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Trócaire 2015 Lenten Lecture

“Integral ecology and the horizon of hope:
concern for the poor and for creation in the ministry of Pope
Francis”

St. Patrick’s Pontifical University, Maynooth, Ireland
Thursday 5th March 2015 at 7.00 p.m.

Introduction

Your Grace, Archbishop Martin, Brother Bishops, Seminarians, ladies and gentlemen, I thank Éamonn for his very kind introduction. I also thank Bishop William Crean, Chairman of Trócaire and Monsignor Hugh Connolly, President of Maynooth for their warm welcome and for the invitation to give the Annual Trócaire Lenten lecture in Maynooth. I have learned that in the very distinguished history of this University, thousands of men and women have left these halls over the years to bring the Gospel of charity and justice to the four corners of the world. I am aware of the leading role played by this University in dialogues between faith and science, between philosophy and praxis, between economics and development, and between environmental sciences and policy decisions regarding climate change.

This evening, I am also very conscious that the Irish people themselves have an outstanding reputation for generous giving and for commitment to development issues. According to the Charities Aid Foundation *World Giving Index*, Ireland is consistently among the five most generous countries of the world. It is the most generous country in Northern Europe. So when I come to Ireland, I already know that people in Ireland really do care about outreach to those in need, commitment

to development aid, and engagement with the issues of international development. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I acknowledge and pay tribute to your tremendous generosity and compassion. I am glad to have this opportunity to pay particular tribute to the outstanding work of Trócaire. As the development agency of the Irish Bishops' Conference and a member of *Caritas Internationalis*, Trócaire is a worthy ambassador of Ireland's compassion and concern for justice across the world. Its professionalism and experience also make it a world leader and a respected voice in terms of insight into issues of international development and a leader in working for a more just world.

Misericordia in Latin, or *Trócaire* in Irish or Mercy in English: this has become a keyword in the ministry of Pope Francis. As in the Scriptures, Pope Francis often associates mercy and tenderness. Indeed, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, he appeals to all of us to bring about a “revolution of tenderness”, a revolution of the heart. For “there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor” when our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests, or when our national life and economy become caught up in their own interests.

Pope Francis intends to publish an encyclical letter later this year on the theme of human ecology. It will explore the relationship between care for creation, integral human development and concern for the poor. The timing of the encyclical is significant: 2015 is a critical year for humanity. In July, nations will gather for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa. In September, the U.N. General Assembly should agree on a new set of sustainable development goals running until 2030. In December, the Climate Change Conference in Paris will receive the plans and commitments of each Government to slow or reduce global warming. The coming 10 months are crucial, then, for decisions about international development, human flourishing and care for the common home we call planet Earth.

So this evening is a good time to look at the relationship between development, concern for the poor and responsibility for the environment in the ministry of

Pope Francis. I do so under the title: *“Integral ecology and the horizon of hope: concern for the poor and for creation in the ministry of Pope Francis.”* I will focus on **four principles of integral ecology**. Through his teaching on these themes, Pope Francis is promoting **integral ecology** as the key to addressing the inter-related issues of human ecology, development and the natural environment.

The Holy Father has echoed the sense of crisis that many in the scientific and development communities convey about the precarious state of our planet and of the poor. What he adds to the conversation about future approaches is the particular perspective of Catholic Social thought, rooted in the Sacred Scriptures and natural reason. This offers something unique and vital to the efforts of the international community. Ultimately, of course, what Pope Francis seeks to bring to this sense of crisis is the “warmth of hope”. Indeed, from his very first homily as Pope, a fundamental aim of his ministry has been to point us to the “horizon of hope” in the midst of those he has called the “Herods”, the “omens of destruction and death” that so often “accompany the advance of this world”. In that spirit of hope, let me reflect on the four themes that are woven through the ministry and teaching of Pope Francis on integral ecology.

I. First Principle: The call to be protectors is integral and all-embracing.

The first principle is this: that the call to be protectors is integral and all-embracing. We are called to protect and care for both creation and the human person. These concepts are reciprocal and, together, they make for authentic and sustainable human development.

At the inaugural Mass of his Petrine Ministry, Pope Francis put the protection of creation to the very forefront of his own ministry and the vocation of every Christian. He offered St Joseph as a model of protecting Christ in our lives, “so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation”, and explained that the vocation of being a protector “has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone.” Its scope is very broad; it involves

“protecting creation, the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi shows us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. It means caring for one another in our families: husbands and wives... they protect one another, and then, as parents, they care for their children, and children themselves, in time protect their parents. It means building sincere friendships in which we protect one another in trust, respect, and goodness.”

