



Caritas in Mission

A quarterly newsletter by Caritas Singapore on the Catholic Church's social mission

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letter to you

A special edition on Care for Our Common Home

WE ARE HIS STEWARDS



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For centuries, the Catholic Church has taught that human beings must care for our environment. This is because **all that is created is God's work and therefore Christians are called to nurture and preserve what God has made.** Personally, I like to think that caring for God's creation is part of our worship of God.

The Church's teaching is even more important today.

Many scientists warn that we are severely damaging our environment, even to the point of no return. Many public health concerns have also arisen from this. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic may in part have resulted from human action. On 6 July 2020, UNEP said that this pandemic is just one example of the rising trend of diseases such as Ebola and MERS caused by viruses jumping from animal hosts into the human population. The rising trend in zoonotic diseases is driven by the deterioration of our natural environment – through land degradation, wildlife exploitation, resource extraction, climate change, and other stresses.¹

Given the urgency of the situation, Pope Francis issued an encyclical in 2015 – Laudato Si'² – which means "Praise Be to You!" with the subtitle "On Care for our Common Home".

While grounded in the Church's teachings, the Pope makes the point that theological reflections should be grounded in an analysis of the present situation, and therefore the encyclical begins by outlining what is happening in our common home such as pollution and climate change, depletion of water supplies, and loss of biodiversity. These have led to a decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society, e.g. unhealthy living conditions, inequality, and increased crime and violence.

Having set out what the world is grappling with, **Laudato Si' turns to what the Bible says about the relationship of human beings with the world.** The creation accounts in the book of Genesis suggest that human life is grounded in **three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.**

According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us, and this rupture

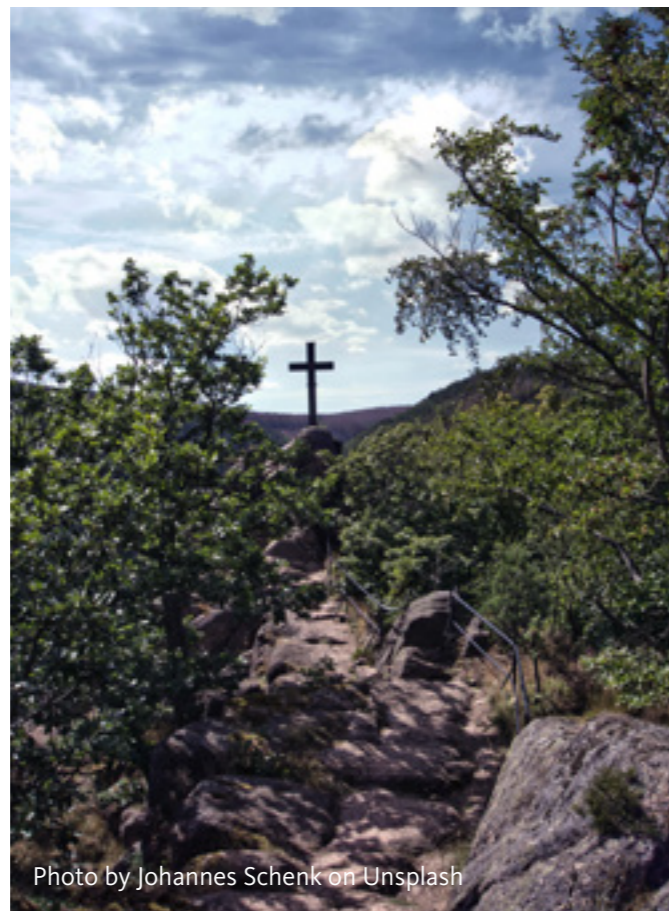


Photo by Johannes Schenk on Unsplash

is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our pride and as a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature came into conflict (cf. Gen 3:17–19).

The Genesis story tells us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15) which means to care, protect and preserve the world including to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.

Our concern for future generations is a matter of our own dignity as it is linked to the meaning of our temporary stay in this world. This is the kind of "dominion" over the world that we have been granted.

Human beings do not own the land; we are strangers and foreigners and it is God to whom the land belongs. (Lev 25:23)

References:

¹ <https://www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/press-release/unite-human-animal-and-environmental-health-prevent-next-pandemic-un>

² https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf

Our responsibility for God's earth means **that we must be responsible stewards and respect the laws of nature** for "he commanded and they were created; and he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away". (Psalm 148:5–6)

God is reflected in all His creatures and so man must respect every creature, and avoid any disordered use of things as well as "excessive anthropocentrism".

