



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO A GROUP OF LAY PEOPLE FROM FRANCE  
ENGAGED IN THE FIELD OF ECOLOGY**

*Thursday, 3 September 2020*

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## **IMPROMPTU ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER**

I thank you all, *de votre visite*, and I thank the president of the Episcopate.

I see that each one of you has the translation of what I will say. And part of ecological conversion is not wasting time. For this reason, you have the official text. Now I would prefer to speak spontaneously. I am giving you the original.

I would like to begin with a piece of history. In 2007 the Conference of the Latin American Episcopate took place in Brazil, in Aparecida. I was in the group of drafters of the final document, and proposals arrived regarding Amazonia. I said, "But these Brazilians, how they go on about Amazonia! What has Amazonia got to do with evangelization?". This was me in 2007. Then, in 2015, *Laudato Si'* was published. I had a journey of conversion, of comprehension of the ecological problem. Before then I didn't understand anything!

When I went [to Strasbourg, to the European Union](#), President Hollande sent the Minister for the Environment, Ségolène Royale, to welcome me. We spoke at the airport ... just a little at the beginning, because there was already the programme. But afterwards, at the end, before leaving,

we had to wait a while and we spoke a little more. And Ms Ségolène Royale said this to me, “Is it true that you are writing something on the environment? — *c’était vrai!* — Please, publish it before the Paris meeting!”.

I called the team that was doing it — because you know that this was not written by my own hand, it was a team of scientists, a team of theologians, and all together we carried out this reflection — I called this team and I said, “This must come out before the Paris meeting” — “But why?” — “To apply pressure”. From Aparecida to *Laudato Si’* was, for me, an inner journey.

When I began to think about this Encyclical, I called the scientists — a good group — and I said to them, “Tell me the things that are clear and proven, and not hypotheses — realities”. And they brought these things that you read there today. Then, I called a group of philosophers and theologians [and I said to them]: I would like to carry out a reflection on this. Work on it and engage in dialogue with me”. And they carried out the first work, then I intervened. And, in the end, I did the final redaction. This is its origin.

But I want to emphasize this: from not understanding anything, in Aparecida, in 2007, to the Encyclical. I like to give witness of this. We must work so that everyone may undertake this journey of ecological conversion.

Then there was the [Synod on the Amazon](#). When [I went to Amazonia](#), I met many people there. I went to Puerto Maldonado, in Peruvian Amazonia. I spoke with the people, with many different indigenous cultures. Then I lunched with 14 of their chiefs, all of them with feathers, in traditional costume. They spoke a language of wisdom and of the highest intelligence. Not just intelligence, but wisdom. And then I asked, “And you, what do you do?” — “I am a university professor”. An indigenous person who wore feathers there, but went to university in “civilian” clothing. “And you, Ma’am?” — “I represent the Ministry of Education for this entire region”. And it was like this, one after the other. And then a girl: “I am a student of political science”. And here I saw it was necessary to eliminate the image of indigenous peoples whom we imagine only with arrows. I discovered, side by side with them, the wisdom of the indigenous peoples, and also the wisdom of “good living”, as they call it. “Good living” is not the “dolce vita”, the easy life, no. Good living is living in harmony with creation. And we have lost this wisdom of good living. The original peoples bring us this open door. And some of the elders of the original peoples of Western Canada complain that their grandchildren go into the city and take on modern ways, and forget their roots. And this forgetting of roots is a problem not only for aboriginal peoples, but also for contemporary culture.

And so, finding this wisdom that perhaps we have lost with too much intelligence. We — and this is a sin — are “macrocephalous”: many of our universities teach us ideas, concepts.... We are heirs of liberalism, of the Enlightenment.... And we have lost the harmony of the three languages. The language of the head: thinking; the language of the heart: feeling; the language of the hands:

doing. And it brings this harmony, that each one thinks what he feels and does; that each one feels what he thinks and does; that each one does what he feels and thinks. This is the harmony of wisdom. It is not the disharmony — but I do not say this in a pejorative sense — of specializations. It takes specialists, it takes specialists, as long as they are rooted in human wisdom. Specialists, detached from this root of wisdom, become robots.

The other day someone asked me, talking about artificial intelligence — we have a very, very high level study group on artificial intelligence in the Dicastery of Culture — “But artificial intelligence, will it be able to do everything?” — “The robots of the future will be able to do everything, everything that a person can do. Apart from what?”, I said. “What won’t they be able to do?”. And he reflected a little and said to me “there is just one thing they cannot have: tenderness”. And tenderness is like hope. As Péguy says, they are the humble virtues. They are the virtues that caress, that do not affirm.... And I believe — I would like to underline this — that in our ecological conversion, we must work on this human ecology; work on our tenderness and our capacity to caress.... You, with your children.... The capacity to caress, which is part of living well in harmony.

In addition, there is another thing I would like to say on human ecology. Ecological conversion shows us harmony in general, the correlation of everything: everything is correlated; everything is related. In our human societies, we have lost this sense of human correlation. Yes, there are associations, there are groups — like yours — which meet in order to do something.... But I am referring to that fundamental relationship that creates human harmony. And very often we have lost the sense of our roots, of belonging. The sense of belonging. When a people loses its sense of roots, it loses its very identity. But no! We are modern! We go and think about our grandparents, our great-grandparents.... Things that are old! But there is another reality which is history; there is belonging to a tradition, to a humanity, to a way of living. This is why it is very important today to take care of this, to nurture the roots of our belonging, so that the fruits are good.

