

CREATURES



RADICAL ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION AFTER LAUDATO SI'
Discovering the intrinsic Value of all Creatures, Human & Non-human

Radical Ecological Conversion in Human Development (Workshop)

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“I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about
how we are
shaping the future of our planet.” (Pope Francis, LS,
14)

Background (previous workshops with CAFOD)

After the encyclical *Laudato Si'* was issued in 2015, we conducted a series of workshops, alongside the UK Catholic Development Agency: CAFOD, on the encyclical, particularly on its call to redefine the idea of progress (cf. LS, 3; 13-14; 194). For more detailed information see the CAFOD *Laudato Si'*: Refining progress interim report, available from cafod.org.uk/theologicalreflection

Who has taken part, and where?

Participants were a mix of religious and lay persons, male and female, from the following countries/regions:

- Sierra Leone (West Africa), one of the poorest countries in the world.
- Ethiopia (Horn of Africa), the only African country not to have been a European colony; developing quite rapidly, with all the issues this entails. It has been seriously affected by unpredictable droughts, and food security is critical.
- Kenya (East Africa), where we met with people working in the slums of Nairobi, in ecological projects outside Nairobi, and with indigenous communities from North Kenya (Turkana) and South Kenya (Maasai).
- Colombia (Latin America), where we met communities from across Amazonia who are being seriously affected by devastation of biodiversity.
- Bangladesh (Asia), one of the most densely populated countries in the world (1101 people per sq. km), a country that will see widespread flooding if sea levels continue to rise at the current pace.

- UK (Western Europe), where most participants live a technologically and economically advanced life. The UK is also a key player in the promotion of international development.
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Despite the limitations of any workshop of this kind, it was overall very well received. Below please find two revealing and inspiring testimonies:

“This workshop has enlightened me and opened me up to look at creation, its importance and value. It has helped me to listen intensely and with more care and love to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor...”
Fr. Emanuel Rosario, Bangladesh

“After this workshop...my understanding of progress is, showing respect for the next generation, demonstrating our interconnectedness and caring for our common home.” *Sister Brenda, Ethiopia*

Methodology

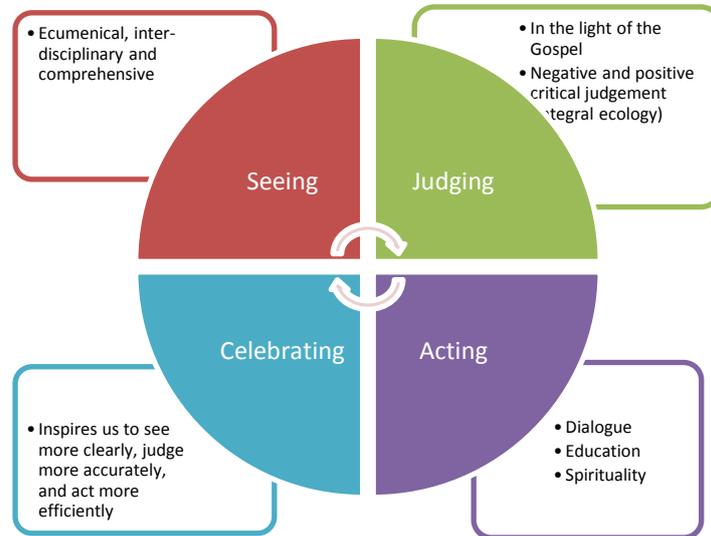
The stimulus for the process was Pope Francis’s invitation to have an open and honest dialogue to redefine our notion of progress (cf LS, 14; 194). In order to be faithful to this call, we adopted an inductive, bottom-up methodology with our partners and stakeholders to consult with and listen to them, which proved to be very fruitful.

The sessions in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and the UK (3 workshops) had a similar structure across one long day or two shorter days. In the spirit of *Laudato Si’*, we aimed to listen to our participants/partners, while being attentive to our Catholic tradition, and we contributed to the dialogue based on our expertise in global development.

The methodology used is that of Catholic Social Teaching (and *Laudato Si’*), namely: see; judge; act; and celebrate.

- *Seeing*: we started by contemplating the way God sees the world, based on Biblical stories of creation, and then considered how we see it. We reflected on what Pope Francis sees as the main impediments to development, adding the view from our own contexts.
- *Judging*: we continued with a positive critical judgement, and discussed how we integrate different dimensions of life. These include political-economic and environmental ecology, cultural ecology and personal lifestyles, the common good and our personal interests and dignity, inter- and intra-generational justice. The interconnectedness of these dimensions is what Pope Francis calls ‘integral ecology’.
- *Acting*: we listened to the proposals for action in *Laudato Si’*, and reflected on what we must do differently in four aspects of life: myself, my family, my community and my nation/world.
- *Celebrating*: *Laudato Si’* includes a fourth additional step to the CST methodology: ‘celebrating’ God’s love and goodness. This is crucial to bringing about hope and joy, and pivotal to seeing more clearly, judging more wisely, and acting more justly. The encyclical is about caring for our common home, a home given to us by God, cared for by God and destined for fulfilment in God. Therefore, we ended by celebrating God’s gift of creation and our role within it as responsible stewards. Celebrating God’s gifts

is vital to taking care of them. While different cultures and religions have diverse ways of celebrating love; Catholics have the gift of the ‘sacraments’, which are a privileged way of doing this. It is worth noting that the fourth step of the methodology: ‘celebrating’ God’s love and goodness, has been truly inspirational to participants and a pivotal dimension of the process. The celebrations were inclusive towards people of all faiths.