One of the major themes in Laudato Si' is the **"common destination of goods"**³. As the earth was created by God for all, it is essentially **a shared inheritance whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone.**

For Christians, the importance of sharing becomes a question of obedience to God who created the world for everyone. Hence, **every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective that takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.** Private property must have a social purpose and the Christian tradition has never recognised the right to private property as absolute.

God's creation, of which we are only caretakers, cannot be used in such a way that its benefits favour only a few. Here, I pause to note that the Church's teachings on creation have a strong **social dimension.**

It suggests, among other things, that our Earth should not be overused for the few at the expense of the many now and in the future.



Photo by Marek Okon on Unsplash

References:

³ <https://www.caritas-singapore.org/catholic-social-teaching>

⁴ <http://www.humandevlopment.va/en/taglist.cura-del-creato.html>

As everything is ultimately closely interrelated, the Holy Father suggests consideration of an "integral ecology" that clearly respects its human and social dimensions.

This concept flows from the Holy Father's understanding that today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account all the interconnected aspects of the global crisis. The "environment" cannot be considered in isolation. **We are part of nature** as we influence nature just as nature influences us. As a result, if we want to know why a given area is polluted, we must study "the workings of society, its economy, its behavioural patterns, and the ways it grasps reality." Accordingly, in considering solutions to the environmental crisis we must seek **comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.**

These interrelationships mean that we are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. As a result, strategies for a solution demand an **integrated approach** to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

In such an "economic ecology", the protection of the environment is then seen as "an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it."

He also calls for a **"social ecology" that recognises that the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life**⁴. This includes the primary social group, the family, as well as wider local, national, and international communities. When these

"We live better when we are not so obsessed by material things. To live such a life, we must be at peace with ourselves, the attitude of our hearts must have a serenity that accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full."



<http://www.humandevlopment.va/en/taglist.cura-del-creato.html>

institutions are weakened, the result is injustice, violence, a loss of freedom, and a lack of respect for law, all of which have consequences for the environment.

As a practical person, Pope Francis also sets out some lines of approach and action in the form of various dialogues that should take place within the international community, at the national and local levels, between politics and the economy as both need to enter into a frank discussion in the service of life, and religions in dialogue with science.

I am, therefore, very pleased that we have such a diverse panel [at the Caritas Singapore Roundtable VI: Heal Our Home], befitting the various "dialogues" that the Holy Father calls us to have. The Church must work with all people of goodwill to solve the environmental challenges that we face.

But ultimately, the Pope says,

"...it is we, human beings, above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone."

It is essential that "we set out on the long path of renewal." This includes the need for a **"new lifestyle"** that does not involve extreme consumerism. Such a change could bring healthy pressure on those who exercise political, economic and social power to make positive changes. To bring about this change, **education** is important and must include a critique of what the Pope regards as "myths" such as **individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market.** It should also seek to restore the various levels of **ecological equilibrium,**

establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures and with God.

The Holy Father emphasises that for there to be **long-lasting effects,** the majority of people must have the right virtues to make a **selfless ecological commitment.** Such a commitment can come about by using less even when one can afford it; by sacrificing some comfort so that the environment will not be harmed (such as using less air-conditioning in our context); by reusing things whenever possible; and by sharing to reduce waste.

He says "less is more" because **it is liberating to return to simplicity, to be spiritually detached from our possessions, and not to be sad for what we lack. This is not a lesser life.**

For Christians, Pope Francis calls for an **"ecological conversion"** such that our encounter with Jesus becomes evident in our relationship with the world around us. According to him, living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. However, individual efforts may not ultimately be sufficient to remedy the complex problems that the world faces and therefore a **community conversion** is also necessary.

Such a conversion entails **gratitude** and a **recognition** that the world is God's loving gift and that we are not disconnected from the rest of God's creatures. As Luke 12:6 records Jesus saying of the birds of the air, "not one of them is forgotten before God".

The Pope challenges us all to recognise and live fully this dimension of our conversion. He says: "May the power and the light of the grace we have received also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world around us."

In conclusion, I would like to say that while we, as human beings, appreciate the need to care for the environment, not least because **it is key to the survival of humanity as a species,** as Catholic Christians, we must also internalise **care for the environment as part of our relationship with God** for all that God creates is good and **we are His stewards.** ✠

CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Caritas Singapore organised a roundtable themed "Heal Our Home" in August 2020. Our expert panellists shared on the topics concerning the current climate situation, and how we can address it as a community.

