

The role of the Catholic Church towards a sustainable life style

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Address

When on 18 May 2015 finally Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter «Laudato Si'. The care for our Common Home» was presented in the Vatican, it caught considerable attention for different reasons. First of all the title of the document, a direct reference to the well-known song/prayer of Saint Francis. It should not remain the only reference to this holy man from Assisi: the whole document proves his spirit, his understanding of Man as part of the whole creation, and his role as steward, but not as its Master.

Secondly it was the way how the encyclical was presented to the public: not by a few high-ranking clerics speaking in the name of the Holy Father, but by a mixed panel of the hierarchy (but not only Catholic), of scientists, of theologians and of a school-teacher, men and women. By doing so Pope Francis underlined once more his intention that with this document he does not want to address Catholics all over the world only or just just Christians, but that this letter applies to all people of good will (as already his predecessor Pope John XXIII did with his encyclical «Pacem in terris»).

A first short look into this document learned that Pope Francis did not only use a direct and very clear language and addressed topics in a very straight way (as he already did in his Apostolic letter «Evangelii gaudium»), but that he invites us to take a clear look without prejudices or any embellishment to our world and its current state. He does not only describe what makes our Mother, the Earth, cry – pollution of air and water, climate change and global heating, the loss of biodiversity, the deterioration of quality of life and social decline and global social injustice – but he also addresses the root-causes for all this: the globalisation of the technocratic paradigm and the sincere belief that everything can be expressed accordingly to economic terms, that the whole earth and social relations are nothing but one big market following economic logic. He urges us to see and to accept that «everything is connected with everything», that the social and the ecological crises are not two different crises but just the two sides of the same coin. And he invites us to take a fresh look not only by recognised of what is going on, but also by looking for ways

out of this crises: to work on the concept of an integral ecology, to be ready for a change, for an «ecological conversion» and to be willing to embark on a new, different, modest but still joyful way of life, that enables all people to enjoy the fruits of the Earth. Notwithstanding his concern and his critic of the current crisis Pope Francis is not pessimistic: Human liberty is capable to limit technology and to guide it towards a different understanding of progress, a healthier, more human, social and integral one (LS 112).

Faced with the growing urgency of these crises, drawing on and building on the work done in the field over the past three years by so many brave actors around the world, within the Catholic Church and beyond, to promote and "live" the messages conveyed by the encyclical "Laudato Sí" we must all listen to "the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (LS 49) and we must listen to the call of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, in order to show our solidarity with those numerous Christians who have already taken a stand against the unlimited and dangerous use and exploitation of the resources of our planet as well as our current development models, supported by institutions and financial systems that bring life, community, solidarity and well-being to earth after profit, wealth and unbridled growth. This listening led to a 2018 Joint Declaration of Episcopal Conferences on Climate Justice that I signed as Archbishop of Luxembourg and President of COMECE. In this declaration we call for ambitious and immediate measures to combat and overcome the devastating effects of the climate crisis. Our call is based on the following principles:

- Urgency: "Time is a luxury that is not given to us. " Thanks to research and scientific data, public opinion is becoming increasingly aware that there is no time to waste. We want to translate this urgency into concrete plans for equitable sharing of resources and responsibilities, where large emitters assume their political responsibilities and respect their commitments on climate finance. "Symptoms of a breaking point seem to be observed because of rapid changes and degradation." (LS 61)
- Intergenerational justice: "Young people are calling for change" (LS 13). Their future is seriously threatened and our generation is not doing enough to leave them a healthy planet. To lack vision is an unacceptable injustice. "[Consequently, intergenerational solidarity is not an option], but a fundamental question of justice, since the land we receive also belongs to those who will come. (LS 159)

- Human dignity and rights, especially the most vulnerable, must always be at the centre of the climate agenda. In the implementation of the Paris Agreement, human rights must be effectively protected, respected and defended, both in national policies and in the field. Governments should show their efforts in this regard in their planned Nationally Determined Contributions and in their funding choices for adaptation and resilience.

Therefore, we are asking for policies by the EU member states that include and recognize calls and the following:

Climate change

We have a moral duty to keep global warming "well below 2 ° C and continue efforts to limit the temperature rise to 1.5 ° C above pre-industrial levels ", as agreed by governments in the Paris Agreement. At the wake of the EU summit on 9 May in Sibiu eight member states – Belgium, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden have submitted an informal note calling for climate neutrality by 2050. To achieve this goal a strategic EU agenda should be adopted by the end of 2020, the intermediate objectives for 2030 reinforced and at least 25% of the next EU multiannual financial framework reserved for climate action. I think that we as Christians should monitor this initiative very closely, but we should also be aware, that it's ambitious political goals won't suffice. The legislator alone, fiscal incentives alone won't do. We also need a change in mentality and behaviour. As always Christians should therefore be recognized by the example they give and by their lifestyles. In this respect I hope that we can be identified by the way we eat and heat, we drive and buy, by the way we recombine mobility and stability, action and contemplation and finally by the way we integrate the care for creation and for the poorest. Pope Francis told us: "As we know, we are [all] hit by climate crises. However, the effects of climate change are not distributed evenly. It is the poor who suffer the most from the devastation of global warming ... Many of those who can barely afford it are already forced to leave their homes and migrate to other places, without knowing how they will be welcomed." A just and equitable ecological transition, as required by the Paris Agreement, is a matter of life and death for vulnerable countries and people living in coastal areas.