Summary of key findings

What helps or hinders development?

Two of the most critical questions asked of participants are ‘*what hinders*’ and ‘*what helps*’ development. It was notable that five major topics emerge across all workshops in response: *technology, politics, urbanisation, economics and culture & nature*.

Technology

As these themes were discussed in the light of the teaching in *Laudato Si*, it is fascinating to compare how the issues are perceived by the Pope and how they are experienced in the local contexts of workshop participants. For example, while Pope Francis recognises the benefits of **technology**, he is concerned with the structural problems behind technological development, because it is controlled by those with economic power. Participants, however, accentuate the advantages of technology for the poor. In particular, participants highlight the role technology plays in facilitating communications and providing access to information, as well as improving transportation and mobility. They also stress the advancement in health care due to technology, and the capacity to increase food production (and provision) as well as new ways of producing energy that are more ecologically friendly than those based on fossil fuels.

“The ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems... require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms” (LS, 9)

Politics

While Pope Francis sees **politicians** as key drivers for change and for promoting dialogue on development, participants are far more sceptical about their role. They stress some problems already highlighted in *Laudato Si'* around development and politics, but with a strong contextual emphasis, such as corruption, short-termism, national (selfish) interest, lack of leadership (of politicians) and of empowerment (of people), the difficulties of designing and implementing green policies, state failure, unfair tax systems, and a serious issue of land grabbing.

“True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good” (LS, 178)

Urbanisation

Where the Pope underlines the structural issues behind **urbanisation**, especially regarding pollution, social and environmental inequality, housing, and the rising of neighbourhoods without neighbours, participants focus on the day-to-day problems city dwellers suffer due to insecurity and violence. However, they also point out the opportunities that cities provide to fulfil people’s dreams, particularly in terms of urban infrastructure and job opportunities.

“Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis... urban contexts” (LS, 141)

Economics

With regard to **economics**, participants agree with the Pope about the need for urgent change in order to promote an inclusive and environmentally friendly economic system where there is little room for exploitation of workers and of resources, and where economic growth is promoted and measured within the context of integral human development and integral ecology. Participants also agree with the Pope regarding the need for an economic model that does not respond to the myth of progress nor to a market system that has become idolatrous, and that is driven by a long-term and non-selfish vision. However, different approaches for achieving future change emerge from the discussions among participants: one involves complete and immediate change; the other is a more gradual – though still radical – approach.

“A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress” (LS, 194)

Culture

In terms of **culture**, participants agree with and add to the Pope’s analysis of the devastating effects of a consumerist and individualistic culture, as well as the threat from a global culture which does not respect diversity. In line with *Laudato Si'*, they also stressed the way culture promotes success, usually determined by having more than others, and with unjust social practices embedded in culture, such as the stigmatisation of minorities. However, a key difference rapidly became evident under the theme of culture: the link between gender equality and development. Whilst for participants across all workshops gender equality is an absolutely vital element of sustainable development and integral ecology, this topic is completely absent from *Laudato Si'*.

As a positive note in terms of development and culture, participants highlighted the multicultural experience due to migration, the way spirituality strengthens a more humane practice of development, and the rise of a desire for transformation, especially induced by religion. They note, however, in line with *Laudato Si'*, that this transformation cannot be imposed, but can be proposed through dialogue.

“All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents” (LS, 14)

For an extensive explanation of each topic, please see CAFOD's *Laudato Si'*: Redefining progress interim report, available from cafod.org.uk/theologicalreflection

What must we do differently? (topics of ecological conversion)

Once the question of what helps or hinders development has been analysed, participants were asked to discuss what must be done differently in order to address the current crisis outlined so clearly in *Laudato Si'*. Three major areas emerge in this dialogue: *time*, *joint actions*, and *eco-conversion*.

Time

In line with *Laudato Si'*, all participants feel we need more time for personal and community reflection on how we relate to each other and to nature; more time to discuss what is the best way of moving forward; and, strikingly, more time for contemplation, since we need to slow down if we are to redefine our priorities, plans and development programmes. In other words, the way we address/live time is absolutely critical if we are to promote integral human development and integral spirituality.

“An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered” (LS, 225)

Joint actions

Another area of agreement between participants and the Pope, is the need for *joint actions*. This collaborative understanding of promoting development applies to all relationships, from inter-personal to national and international. It also implies that there are different individual and national responsibilities, according to positions of power and available resources. But joint actions cannot forge sustainable development if they are not rooted in actual dialogical processes where the voices of the powerless – and the cry of the earth – are truly heard.

