summits, to be held in Addis Ababa next month on financing for development.

He will also be addressing the UN General Assembly in New York in September at the second summit, where leaders will sign up to the new Sustainable Development Goals – the successor agreement to the Millennium Development Goals. World leaders will need to agree a deal on tackling climate change at the third summit in Paris at the end of the year.

This trinity of summits has the potential to set out the path toward a more just and sustainable world over coming generations. So, what relevance might the encyclical have for them? Primarily it keeps the focus on tackling poverty and protecting the environment for both governments and business. It has been clear in the run-up to publication that the thinking behind the encyclical is to focus on human development that is both integral and authentic – about the whole person and about every person. This is development not merely for some, nor even for the many, but for all people, both current and future generations. It is also development that is about respecting and protecting creation. Development is not authentic if it harms the environment, nor is environmental protection enough if it is not also about human development.

Currently there is strong ambition in the latest draft of the Sustainable Development Goals to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere”, and to consider no target unmet unless it is met for everyone, with goals on ending hunger, providing employment, and health and education for all. Goals are also focused on environmental challenges, seeking to protect oceans, ecosystems and forests. This is a big improvement on the narrower focus of the Millennium Development Goals.

In contrast, the financing for development discussions give insufficient attention to environmental sustainability or poverty alleviation, with a much bigger focus on how much money is needed and where it will come from. The role of the private sector is one of the most contentious issues in all three processes.

Business can make a significant positive contribution, through providing jobs and supporting local economic development, but is too often still associated with human rights abuses and environmental damage, such as the La Oroya case in the Peruvian Andes, where pollution over nearly a decade has produced extremely high levels of lead in children’s blood, affecting their mental development and opportunities in life.

To ensure that all those in development put both people and planet first, and that all development finance goes to where it is most needed, both business and government need to meet the highest standards. One clear proposal on the table for Addis Ababa is to agree a set of sustainable development criteria and accountability mechanisms for all types of finance, whether public, private or a mixture of both. This would help direct resources towards development that is authentic and in harmony with the environment.

Laudato si’ comes amid a vacuum in global political leadership. However, instead of looking to the Pope as the one who will unlock the global political stalemate, the encyclical is intended as a mirror that reflects responsibility back towards global leaders.

World leaders attending the three summits need to use their political capital to achieve a truly transformative agenda, including an agreement on climate change in Paris that will limit global warming. Staying away for fear of failure or lack of priority is not the type of leadership the world needs.

Financial commitment is also a sign of personal or political commitment (“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” Matthew 6:21). One of the ongoing challenges is the lack of fulfilment of existing financial commitments. For example, rich countries have committed to spend 0.7 per cent of

their national budgets to aid, but only five countries (Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark and the United Kingdom) have met the target.

Countries have also committed to provide US\$100 billion (£63.5bn) to the Green Climate Fund by 2020 for action on climate change, yet only one tenth of this money has been pledged. The summits provide the opportunity for leaders to show how they will fulfil existing pledges and to show the political leadership that is needed.

Action on climate change is a priority for many developing countries who have suffered its devastating effects. In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines with winds of up to 171 mph and a storm surge of up to 25ft high that devastated coastal areas. More than 14 million people had their lives torn apart and more than five million lost their homes. According to the Philippines Government, more than 6,000 people were killed. There was widespread destruction of homes, schools and roads.

Although single events cannot be attributed to climate change, the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events is increasing. Those who are most affected are the poorest communities, which have least contributed to climate change. We need to act on climate change as part of our responsibility to the most vulnerable people, as “a poor Church for the poor”. From this perspective, Pope Francis has taken the unusual step of writing the encyclical to influence the negotiations in Paris and to help support progress in reaching a deal on climate change.

All the summits need to indicate a much greater urgency to move away from a dependence on polluting fossil fuels, such as coal, oil and gas, which are the greatest contributors to global warming, and move towards clean, renewable energy, such as solar and wind. Fossil fuels are still subsidised globally to the tune of approximately US\$700bn (£444bn), while subsidies for alternative cleaner forms of energy are suffering in many places, such as the UK. This is giving the wrong message and showing the wrong priorities.

As well as an issue of justice, acting on climate change is also part of our responsibility before God to protect his creation, as the title of the encyclical, *Laudato si'* – or “Praised be” – hints towards. All of creation should praise God and we have responsibility to God for how we treat his creation.

Just as the encyclical will hold up a mirror to politicians over their global responsibility, it holds one up to us in terms of our lifestyles. It is easy to point the finger at those who consume more, but most of us in the UK are still in the top percentage of consumers worldwide. How can we enjoy more of the creation that God has given us, without needing to own it? Can we reduce our impact on the environment by using cars less, installing solar panels and supporting local farmers?

The encyclical will have plenty to say to all of us. It is now up to us all to listen and act.

Graham Gordon is head of policy of the aid agency Cafod.

KEY INFLUENCES

The people whose campaigning, knowledge and writing influenced the Pope's thinking on the environment

Green fingers

Fr Sean McDonagh SSC

Sean McDonagh was one of the first Christians to articulate the need for the Church to engage with ecology in his 1986 book *To Care for the Earth: Call to a New Theology*. An Irish Columban missionary, McDonagh saw the impact of environmental damage while working among the indigenous T'boli people on the Philippine island of Mindanao in the 1970s and 1980s.

Professor John Schellnhuber

Professor Joachim Hans "John" Schellnhuber, one of the contributors to the encyclical, is a long-standing member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and chairman of the German Advisory Council on Global Climate Change. In a 2003 article for *The Guardian*, Professor Schellnhuber described the consumption of cheap fossil fuels as "a lifestyle of mass destruction". Climate change is accelerating, he warns, and drastic cuts in global carbon dioxide emissions are vital to avoid disaster. He says emissions need to be halved overall by 2050, reduced by 80 to 90 per cent in

developed nations and phased out completely by end of century.

Patriarch Bartholomew and orthodox priest John Zizioulas

Patriarch Bartholomew, 75, first among equals of the world's Orthodox Christians, has been nicknamed the "Green Patriarch" for his environmental activism. In 2002 he issued a joint statement with Pope John Paul II that urged people to undergo "a genuine conversion in Christ" to adopt "a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production". Bartholomew welcomed Francis to Turkey in 2014. Both leaders are great admirers of the work of Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas, metropolitan of Pergamon, who argues that nature is an indispensable link of communion between human beings and God. He contributed to the writing of *Laudato si'*.

Leonardo Boff

Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff left the priesthood in 1992 after clashing with the Church over his views of the hierarchy, the ordination of women and married men, and his advocacy for the poor. Pope Francis, who previously welcomed Gustavo Gutiérrez, father of liberation theology, to Rome, invited Boff to submit material for inclusion in the encyclical. Explaining the link between concern for the poor and ecology, Boff said: "Along with the poor, you have to add the Earth as the "great pauper" that is oppressed and devastated. It's the ecotheology of liberation. It is not as if we went from red theology to green theology. It is the same liberating impulse."

Cardinal Peter Turkson

The Ghanaian head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is the second most senior African in the Vatican after Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship. Francis asked him to start work on the encyclical early on in his papacy, and he submitted a first draft last August. His 2011 proposal for the establishment of an international financial system in the wake of the financial crisis included sustainable development as a way to combat poverty and inequality.

The Brazilian bishops' conference

After the bishops of Latin America met at the Brazilian shrine of Aparecida in 2007, a leading figure who worked on the document summarising their discussions was the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and future pontiff, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio. Pope Francis was deeply moved by what he heard from the Brazilian bishops who spoke of the destruction of the environment, especially the rainforests of the Amazon.