Clearly this is not some narrow agenda for the greening the Church or the world. It is a vision of care and protection that embraces the human person and the human environment in all possible dimensions.

Saint Pope John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on human ecology.

In his insistence on an integral, relational vocation of protector, Pope Francis continues the thought of his two predecessors. In his social encyclical, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Saint John Paul II spoke of the need to respect the constituent and inter-related elements of the natural world: “One cannot use with impunity the different categories of beings...animals, plants, the natural elements – simply as one wishes, according to one’s own economic needs. On the contrary, *one must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system*, which is precisely the cosmos.”¹ A recently republished pastoral of the Irish Bishops echoes his point: “Our earth is complex, its systems of life are interdependent and finely balanced. Small changes in one part of the planet’s rhythms and systems can have significant, if not dramatic consequences for the whole of the earth and its creatures.”² For the natural environment to be respected, the human environment and its objective

¹ Saint Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, (1987), n.34, emphasis added.

² Irish Bishops’ Pastoral, p.3

moral structure must also be respected. When we ignore or neglect one, it has a destructive impact on the other.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI also had this point as a central theme in his teaching. Some called him the “Green Pope” because of the priority he gave to concern over our destruction of nature. He echoed the call of Saint John Paul II to “change our way of life... [to] eliminate the structural causes of global economic dysfunction, and to correct models of growth that seem incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment and for integral human development.”³

Pope Benedict’s message for the 43rd World Day of Peace in 2010 was abundantly clear: “The book of nature is one and indivisible; it includes not only the environment but also individual, family and social ethics. Our duties towards the environment flow from our duties towards the person, considered both individually and in relation to others.”⁴ On this basis too, in *Caritas in Veritate*, he famously called contemporary society to a serious review of its lifestyle, which is so often prone to hedonism and consumerism, regardless of their harmful consequences. What is needed, he said, is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of “new lifestyles” in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.⁵

It is such integral ecology that Pope Francis took up, in eminently pastoral terms, in his inaugural homily. He does so again in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* when he calls all people to a new solidarity, “the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (n.188).

II. Second Principle: care for creation is a virtue in its own right.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 8 January 2007

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, 43rd World Day for Peace Message, 2010

⁵ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n.51

Compelled by the scientific evidence for climate change, we are called to care for man and to respect the grammar of nature as virtues in their own right. This is the second principle that underpins Pope Francis approach to integral ecology as the basis for authentic development.

In an airplane interview while returning from Korea last August, Holy Father said that one of the challenges he faces in his encyclical on ecology is how to address the scientific debate about climate change and its origins.⁶ Is it the outcome of cyclical processes of nature, of human activities (anthropogenic), or perhaps both? What is not contested is that our planet is getting warmer. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has undertaken the most comprehensive assessment of climate change. Its November 2014 Synthesis Report was as stark as it was challenging. In the words of Thomas Stocker, the co-chair of the IPCC Working Group I: “Our assessment finds that the atmosphere and oceans have warmed, the amount of snow and ice has diminished, sea level has risen and the concentration of carbon dioxide has increased to a level unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years.”⁷

Yet even the compelling consensus of over 800 scientists of the IPCC will have its critics and its challengers. For Pope Francis, however, this is not the point. For the Christian, to care for God’s ongoing work of creation is a duty, irrespective of the causes of climate change. To care for creation, to develop and live an integral ecology as the basis for development and peace in the world, is a fundamental Christian duty. As Pope Francis put it in his morning homily at Santa Marta on 9th February, it is wrong and a distraction to contrast “green” and “Christian.” In fact, “a Christian who doesn't safeguard creation, who doesn't make it flourish, is a Christian who isn't concerned with God's work, that work born of God's love for us.”

⁶ Press Conference, flight from Korea to Rome, 14.08.2014.

⁷ <http://www.un.org/climatechange/blog/2014/11/climate-change-threatens-irreversible-dangerous-impacts-options-exist-limit-effects/>

In this, Pope Francis is affirming a truth revealed in the first pages of Sacred Scripture. In the second creation account of the Book of Genesis, humankind is placed in the Garden by the Creator to “till it and keep it” (*Gen 2:15*). These concepts of “tilling” and “keeping” involve a vital and reciprocal relationship between humanity and the created world. They involve humankind, every individual and every community in a sacred duty to draw from the goodness of the earth, and at the same time to care for the earth in a way that ensures its continued fruitfulness for future generations.

