

We need to listen to Pope Francis' appeal:

By **Venerato Deus Babaine**, M.Afr

"I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation, which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges... All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvement and talents" (n°14).

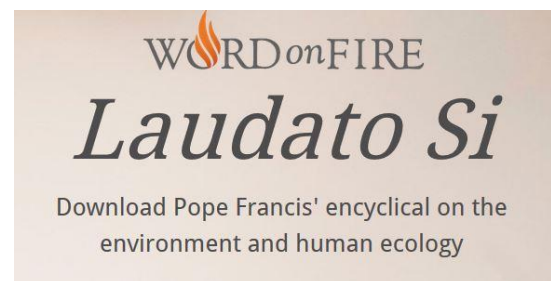


The earth is "our common home" is a beautiful statement. The word home, simple as it is, tells a great story about the life of any living creature. It provokes the sentiments of belonging, tranquillity and joyfulness revealed in Sacred Scripture in the book of Genesis "Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden.... and he placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad (Gen. 2:8-9, The African Bible). The themes in this short text are clear: the presence of a person on earth endowed with dignity, the soils that sustain vegetation, plenty of food and trees that provide an aesthetic milieu, abundance of life and possibility to discern the authenticity of life.

When the Pope makes this appeal, he is deeply aware of some of the debates at various conventions held since the 1970s that have led to declarations and policies. These debates have seen shifts in the emphasis laid on certain topics. At the beginning, the stress was on development and its sustainability. The stress has now come to be on the earth itself and the impact that human action has had in these last centuries of industrialised

development. This shift has forced a number of states to formulate policies regarding the environment and ecology and some have enshrined them in their national constitutions. Technology has given us more information. Religions are more aware of the material world. Inevitably, this has affected human consciousness and made it reflect seriously on the issues and to take action without exclusively basing themselves on faith or scientific grounds. Occurrences of floods, the melting of polar-ice or snow on some mountain tops in Africa, expansion of deserts, air and water pollution, rapid extinction of some fauna and flora species, depletion of bog-lands and wetlands, irregular seasons, all trigger despair and debate among housewives, herd boys, sailors, policy makers and techno-scientists. These events affect the safety, security and happiness of humanity. It is said that our common home has enough for everybody's need but not everybody's greed. The Pope calls for a conversion to be more responsible and concerned about others. The encyclical mentions that the resources of the earth has been exploited to satisfy the greedy at the expense of the needy. It calls for a balanced life-style and moderation of human passions, which Hippocrates had mentioned before the era of Jesus. One important point, does not feature strongly; the population explosion. There are too many feet treading the earth and too many stomachs to fill. There is a remarkable population increase in every country. The more population grows the more facilities we need; more food and space are required. The animal population has also multiplied and they need more space and feedstuffs. Consequently, lamentations rise instead of praises. We need more space for living as well as for more food and water. In a long run, more rubbish will be generated leading to more pollution. The human population seems to claim more rights over the other members on the block.

If we are still inspired by the 'Genesis concept' of Eden, where it was all good, we have to design policies, adapt our catechesis and change our habits and create awareness among the earth's inhabitants.



“This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set-out on the long path of renewal (n°202) Commitment to ecological concerns without the promotion of the human dignity is futile. The earth needs to be a home for all creatures.

We have to engage in matters of justice, advocacy for equal opportunities, provide a home for refugees and migrants. We need to respect and appreciate people’s cultures and traditions. We need to promote basic rights such as food, shelter and gender equality. Among us there should not be any segregation based on anything.

We need to cultivate a fascination for landscapes, vegetation, water, animals and fish. We have to contribute towards harmony in “our common home” by conserving or planting trees, cleaning our streets, or closing a water-tap. We have to engage neighbourhood communities in biodiversity protection campaigns by using modern media. We need to know more about the natural sciences to be able to pass it on to others and get a better understanding about the natural world.

See: [Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment and human ecology.](#)