

Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, the first papal document devoted entirely to ecology, has generated considerable interest and debate since its publication in June 2015. The encyclical is at once an exploration of the various environmental crises facing the world, a radical critique of current economic models, a call to action, and a reminder of the values which underpin Christian concern for the environment.

In the opening article of this issue of *Working Notes*, Donal Dorr writes that at the heart of the transformation which Pope Francis calls for, in response to the ecological crisis, is the replacement of present-day economics – in which the market and the pursuit of profits dominate – by an 'economic ecology', which takes proper account of ecological considerations. Donal Dorr suggests there are three particularly strong statements in the encyclical. These are: the need to reconsider the assumption of continuing economic growth and even to acknowledge that 'the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world'; the need to move away from reliance on fossil fuels; the need to recognise the global inequity inherent in the environmental crisis, such that the developed world now owes an 'ecological debt' to the developing world, because it is the former which has played the predominant role in generating ecological problems but it is the latter which is forced to bear the greatest impact, though least able to do so. Donal Dorr suggests these statements pose a significant challenge to political leaders, who for the most part have been unwilling to face up to, and to act upon, the issues involved.

Writing about the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015, John Sweeney notes the high expectations for what may be achieved at these negotiations. He says that the preparatory work for the Paris conference has been strengthened by the publication of the 2013 Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which set out the scientific evidence on global warming and emphasised the role of human activity in generating this. He highlights the significance of Pope Francis' encyclical in terms of making

'the moral and ethical case' for international action on climate change. However, John Sweeney also points to the reality that annual climate conferences over the past twenty years have failed to produce a global agreement capable of achieving the reduction in carbon emissions necessary to avoid dangerous climate change. He concludes that the most likely outcome of the Paris conference will be 'an agreement that will be marketed as a political triumph, but fall short of the radical change of hearts and minds necessary to protect the world from 2°C warming over the next four decades'.

An important feature of Pope Francis' encyclical is its call to individuals and civil society organisations to do whatever they can to respond directly to the environmental crisis. In this issue of *Working Notes*, six church communities in Ireland outline the ecology work they have been carrying out for several years. These articles reflect a commitment to taking practical action – for example, minimising the use of resources; reclaiming and replanting garden areas; incorporating environmentally friendly features into building projects – and to including environmental concern in prayer and liturgy. The articles also describe education and awareness-raising aimed not only at encouraging changes in lifestyles, but developing greater consciousness of the political dimensions and global justice aspects of the environmental crisis.

In the final article of this issue, Gerard Doyle suggests that social enterprises – that is, enterprises which have as their core aim the realisation of a social objective, rather than the maximisation of profit – can make an important contribution to addressing environmental issues. Focusing on social enterprises engaged in the production of renewable energy, he argues that the experience of other countries shows how such enterprises have the potential to play a significant role in meeting the energy needs of local communities and in assisting the transition to a low carbon economy. He suggests that the Irish State needs to place greater value on the role of social enterprises in providing renewable energy and that it should prepare an overall strategy for the development of this sector.

Ecological Economics and Politics in the Ecology Encyclical

Donal Dorr

The ecology encyclical, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, issued by Pope Francis in June 2015, is a very wide-ranging document. It is a call for 'an ecological conversion' in the areas of economics and politics – and also in the spheres of spirituality, theology, culture, and education. In this article, I shall focus only on the pope's challenge to governments and to all of us to establish an ecologically oriented economics and politics.¹

Ecological Economics

At the heart of the transformation called for in the encyclical is the replacement of the present-day market-dominated economics by a truly ecological economics – or what Francis calls an 'economic ecology' (§ 141). He is calling for a rejection of the 'deified market' (§ 56). This is a term which he later explains by referring to 'a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals'. (§ 190)

In the same paragraph, he points out that, 'Where profits alone count, there can be no thinking about ... the complexity of ecosystems which may be gravely upset by human intervention.' In that situation, he adds, 'biodiversity is considered at most a deposit of economic resources available for exploitation ...'. (§ 190)

An important account of one crucial aspect of an ecological economics comes in the following passage:

Environmental impact assessment should not come after the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or program. It should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure. It should be linked to a study of working conditions and possible effects on people's physical and mental health, on the local economy and on public safety. Economic returns can thus be forecast more realistically, taking into account potential scenarios and the eventual need for further investment to correct possible undesired effects. (§ 183)

Another fundamental aspect of the converted economics which Francis calls for is that it puts a high value on employment – ensuring that people are not put out of work (§ 129; cf. §51, 127, 189). He says, 'In order to continue providing employment, it is imperative to promote an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity.'

He goes on to point out that most of the peoples of the world are engaged in 'a great variety of small-scale food production systems ... using a modest amount of land and producing less waste, be it in small agricultural parcels, in orchards and gardens, hunting and wild harvesting or local fishing.' This type of economy, he says, provides adequate employment, whereas modern systems which seek economies of scale 'end up forcing smallholders to sell their land or to abandon their traditional crops'. (§ 129)

Further crucially important aspects of a renewed economics are the adoption of more ecologically respectful methods of production and consumption (§ 23, cf. § 5, 138, 191). So too is a great reduction in the amount of waste we generate and the way we deal with it (see § 44, 50, 51, 90, 129, 161). For instance, the encyclical refers to the possibility of 'developing an economy of waste disposal and recycling'. (§ 180)

Three Key Challenges

Francis makes three very strong statements which are probably the most challenging in the encyclical. The first is this passage:

*... given the insatiable and irresponsible growth produced over many decades, we need ... to think of containing growth by setting some reasonable limits and even retracing our steps before it is too late. We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why **the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world**, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.* (§ 193, emphasis added)