

## *Laudato Si (5)*

### *Pope Francis's Encyclical on the Environment*

For the past four weeks I have dedicated this column to a discussion of Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*. Thus far, I have summarized what the Pope has to say about what is happening to our common home, what the Bible teaches us about creation, the human roots of the ecological crisis, and the need for an integral ecology. In this column, I turn my attention to the Chapter Five, which is entitled, "Lines of Approach and Action." This chapter is divided into five sections.

The first section is entitled *Dialogue on the Environment in the International Community*. Here Pope Francis begins by noting that if we are to resolve the environmental crisis it is important that solutions are proposed from a global perspective lest we simply defend the interests of a few countries. He writes: "Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*." The environmental crisis cannot be solved by the "unilateral actions on the part of individual countries."

In the second section, *Dialogue for New National and Local Policies*, the Pope calls for "greater attention to policies on the national and local levels." He notes that "a politics concerned with immediate results, supported by consumerist sectors of the population is driven to short-term growth." What is needed then is political courage. "True statecraft," the Pope writes, "is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good."

In the third section, entitled *Dialogue and Transparency in Decision-Making*, the Pope calls for a "transparent political process involving a free exchange of views." Here there is need for honesty and truth in scientific and political discussion. In a strong statement he writes, "The culture of consumerism, which prioritizes short-term gain and private interest, can make it easy to rubber-stamp or conceal information."

The fourth section is entitled *Politics and Economy in Dialogue for Human Fulfilment*. Here Francis notes that "there is an urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life." Here the Pope warns that "where profits alone counts, there can be no thinking about the rhythm of nature, its phases of decay and regeneration, or the complexity of the ecosystems which may be gravely upset by human interventions." Such an approach will need a "politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis."

In the fifth and final section, the Pope discusses *Religions in Dialogue with Science*. Here he notes that the majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. Since this is the case, this should spur the different religions to be in dialogue with each other for the sake of "defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity." The chapter concludes with an exhortation. Given the gravity of the crisis we should embark "on a path of dialogue which demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that realities are greater than ideas."

Some will complain that the Pope is meddling in politics and he should stick to religion. While it is true that the Pope is speaking about political realities, he is not espousing a particular political system. But he is calling all who are involved in the noble task of politics to be the best politicians they can be.

Politics is a noble profession, even though we often criticize our politicians. But nearly every political decision has moral and ethical implications. This is why the Pope summons all politicians, and us, to the highest and noblest of ideals.

*Father Matera*