“There is a need for common and differentiated responsibilities... the countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility for providing a solution to the problems they have caused.” (LS, 170)

Ecological conversion (live simply)

Moreover, shared actions comprise the need to rethink our lifestyles, seeking a simpler way of living and using natural resources wisely. It also requires a change in the way we organise our

communities, groups, agencies, companies, etc. Participants stressed that personal and familial commitments to change our lifestyles must be balanced with political incentives that could help change habits (e.g. taxes), and with analogous social initiatives (e.g. common waste management) and religious initiatives (e.g. celebrations that promote the care for our common home). This is what CST refers to as *ecological conversion*, which is always both personal and communal.

“The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion... or change of heart... Nevertheless... Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds... The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion” (LS, 217-219)

Integrating: development, ecology, spirituality
Another clear outcome for action, was the need to resume the inextricable link between:

- *integral human development*: for all people, for the whole person
- *integral ecology*: that integrates economics, politics & ecology, human dignity & common good, personal lifestyles & culture, inter- & intragenerational justice, society & nature
- *integral spirituality*: that integrates little hidden gestures & public celebrations, interpersonal & social love, rituals & ordinary concerns, faith & reason, sentiments & norms, aid & development, theology of creation with theology of redemption, crude reality & hope for change.

Radical ecological conversion: workshop discussions

For the workshop on radical ecological conversion (The Gregorian, 8th March 2018), we didn't have one or two days, but just a couple of hours. Hence, based on the outcomes of the previously described workshops, participants were asked to choose some key areas where “feasible” and “concrete” processes of conversion are possible. Below please find a summary (bullet points) of their discussions:

- ***Conversion from the culture of dominance, towards a culture of respect.*** How? Participants suggest taking into account the complexity of the ecological crisis (true cruel picture), but without losing a simple way of communicating it, especially through “stories” inspired by our faith tradition. This will generate hope in such a cultural shift. Hence, we should start within the Church.
- ***Conversion from an individualistic approach (the “I”), towards the cross-fertilised wisdom of the “we”.*** We need to work more on collective virtues in order to generate a proper universal solidarity. We should start within our own communities. Moreover, in order to overcome individualism, we could rely on the richness of the idea of “dwelling” and “relationality”, especially in terms of urbanisation and city dwellers.
- ***Conversion from a utilitarian approach to nature, towards a living/loving approach.*** There is a need to feed hearts and minds simultaneously in order to improve our relationship with nature. For that, they suggest relying on the sense of awe and wonder, which leads us to the deep meaning of all creatures. This is a necessary first step to address the need for a radical conversion from our own ideologies.
- ***Conversion from an instrumental understanding of food/feeding, towards a spiritual-ethical one.*** In order to change habits of food consumption through multiple virtues, we can rely on the ethical and spiritual basis of food and feeding. Most

religions address this issue, but especially the Judeo-Christian one, for which the “meal” (Passover) is the centrality of its faith. One idea mentioned was the chance, for Catholics, of refreshing the Eucharistic celebrations. This could help us to move away from the production and consumption of food based on violence towards animals, from the legal permission for land grabbing, from the current unjust food distribution, and from the scandalous and ever increasing food waste in developed countries. It could also help us to convert ourselves from our disconnection between our lifestyles and our roots, i.e. our territories, a topic where we have a lot to learn from indigenous communities and their ancestries, cultures and practices.

Conclusion

In short, in order to help each other and our communities to enter the path (or process) of an ongoing radical ecological conversion, we need to stop doing what hinders integral human development, and to develop habits that can help to promote it.

For example, in politics, we need to convert from short-termism, cowardice, corruption, elitism and lack of fruitful dialogues, and instead promote the participation of all, especially of the poor. In economics, we need to convert from an economy that dominates and kills, to recover an economy that serves and promote wellbeing. Culturally speaking, we need to move away from a culture of dominance and from an individualistic and utilitarian approach, towards a culture of respect, love, care and communal wisdom. We also need to move from an instrumental understanding of food and feeding, towards a spiritual and ethical one.

Yet to promote such a conversion, we would need to step back, take a deep breath, and delve deep into our existential dimension, into our ‘being’. And, as the creation accounts in the book of Genesis imply, “our historical human existence is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself” (LS, 66). Hence, when these three vital relationships have been broken (sin), we need to heal them. And healing relationships is about changing the attitude that has caused the disruption of them, namely the attitude of dominion and exploitation (cf. LS, 66-67). We cannot promote conversion with the same attitude that causes disruption.

Radical conversion, hence, does not start with our good will or our actions, but by refreshing who we truly and deeply are. We humans have an immense dignity, capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving ourselves and entering into communion with others (cf LS, 65). We are persons with the capacity to praise and contemplate God’s wonders. This is a crucial step towards reconciliation with God and his creation, and thus to changing behaviours: “*nature as a whole not only manifests God but is also a locus of his presence. The Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with him. Discovering this presence leads us to cultivate the ‘ecological virtues’*” (LS, 88). But it’s God’s light that indicates the path for healing, reconciliation, and conversion: “*In God’s light, we see light*” (PS 36:9). And Christians in general, and Catholics in particular, have a privileged encounter with God and their deep humanity in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist (cf LS, 235-236). These celebrations are a fundamental boost to promote a deep conversion that can help us to improve our bonds with creation, with others and with the Creator.