Therefore, dialogue between grandparents and grandchildren is necessary today more than ever. This may seem rather peculiar, but if a young person — you are all young here — does not have the sense of a relationship with his or her grandparents, the sense of roots, he or she will not have the capacity to carry forward his or her own history, humanity, and will end up coming to terms with, compromising with, the circumstances. Human harmony does not tolerate compromise. Yes, human politics — which is another art, and is necessary — is done in this way, with compromises so that everyone might go forward. But harmony does not. If you do not have roots the tree will not live. There is an Argentine poet, Francisco Luis Bernárdez — he is already dead, he is one of our great poets — who says: “*Todo lo que el árbol tiene de florido vive de lo que tiene sepultado*”. If human harmony bears fruit it is because it has roots.

And why dialogue with grandparents? I can talk with parents, this is very important! Talking with parents is very important. But grandparents have something more, like good wine. The older the wine, the better it gets. You French people know these things, don’t you? Grandparents have that

wisdom. I have always been struck by that passage in the Book of Joel: “Grandparents will dream. The old will dream and the young will prophesy”. Young people are prophets. The elderly are dreamers. It seems the opposite, but this is how it is! As long as one speaks to the elderly, to grandparents. And this is human ecology.

I am sorry, but we have to finish, because the Pope is also a slave to the clock! But I wanted to offer you this testimony of my history, these things, in order to go forward. And the key word is *harmony*. And the human key word is *tenderness*, the ability to caress. Human structure is one of the many necessary political structures. The human structure is the dialogue between the old and the young.

I thank you for what you are doing. I preferred to send this [the written address] to your archives – you will read it later — and to say, from the heart, what I feel. It seemed more human to me. I wish you the best. *Et priez pour moi. J'en ai besoin. Ce travail n'est pas facile. Et que le Seigneur benisse vous tous.* [And pray for me. I need it. This work is not easy. And may the Lord bless you all.]

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### Prepared address of the Holy Father

*Your Excellency, Ladies, Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to welcome you and I offer you a warm welcome to Rome. I thank Msgr de Moulins Beaufort for taking the initiative for this meeting, following the reflections made by the Conference of the Bishops of France on the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, reflections with the participation of a number of experts committed to the *ecological cause*.

We are part of a single human family, called to live in a common home whose disturbing degradation we see together. The health crisis that humanity is currently experiencing reminds us of our fragility. We understand the extent to which we are linked to one another, within a world whose future we share, and that mistreating it can only have serious consequences, not only environmental but also social and human.

We welcome the fact that an awareness of the urgency of the situation is now being felt everywhere, that the issue of ecology is increasingly permeating the ways of thinking at all levels and is beginning to influence political and economic choices, even if much remains to be done and if we are still witnessing too much slowness and even steps in the wrong direction. For her part, the Catholic Church intends to participate fully in the commitment to the protection of the common home. She has no ready solutions to propose and is not unaware of the difficulties of the technical, economic and political issues at stake, nor of all the efforts that this commitment entails. But she wants to act concretely where this is possible, and above all she wants to form consciences in

order to foster a profound and lasting *ecological conversion*, which alone can respond to the important challenges we face.

With regard to this ecological conversion, I would like to share with you the way in which the convictions of faith offer Christians great motivations for the protection of nature, as well as of the most fragile brothers and sisters, because I am certain that science and faith, which propose different approaches to reality, can develop an intense and fruitful dialogue (cf. Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, 62).

The Bible teaches us that the world was not born of chaos or chance, but by a decision of God who called it and always calls it into existence, out of love. The universe is beautiful and good, and contemplating it allows us to glimpse the infinite beauty and goodness of its Author. Every creature, even the most ephemeral, is the object of the Father's tenderness, which gives it a place in the world. A Christian cannot but respect the work that the Father has entrusted to him, like a garden to cultivate, to protect, to grow in accordance with its potential. And while man has the right to make use of nature for his own ends, he cannot in any way consider himself its owner or despot, but simply the custodian who will have to account for its management. In this garden that God offers us, human beings are called to live in harmony, in justice, peace and fraternity, the Gospel ideal proposed by Jesus (cf. *LS*, 82). And when nature is considered solely as an object of profit and interest - a vision that consolidates the will of the strongest - then harmony is broken and serious inequalities, injustice and suffering occur.

St *John Paul II* said: "Not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given to him, but man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed" (Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, 38). Everything is therefore connected. It is the same indifference, the same selfishness, the same greed, the same pride, the same claim to be the master and despot of the world that leads human beings, on the one hand, to destroy species and plunder natural resources, and on the other, to exploit the misery, to abuse the work of women and children, to overturn the laws of the family cell, and to no longer respect the right to human life from conception to its natural end.

Therefore, "if the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships" (*LS*, 119). So there will be no new relationship with nature without a new human being, and it is by healing the human heart that one can hope to heal the world from its social and environmental unrest.

Dear friends, I reiterate my encouragement of your efforts to protect the environment. While the conditions on the planet may seem catastrophic and certain situations may seem even irreversible, we Christians do not lose hope because we have our eyes turned to Jesus Christ. He

is God, the Creator himself, who came to visit his creation and to dwell among us (cf. [LS](#), 96-100), to heal us, to restore the harmony we have lost, harmony with our brothers and sisters and harmony with nature. “He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward ([LS](#), 245).

I ask God to bless you. And I ask you, please, to pray for me.

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