Drinking Water

On 6 March the Council of the European Union found a compromise on the revision of the drinking water directive. The issue was promoted and advanced by the European Citizen's

Initiative “Right2water”. The European Commission made a first a proposal, the European Parliament discussed and amended it in time. Unfortunately the Council took too much time in order to finally adopt the revision before the European elections but hopefully the new European Parliament may adopt the text in the near future. It sets out new security parameters for drinking waters and redefines the list of materials, which are allowed to be in contact with drinking water before its distribution. It also creates obligations for free water fountains in public places. Again a lot can and must be by each of us individually to spare the beautiful treasure of drinking water. But the Churches could also set nice examples in this field. Wouldn't it be a nice symbol for instance to have a free drinking water fountain of each European cathedral?

Oceans

In early May Justice and Peace Europe and the Global Catholic Climate Movement organised a wonderful conference in Copenhagen. Following the integral method Together with the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the Apostelship of the Seas the brought together experts, civil society activists and political leaders to discuss the “Common Good of the Seas”. Our oceans are a global treasure and this treasure is at the risk of destruction because of pollution, over-fishing, deoxygenation and acidification. People working on the Seas are often victims of human trafficking. In the second part of its mandate the European Commission became the sponsor of the international “Our Oceans” initiative. It also proposed new legislation on the use of plastics, including the interdiction of the curse of the oceans, which are single use plastic items. The Parliament and the Council adopted this legislation last December. Christians, however, do not have to wait until 2021, when the interdiction becomes effective. They can start already now. Christian organisations can also support the “Our Oceans” to be continued and the next European Research program foresees to greatly support research on the cleaning up of the oceans.

Deforestation

In the second half of 2019 the European Commission is supposed to present a communication on EU efforts to reduce our footprint on tropical forests. It will fall together with the next extraordinary plenary of the synod on the Amazons and we all hope for an ambitious and concrete plan of the EU against deforestation, which is caused by the plantation of soya, palm-oil, coffee, chocolate and other agricultural products exported to the richer parts of the world. Again our consumption patterns are questioned. An

ecological conversion, a change of our habits needs to go hand in hand with new European legislation. Within the European Union the European Commission has made a proposal in last April to compensate every farmer who replants one hectare with trees on his farm. Again the Churches in Europe could accompany this initiative by even more ambitious programs on their land.

Food waste

The EU waste legislation from May 2018 projects to diminish food waste by 30% until 2030 and by 50% until 2050 and the European commission is currently very active to improve the methods of measuring and quantifying food waste. Once this is done we can support the idea of a binding reduction goal as Justice and Peace Europe suggested it in its annual concerted action 2019. Fighting a waste economy is a cause of the Church. When Pope Francis received the European Federation of Food Banks on 18 May he said: "Fighting against the terrible scourge of hunger means also fighting waste. Waste reveals indifference towards things and towards those who go without. Wastefulness is the crudest form of discarding... We need to support those who wish to change things for the better; we need to encourage models of growth based on social equality, on the dignity of human persons, on families, on the future of young people, on respect for the environment. A circular economy is no longer something we can put off. Waste cannot be the last word bequeathed to posterity by the well-off few, while the majority of humanity remains silent. »

Dear friends I could add further examples, for instance on the threat to biodiversity and our contribution to Post 2020 Biodiversity framework, or on sustainable finance - the issue you dealt with last year - and the support we should lend to the EU initiatives in this field but also to the divestment program of the GCCM, but you understand my point.

In my view an ecological conversion includes both: it invites us to a deep and lasting change in our own lifestyles so that they became truly sustainable in a practical and material but also in a spiritual sense, and it requires bold policy choices that support these efforts to combat over-consumption and drastically reduce the ecological footprint at the individual and community level.

Securing opportunities for future generations requires a much more fundamental reform of our economy. The major challenge lies in the search for an economy that preserves (natural) resources without deteriorating the quality of life and the employment situation. With our enormous consumption of energy and CO₂ production Lenten is in fact an adequate partial answer: we need a new modesty, a new sobriety. A happy sobriety! This is what ecological conversion should aim for. And with that we have to face, each of us in his own country, the challenges of meeting 2030 Agenda with all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Certainly this 2030 agenda can be criticized. Some admonish that there is a lack of willingness to change a system that creates poverty in the world, but on the other side this 2030 agenda has the merit that countries in the global North must also question a number of policies and commit themselves. This commitment must be guided by a central question in this regard: will the public policies in our countries - within the EU and beyond our borders - contribute to a more sustainable, just and sustainable world?

We need deep and lasting change towards sustainable lifestyles and bold policy choices that could support these efforts to combat over-consumption and drastically reduce the ecological footprint at the individual and community level. "All these actions presuppose a transformation to a deeper level, that is to say a change of heart, a change of consciousness. " A simple "greening" of current economic and production conditions, the productivity gains of digitalization alone will not be enough to meet the challenge of a long-term sustainability policy.

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by a central question in this regard: will my country's public policy - in my country and beyond our borders - contribute to a more sustainable, just and sustainable world?

Last Friday Pope Francis addressed the participants of a conference organised by the *Centesiums Annus* Foundation. What he said resumes well the intention of today's second *Laudato Si'* reflection Day, so let me therefore cite the Holy Father: « The word "conversion" assumes a special importance in our present situation. Adequate responses to current problems cannot be superficial. Rather, what is needed is precisely a conversion, a "turning around", that is, a transformation of hearts and minds. Striving to overcome problems such as hunger and food insecurity, persistent social and economic distress, the degradation of ecosystems, and a "culture of waste" calls for a renewed ethical vision, one that places persons at the center, desiring to leave no one on the margins of life. A vision which unites rather than divides, includes rather than excludes. It is a vision transformed by taking into account the ultimate purpose and goal of our work, efforts, lives and earthly sojourn »

Given the immensity of the task and its urgency, it is certainly important to take to heart what the Pope said and to always remember Saint John of the Cross who taught us that all the goodness present in the realities and experiences of this world "is present in God eminently and infinitely, or more properly, in each of these sublime realities is God" (LS 234)