Little steps to care for our environment

■ As Catholic Individuals

 <p>Walk more, take public transport or carpool to reduce your carbon footprint.</p>	 <p>Purchase food that is at least 70% organic, or whole foods to reduce dependence on processed food with a high carbon footprint and pesticide residues.</p>	 <p>Instead of buying new things, upcycle used items like furniture and clothes, and give them a new purpose.</p>	 <p>Bring the 6Rs into your life – Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle, Regenerate.</p>
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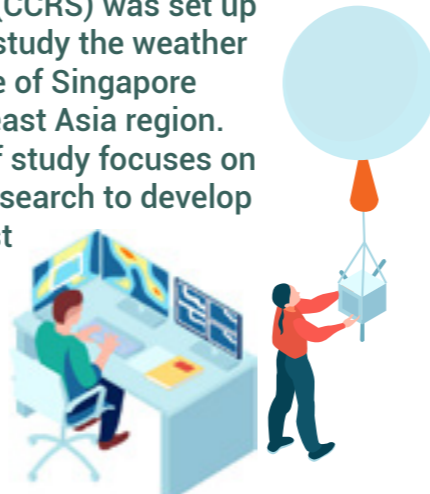



■ As a Community of Faith


 <p>Pope Francis' 5Rs: A Jubilee is a sacred time to Remember, Return, Rest, Restore and Rejoice.¹⁰</p>	 <p>Pray as a community for a shift in mindset towards caring for our common home.</p>	 <p>Participate in parish activities that put the principles of Laudato Si' into practice and teach us how to be good stewards of creation.^{11, 12}</p>	 <p>At all events, use reusable crockery and utensils.</p>
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" We are asked to re-appropriate God's original and loving plan of creation as a common heritage, a banquet which all of our brothers and sisters share in a spirit of conviviality, not in competitive scramble but in joyful fellowship, supporting and protecting one another. "

- Pope Francis

Climate Action in Singapore⁹

<p>The Centre for Climate Research for Singapore (CCRS) was set up in 2013 to study the weather and climate of Singapore and Southeast Asia region. One area of study focuses on sea level research to develop more robust projections of sea level rise.</p> 	<p>By 2021, Singapore will be one of the few countries in the world to have 100% green waterworks.</p> 
<p>NEW plans NEWater: Closing the water loop. NEWSand: Turning incinerated bottom ash to construction materials. NEWOil: Converting discarded plastics into higher value products like pyrolysis oil.</p> 	<p>Tuas Port, when completed by the 2040s, will provide greater efficiency and lower emissions through automation and reduction in inter-haulage operations by road and sea.</p> 



GLOBAL CRISES

2019 is the second hottest year on record⁵


We produce over **300 mil** tons of plastic waste every year and about 8 mil lands up in the ocean⁷

We consume as many as **1,769** particles of microplastics every week only from drinking water⁸

We have lost **60%** of animal populations⁶

Singapore is already experiencing the impact of climate change, such as more **intense rainfall** and **prolonged dry spells.**

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AS SEEN IN SINGAPORE:



Mean **sea level rise** of up to **1 metre**

By 2100⁹

An **increase in daily mean temperatures** as high as **4.6°C**

More **extreme** and **intense weather events,** which may lead to more **frequent floods.**

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⁵ <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/wmo-confirms-2019-second-hottest-year-record>
⁶ https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/wwfint_livingplanet_full.pdf
⁷ http://www3.wwf.org/docs/WEF_The_New_Plastics_Economy.pdf
⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/11/health/microplastics-ingestion-wwf-study-scn-intl/index.html>
⁹ <http://ccrs.weather.gov.sg/Publications-Second-National-Climate-Change-Study-Science-Reports>

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¹⁰ <https://catholicnews.sg/2020/09/09/creation-at-a-crossroads>
¹¹ <https://stignatius.org.sg/home/ministries/community/st-ignatius-green-movement>
¹² <https://new.divinemercy.sg/reusable-bag>

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— ABOUT —
OUR IMMINENT FUTURE

SAT 3 OCT
10AM

LIVE
CATHOLIC.sg

IN COLLABORATION WITH
Caritas SINGAPORE
God's Love in Action

REV FRIAR DERRICK YAP

JOSEPH TEO

WILSON ANG

MARK TANG

CLIMATE CHANGE. HOW DOES IT AFFECT ME? HOW CAN I MAKE A CHANGE IN THE WORLD? OR IS IT ALL JUST DOOM AND GLOOM?

Speakers:

Friar Derrick Yap, Custos for the Custody of St Anthony (Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei)

Joseph Teo, Singapore's Chief Negotiator for Climate Change, Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment

Wilson Ang, Founding President, Environmental Challenge Organisation (Singapore)

Mark Tang, Caritas Board member and Chair, Caritas Young Adults Committee

For more information, click here.

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10 October 2020 - 31 October 2020

CALLING ALL YOUTH
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10 - 31 OCTOBER 2020

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