Justice in this context is essentially a relational term. Its defining quality is fidelity to the demands of the threefold relationship within which each of us stands and upon which each of us depends for life itself: our relationship with the Creator, with our neighbour, and with the natural environment in which we live. To neglect or violate one of these relationships is an offence, quite literally a sin. In the Scriptures, the “just person” is one who maintains these relationships by respecting the demands that they entail. The just person is one who therefore preserves *communion* with God, with neighbour and with the land, and by doing so, also makes peace! The various holiness and justice codes of the Old Testament are unequivocal. Those who till and keep the land have a responsibility to share its fruits with others, especially the poor, the stranger, the widow and the orphan. The law of the Covenant was clear; the gift of the land and its fruitfulness belongs to the whole people of Israel together.

So when Pope Francis says that destroying the environment is a grave sin; when he says that it is not large families that cause poverty but an economic culture that puts money and profit ahead of people; when he says that we cannot save the environment without also addressing the profound injustices in the distribution of the goods of the earth; when he says that this is “an economy that kills” – he is not making some political comment about the relative merits of capitalism and communism. He is rather restating ancient Biblical teaching. He is pointing to the fact that being a protector of creation, of the poor, of the dignity of every human person is a *sine qua non* of being Christian, of being fully human. He is pointing to

the ominous signs in nature that suggest that humanity may now have *tilled* too much and *kept* too little, that our relationship with the Creator, with our neighbour, especially the poor, and with the environment has become fundamentally “un-kept”, and that we are now at serious risk of a concomitant human, environmental and relational degradation.

III. Third principle: we will – we must – care for what we cherish and revere.

Thirdly, binding regulations, policies, and targets are necessary tools for addressing poverty and climate change, but they are unlikely to prove effective without moral conversion and a change of heart. Think of the present Pope’s choice of the name Francis, for Saint Francis of Assisi who is an example *par excellence* of a lived and integral ecology. In fact, Saint Pope John Paul II had declared him the patron saint of those who promote ecology. His love for creation, for creatures and for the poor, are one, they form an integral whole. And the prior and fundamental source of that integrated whole was his religious faith. In pointing to Saint Francis as a model, Pope Francis holds that a truly practical and sustainable integral approach to ecology, has to draw on more than the scientific, the material and the economic, more than laws and policies. When Saint Francis gazed upon the heavens, when he surveyed the wonder and beauty of the animals, he did not respond to them with the abstract formulae of science or the utilitarian eye of the economist. His response was one of awe, wonder and fraternity. He sang of “Brother Sun” and “Sister Moon”. In other words, his response was that of reverence – of a deep and relational respect based on kinship and fraternity, the kinship with God, our neighbour and the land spoken of in the book of Genesis and praised throughout the wisdom literature and the psalms.

There have been many attempts in recent years to implement international agreements on development goals, carbon emission targets and climate change limits, with varying degrees of success. For example, the Millennium Development Goals – many of which sought to remedy the particular crises that I have mentioned – have only achieved partial success, with half remaining unfulfilled. For

instance, between 1.2 and 1.5 billion people are still mired in “extreme poverty”.⁸ Global inequalities continue to widen. Sub-Saharan Africa has the second highest rate of economic growth in the world (after developing Asia). Nevertheless, the region remains locked in a negative cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, with development aid shifting away from some of the poorest countries. The wealth of the top 1% has grown 60% in the last twenty years,⁹ and it continued to grow through the global economic crisis. Despite the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change signed in Rio in 1992 and subsequent agreements, global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) continue their upward trend, almost 50 per cent above 1990 levels. The concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere has reached a level last seen 3 million years ago – when the planet was significantly warmer than it is today. Millions of hectares of forest are lost every year, many species are being driven closer to extinction, and renewable water resources are becoming scarcer.

The list could go on. Certainly international agreements are important, they can help. But they are not enough in themselves to sustain change in human behaviour. As Saint John Paul II put it, we require an “ecological conversion”, a radical and fundamental change in our attitudes to creation, to the poor and to the priorities of the global economy. By pointing us to the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis teaches the world that the ancient wisdom, insights and values of religious faith, most notably the tradition of Catholic Social Doctrine, can contribute something of value to the search for sustainable development, based on an integral ecology. Genuine “ecological conversion” involves the whole person. Commitment assumes a relationship, an emotional and relational attachment. It is the kind of kinship and fraternity with creation, creatures and the poor that flowed so clearly and directly from the relationship between Saint Francis and the Creator.

This is why the cultural trend of relegating religious language, religious motivation and religious faith to the sphere of the purely private and personal undermines a vital and powerful source of meaning and action in the common effort to address

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) "Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)", 17.01.2014.

⁹ *Oxfam Media Report 02/2013* (18.01.2013).

both climate change and sustainable development. The Judaeo-Christian insight into creation can transform our relationship from that of remote observers or technical managers of nature, to that of “brother and sister”, of nurturer and protector of all. Religious insights into creation in this sense can help to orient and integrate us as humans within the wider universe, to identify what is most important to us, what we revere, sustain and protect as sacred. Giving space to the religious voice and to its ancient experience, wisdom and insight therefore can transform our attitudes to creation and to others in a way that purely scientific, economic or political approaches are less likely to achieve. What more radical and comprehensive charter for sustainable development and environmental care do we have after all than the Beatitudes, than the call to generosity that permeates *Evangelii Gaudium*: the command to go the extra mile, to give to the least, to give our tunic as well as our cloak to the one who asks us.

IV. Fourth principle: the call to dialogue and a new global solidarity.

Fourthly, for Pope Francis, integral ecology, as the basis for justice and development in the world, requires a new global solidarity, one in which everyone has a part to play and every action, no matter how small, can make a difference.

During World Youth Day celebrations in Brazil in July 2013, this call to solidarity became most explicit in his address to Varginha, a *favela* community. Pope Francis noted that the rich could learn much from the poor about solidarity: “I would like to make an appeal to those in possession of greater resources, to public authorities and to all people of good will who are working for social justice: never tire of working for a more just world, marked by greater solidarity... The culture of selfishness and individualism that often prevails in our society is not what builds up and leads to a more habitable world: it is the culture of solidarity that does so, seeing others not as rivals or statistics, but brothers and sisters.”

The Holy Father then added that giving “bread to the hungry,” while required by justice, is not enough for human happiness. “There is neither real promotion of the common good nor real human development when there is ignorance of the

fundamental pillars that govern a nation, its nonmaterial goods,” he said. The Pope identified those goods as life; family; “integral education, which cannot be reduced to the mere transmission of information for the purposes of generating profit”; health, “including the spiritual dimension” of well-being; and security, which he said can be achieved “only by changing human hearts”.

As this year’s *Drop in the Ocean* campaign by Trócaire implies, and as the Pastoral Letter of the Irish Bishops’ Conference, *The Cry of the Earth*, points out, “Action at a global level, as well as every individual action which contributes to integral human development and global solidarity, helps to construct a more sustainable environment and therefore, a better world”¹⁰. Thanks to the Trócaire box in many homes and classrooms during Lent, you already know how little gestures add up to make a difference.

Conclusion: Let us become artisans of the revolution of tenderness.

Allow me to summarize all that I have said this evening:

- The threats that arise from global inequality and the destruction of the environment are inter-related; and they are the greatest threats we face as a human family today.
- In responding to this combined threat, every action counts. We all have a part to play in protecting and sustaining what Pope Francis has repeatedly called *our common home*.
- Our efforts in this regard require an integral approach to ecology, not one limited to scientific, economic or technical solutions.
- At the heart of this integral ecology is the call to dialogue and a new solidarity, a changing of human hearts in which the good of the human person, and not the pursuit of profit, is the key value that directs our search for the global, the universal common good.

¹⁰ *The Cry of the Earth, A Pastoral Reflection on Climate Change from the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference*, 2014, p.7

In this, we have the core elements of an integral ecology which in turn provides the basis for authentic and sustainable approaches to human development.

In conveying my thanks to you once again for the honour of giving this annual Lenten lecture, in commending Trócaire for their excellent and timely Climate Justice campaign, I encourage you to give great attention to the forthcoming encyclical from Pope Francis on the themes we have just considered. As we confront the threat of environmental catastrophe on a global scale, I am confident that a shaft of light will break through the heavy clouds and bring us what Pope Francis describes as *the warmth of hope!* Most importantly, as we become revolutionaries of tenderness overcoming the world's pervasive inequities, these years can indeed initiate a millennium of respect for life, of care for God's creation, of solidarity and peace, síocháin. peace.

Thank you for listening.

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson