

DO NOT BE AFRAID

Laudato si' and Integral Ecology

Pedro Walpole

‘DO NOT BE AFRAID’ could well have been Pope Francis’ opening words in this encyclical, as he asks us to go deeper, and not to fear going deeper, into our daily life experience:

Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. (n.225)

Here the power of perseverance is found, through which we can readdress our living needs and find a humbler joy. As we read this encyclical we grow spiritually so as to express our concern, act with environmental justice and seek reconciliation with the pain of the land. This is a living document that finds its mark in the world of political and market decisions through the need for increasing bottom-up solidarity and accountable use of resources. I shall discuss the encyclical, therefore, from the point of view of these five key themes: *do not be afraid, go deeper, persevere, the pain of the land and find the mark.*

Of these five points, the first three are about personal conversion, and the last two are concerned with the gross injustices, over-consumption and loss of equity in today’s society. The pain of the land consists both of human suffering and environmental degradation: these are one and the same call for justice. And the target of the encyclical is the power of global markets over the use and distribution of natural resources, which in many cases equally disregards local needs and global sustainability.

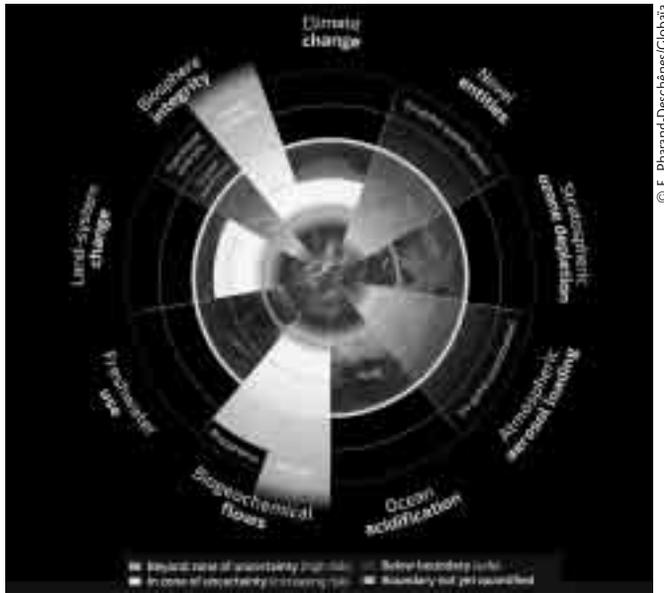
I am writing from the perspective of Asia-Pacific, a part of the world where there are expanding economies of consumption, a growing, if insecure, middle class, increasing numbers of the poor and high levels of environmental exploitation and risk. The risks may vary in relation to other regions, but they are specific and real. Responses to environmental

concerns are mixed owing to political considerations, financial uncertainties, the desire for economic growth, belief in technological development and confused strategic intervention. We too want to get on in the world! Asia Pacific has its share of the world's richest people. Meanwhile there is a limited sense of social cohesion and personal commitment to accountability. There is marginalisation, not only of the poor in general, but of the rural poor and indigenous communities in particular. Corporate, globalised food production results in a loss of local food security and food quality, while waste coexists with hunger. Water is now a commodity, and in many places it is not a right. Biodiversity and ecosystems are seriously threatened.

My intention is not to discuss this context as such, but to focus on the five points that I have drawn out of the encyclical, and on the articulation of a spirituality that can help us all to reach a humble and self-aware sense of what is 'enough' and a solidarity by which to live with the world. None of the world's economic or ecosystem flows are going to become more sustainable and inclusive unless, one by one, we change—finding a simpler lifestyle and transcending our wants and images of success through a spirituality of presence and reconciliation. We need to hear the call anew and respond with reflection and perseverance, in solidarity with others. We need, in this process, an attitude and spirit that share in the joy, frailty and peace of life; but we also need an understanding of science, ethics and governance.

We are challenged to understand the financial and technical worlds if the spiritual dimension is to connect with them and be a source of reconciliation and regeneration. Pope Francis recognises the need for scientific endeavour to take into account 'the data generated by other fields of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics; but this is a difficult habit to acquire today' (n. 110). We in the Church are similarly challenged to understand science and the complexities of the physical world. We have to acquire this habit when we come from a spiritual perspective to reflect on the knowledge gathered together by others and to understand its integral role in human development and healing the Earth. We have to come to terms with scientific language and let 'scientific results touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows' (n. 15). The solutions to the environmental crisis are not simply technical, but challenge humanity at the deepest level to be responsible for all life.

Levels of environmental exploitation and risk can be expressed through the nine 'planetary boundaries', originally defined in 2009 by a



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The Nine Planetary Boundaries

group of 28 scientists with the aim of ‘estimating a safe operating space for humanity with respect to the functioning of the Earth System’.¹ These are deeply interconnected, and their measurement and impact are inseparably both biochemical and social. In Asia Pacific we share in the dangers of crossing these boundaries, but as yet lack any political, economic or civil response. We must engage these limits of our world, avoiding both denial and depression. In hope and sacrifice we must take up the daily challenge of conversion and fidelity to God, the giver of life.

1. *Climate change*, with a focus on fossil fuels, is the dominant global concern and focal point for action. This is a boundary that we have already transgressed, but the full complexities of the consequences cannot be derived from each weather event that causes a national disaster.
2. *Stratospheric ozone depletion*, which became evident in the 1980s, was easy to overcome by banning the production of

¹ Johan Rockström, Will Steffen and others, ‘Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity’, *Ecology and Society*, 14/2 (2009). And see the recent follow-up article: Will Steffen, Katherine Richardson, Johan Rockström and others, ‘Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet’, *Science*, 347 (16 January 2015). See also ‘Planetary Boundaries 2: New and Improved’, available at <http://www.stockholmresilience.org/21/research/research-news/1-15-2015-planetary-boundaries-2.0---new-and-improved.html>, accessed 8 September 2015.

chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). The replacement of these by hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) remains a concern, given that the latter form potent greenhouse gases when released.

3. *Fresh water use*, the over-consumption of water affecting 'biodiversity, food and health security, and ecological functioning', is an environmental boundary that several countries, particularly in Africa, have already crossed.² It is addressed as a development issue when it results in internal displacement of people and migration.
4. *Change in biosphere integrity* refers to species loss and habitat destruction, and is another threshold that has been crossed globally.
5. *Biogeochemical flows* involve human interference in the global nitrogen and phosphorus cycles—by which these elements are taken up by organisms and released back into the environment—partly as a result of intensive agriculture affecting land and water.
6. *Land-system changes*, the 'conversion of forests and other ecosystems to agricultural land', are nearing their global safe threshold.³
7. *Ocean acidification*, linked to many of the above, is another challenge to food security.
8. *Introduction of novel entities* includes the most deadly industrial, radioactive and chemical wastes, nanomaterials and micro-plastics.
9. *Atmospheric aerosol loading*, the pollution of the atmosphere by particulates, is a problem familiar to urban communities; its effects are being felt by industrialising economies in loss of working days and ultimately loss of life.

But what have these planetary boundaries to do with spirituality, we might ask?

These limits are so integral to my own and my neighbour's way of life that spiritual reflection brings me to deep concern as to what I can do, and how to avoid oppressive guilt and uncoordinated action. I encounter

² Rockström, Steffen and others, 'Planetary Boundaries',

³ Rockström, Steffen and others, 'Planetary Boundaries',

these boundaries every day, but not necessarily directly. They may not be the subject of my work, the preoccupation of my home life or the needs I present to God, but they are intrinsic to much of what I touch, eat and buy. I am so connected to the integrity of the world that I am daily pushing and pulling on these planetary boundaries. I may think in a bubble, but I do not actually live in a bubble; I live in the planet's atmosphere. Likewise, the God to whom I pray is not a God of the biblical past but of my lifetime, and the God of Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict, Pope Francis and those who will follow. The God of the living is also the God of how we live.

The God of the living is also the God of how we live

Spirituality enables us to embrace suffering with hope—what justice and reconciliation this truth embodies when lived! We can appreciate it in personal or family trials, and when we spend time with the poor. Knowing the poor as friends rather than just as those in need transforms our experience of life. Engaging with life at the margins is not so difficult when we have such friends to help us understand what it is like. The experiences and needs of poor people's lives are reflected in Pope Francis's teaching. He elevates these concerns to be heard globally, while at the same time they are still understood locally. In the silence of this man's heart, he accompanies those who are suffering. Our local encounter with Pope Francis was uplifting when he visited the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan; though his presence changed nothing about the disaster, he brought deep consolation and changed people's attitudes.⁴ Pope Francis has since spoken of this globally in *Laudato si'*: 'Our goal is ... to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it' (n. 19).

Do Not Be Afraid

Why not be afraid? A whole complex of linked ecological and social problems is getting worse; our politicians are doing as little as possible; and consumerism grows daily as we urbanise. What difference does one voice make in a world of denial? But we need to start from gratitude and with praise towards God, not from a focus on the issues. 'Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated

⁴ See Pope Francis, homily, Tacloban, 17 January 2015, available at <http://www.rappler.com/specials/pope-francis-ph/81106-full-text-pope-francis-homily-tacloban>.

with gladness and praise.’ (n. 12) Then the issues become concerns that are internalised and acted upon. As we read this encyclical we can experience and express hope that we did not have before. Hope is affirmed by linking the present with the future and sharing the story of this beautiful planet. The strong sentiments of healing and solidarity throughout the encyclical sustain us, as we do not feel judged. Without such hope and trust it is hard to mobilise people towards meaningful action.

Deep reconciliation is expressed throughout the document; everyone is included save the arrogant who turn away. This inclusiveness reaches back a thousand years when Pope Francis joins his concerns with those of the Orthodox Church (nn. 7–9); more recently he has committed the Roman Catholic Church to sharing in the Orthodox Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation on 1 September.⁵ Pope Francis talks about pollution, water, energy, biodiversity and climate in terms of the common good. His spirituality and solidarity are empowering: ‘men and women are still capable of intervening positively. For all our limitations, gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us, since we were made for love.’ (n. 58) The common good is alive but it needs vitality—our vitality.

Pope Francis speaks with clarity and has a strong appeal; his is a global voice affirming the good and encouraging basic perseverance, personal reflection and solidarity. There is a depth of love and life here for everyone, and those with faith humbly feel that this is a calling of God: we are drawn to do God’s work in the world. We are transformed in the process and experience greater hope and a little more integrity. As we look for the ‘ethical and spiritual roots’ of the ecological crisis, we find liberation from fear (n. 9). And when we overcome indifference and fear, we are given a new mission; gratitude and praise resound again as we seek to serve.

Go Deeper

Once we find gratitude, slowly we are moved to solidarity and feel empowerment grow in our hearts. Attitudes change out of desire much more easily than out of a moral imperative. Ultimately, deep love of life is open to a deep faith in the source of life. Of ecological conversion, Pope Francis writes:

⁵ See ‘Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Establishment of the “World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation”’, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150806_lettera-giornata-cura-creato.html.

A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity (n.216).⁶

Pope Francis speaks of depth so often, but what is this capacity he asks us to use? He writes about deep concern, deep love, being touched deeply and thinking deeply.⁷ He wants us to go deep to find our causes of concern, the sources of human failure and ‘our deepest riches’.⁸ He asks us to contemplate, to find inner peace, enjoyment, communion, justice, meaning and change, all in *depth*.⁹ Only in this way can we deal with superficiality, ideology, ‘the dominant technocratic paradigm’ and the limits of ‘media and the digital world’.¹⁰

An important way in which we must go deeper is in looking to the future by transforming education for all. In the words of the encyclical:

If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature. (n.47)

The United Nations post-2015 education agenda already offers a framework for this kind of transformation.¹¹ Taking this as a starting point, the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN) on Ecology affirms:

We need an understanding and appreciation of the common good, our common home, to establish the attitude of seeking specific resolutions, to reject systematic and arbitrary exclusions, and to enable and engage conditions that allow the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.¹²

In Asia, young people become more insecure every year about their future and job opportunities, even for those with degrees; and there is

⁶ Quoting *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 261.

⁷ See nn. 7, 200, 15, 47.

⁸ See nn.15, 109, 47.

⁹ See nn.233, 225, 222, 91, 200, 210, 215.

¹⁰ See nn.113, 197, 101, 47.

¹¹ See <http://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/post-2015/education-post-2015-process>.

¹² GIAN-Ecology, ‘Shaping the Future We Want: Education for Sustainability’, available at <http://www.ecojesuit.com/shaping-the-future-we-want-education-for-sustainability/8583/>.

great personal doubt and questioning of identity. They are forced to go deeper and to persevere, as the problems of the older generation have already been passed on to them, with little accountability. When there is a natural or man-made disaster, they bear the burden of asking 'Why'? Why is the human condition so poor, in a society and a world that talk so much about comforts and desires while making no connection to the billions of people who do not have access to these things? Why, they ask, is there such environmental degradation, why do the poor remain poor and how is this inequality actively sustained? This is where we need to find the 'spirituality capable of inspiring us'.

To go deeper is also to get broader, to connect more people together. The young, in particular, want to have different experiences, meet different people, learn more about the world. How can young people who seek sources of inspiration find enough support to act with a sense of the human spirit? What are the social structures, outside school, in which such values and aspirations can form a working environment for them beyond weekend programmes of reflection and short-term exposure? Young people make friends easily. Student volunteers often bridge the gap of inequality between different communities: they are affected by the plight of others and listen to their suffering. This sharing deepens the spirituality of both the local community and the volunteers who help them. Engagement



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Project Ma2wa volunteers at work in the Philippines

with, not just exposure to, other communities strengthens the future confidence, compassion and capacities of the young, creating a foundation for life-changing attitudes and relationship with God.

Persevere

Fear and the sense of failure destroy so many good intentions when they lack an initial commitment, while the habits of *lifestyle* steal *life* and *living* from those who are unsuspecting and unreflective. It is difficult to persevere when we see no concrete change resulting from our efforts and when the contributions of many are easily wiped out, but spiritual commitment and solidarity allow us go further than we thought possible. *Laudato si'* shares hope, and the deep, integrative meaning of how we live that can bring us to a point of liberation and transformation.

Wherever people gather in productive engagement and raise social awareness there are active signs of hope. Communities of practice¹³ are places where we can live out in simple activities a relationship with creation and with others that gives all of us life. They may be stalls selling garden produce or coffee mornings raising funds for charity; they are places where familiar faces can gather and exchange words of care and concern. They require a level of shared reflection and input, and offer us learning and hope. The Satoyama Initiative, for example, originating in Japan, supports locally based and traditional ways in which communities can manage and coexist with an environment shaped, not destroyed, by human activity.¹⁴

The integrity of indigenous traditional communities, often scattered and dispersed, is also a source of hope—although many are gravely embattled today by a concept, and a reality, of ‘development’ that is alien to them. I live with the Pulangiyen community in the mountains of the Philippines. The way they work on the land is very integrated, their knowledge is shared and they sustain each other. They acknowledge the Creator in everything they do; they have said their prayers long before the food reaches the table; they have toiled and suffered; they are humble yet shrewd; and they share a vision of the world that societies elsewhere

¹³ ‘Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor’: Etienne and Beverley Wenger-Trayner, ‘Communities of Practice: A Brief Introduction’, available at <http://wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/07-Brief-introduction-to-communities-of-practice.pdf>, accessed 9 September 2015. See also Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

¹⁴ See <http://satoyama-initiative.org/en/about/>.

have lost. Their sense of welcome and blessing can awaken inner strength for those who make the journey to work with them and learn from them.¹⁵

A growing interest in a broader sense of ‘good living’, or *buen vivir*,¹⁶ is emerging in different forms globally. *Buen vivir* is based on classical ideas about a good quality of life, but with a specific focus on well-being within community. In most approaches, ‘community’ is understood more broadly to include the natural environment. Having a connection with the land and with a likeminded group of people helps us to persevere in good times and in bad. Such communities are where new ideas form, values strengthen and commitment emerges:

While the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instil a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. (n.179)

Even short periods of reflection and conversation in community can help us to form the way we use the greater part of our time and to be part of ‘a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm’ (n.111). Changes in how we live are not a one-off decision, but need the quiet assurance of others that, though different and at times difficult, those changes are genuinely adding to quality of life and social witness.

Those of us who live a privileged life, secure in all our basic needs and able to have a little extra, must live with moderation and with generosity towards others. The most important generosity is generosity with time, which allows us to experience what it is to live at the margins, letting go of our own obsessions and contemplating life with others, serving and striving for their benefit. Such engagement strengthens us for the long-term goal of ‘deep change’.

Laudato si’ addresses the problem of our home, in Greek *oikos*; this is the linguistic root both of *economics* and *ecology*. And when economics meets ecology, all too often it is the poor who lose their homes. When there

¹⁵ See Pedro Walpole, ‘Welcome and Blessing: A Transformative Learning Encounter with Indigenous People’, in *Humankind and Nature: An Endangered System of Interdependence in Today’s Globalising World*, edited by Albert Wong and Artur K. Wardega (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014).

¹⁶ See Juan Francisco Salazar, <http://theconversation.com/buen-vivir-south-americas-rethinking-of-the-future-we-want-44507>, accessed 24 September 2015.

is a crisis, whether economic or environmental, the virus is passed from finance to politics: exploitative economic practices are covered up by politicians who present a systemic problem to the media as a one-off event. Meanwhile it is the poor who die and the land that is laid waste. People at the margins suffer most because they are excluded from the broader economy that allows others more options to preserve themselves and their families. We cannot acknowledge this without confronting the need for structural change. Only when we listen humbly and speak boldly can we face these challenges, be part of the change and be transformed.

The Pain of the Land

The stories of men and women who labour on the land and who have only known one community tell us how things have changed. If you belong to a traditional community, you have a pattern of daily communication, you know the land, the turn of every sod, every pregnancy, birth, marriage and death relating to every person in that community. Every person, young or old, is engaged in common daily activities and a common set of social relations. There is much to learn from this experience of life in understanding the integrity of our action in the world.

Life experience is very different for those of us who live and work in modern cities. Every day we see pictures and hear reports about disasters, wars and terrible human loss, economic and political strife. The media inform us about life beyond our own community, but also disempower us, because we know that the problems are too big for any one of us, too complex and often too far away to tackle. We may share the experience of these problems, even if it is only through traffic and pollution, but the effect of this is often to focus us on our own need for security, our need to keep moving on—whatever that means.

Could I ever take a day off from my busy life and follow my household rubbish to the end of its journey, where would I be led? What would I, my family and my community learn? Likewise it is difficult to find out where waste water goes, but do we even know where the water we use comes from in the first place, where the rain actually falls? And what are things like for the less fortunate? The pilgrimage to find out is an inner experience, in which we meet people along the way and see their lives, asking ourselves questions and reflecting deeply. But does this experience help us change the realities that we find?

If any of the regional talk about human development over the last twenty years here in the Philippines were to have any reality, every rural

community would have a secure water source and tools to maintain water distribution and drainage. With most of the forest land cleared of its natural ecosystem, many springs are drying up or are no longer potable, dengue fever abounds and the lack of sanitation is evident. If we really had development, small streams would not only be giving water but providing a secure energy source, and we would have food security. Instead we are subjected to the global market, which encourages farmers to grow animal feed or 'food extenders' (cheap crops designed to bulk out processed food) and to use high-risk, poisonous agricultural chemicals without protecting themselves. Loans entice rural people to buy consumer goods such as motorbikes and mobile phones—the latter even in places where there is no signal! Corporate agricultural practices are forcing increased migration to the fragile uplands or to urban environments lacking in basic services. There will be no justice for the slow death of our land and the vulnerability of our people until agriculture is viewed in terms of social sustainability, not economic profit.

Today we all need a science of sustainability, 'fostering shared prosperity and reduced poverty while protecting the environment'.¹⁷ Millions—two billion—of the poor struggle through the day, sometimes without hope, and suffer with the rest of creation the destruction integral to human greed and thoughtlessness. They may not even know that other people are the cause of their suffering. How, then, can we know the complexity of this situation in a way that causes us to act? How can we achieve environmental justice and so 'hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the people' (n.49)? As we seek to understand Pope Francis' appeal, it provides an impetus for many different local agendas and approaches across the global scene. Keeping the momentum of this appeal for the inclusion of the poor and the healing of the environment in the global forum is crucial. It will not be easy to move from the 'pain of the land' to a new experience of 'love of the margins'.

Find the Mark

Our present framework for global negotiations does not allow for the shift in mindset that is needed to deal with the immediate local concerns of many communities. The depth of realisation, the sense of connection and the hope that need to be shared for changes in global economic and

¹⁷ See Harvard Kennedy School, 'Sustainability Science Program', available at <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/mrcbg/programs/sustsci>, accessed 10 September 2015.

political systems to take place are insufficient, precisely because those changes have not yet happened. For example, the interests of industrial corporations are displacing tribal communities, weakening their cultural systems for decision-making and exerting pressure on their fragile ecosystems and cultures even before the corporations' economic arguments can be contested. There is a fragmentation of thinking and decision-making, as scientific, economic and social realities do not meet. Political structures are not designed for intervention either at the local level—coping with the particular effects of an environmental disaster—or at the global level—enforcing an effective carbon tax. There is a call for fundamental change.

While *Laudato si'* addresses the demand from within the institutional Church for an integral ecology, spiritual depth and a renewed commitment in faith and solidarity, it also engages global dialogues and processes of change. Given the integrated and inclusive concerns it raises, it is part of a discussion about human development and the global market as well as the Church. What it says is consistent with the aims of United Nations meetings such as the Sustainable Development summit in New York of September 2015, and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21), which will meet in Paris in December 2015, but it is able to go beyond them. The encyclical imparts an energy for change, for people to gather on the streets and



Interfaith demonstration in support of Laudato si' at the Vatican

proclaim their solidarity with humankind and the planet in need. It gives civil society some leverage in the national elections that will take place in many countries during 2016. The document is not going to alter the results of meetings or elections but, as with the dialogue on human trafficking, the Pope's involvement in these issues can lend a better focus and depth.¹⁸

The message is appealing in a secular context because there is so little leadership in the world that commands hope. Pope Francis is defining an attitude and a culture prepared to 'confront the crisis' (n. 53). Water, blood diamonds, energy, refugees—all these issues are connected in this period of deep crisis which requires 'bold decisions' in the face of 'outdated criteria that rule the world' (nn. 59, 189).

Radical shifts in the world's approach to human development are needed, and deeper expressions of the human spirit must be heard. The pragmatic effect of this exaltation of the spirit is to inspire a shift in how we view, and act in, reality. Because it is inspiring and generates an interior impulse, it moves all generations to act, and supports them, not just in a pious but in an apostolic way. We now have a sense of spirituality and solidarity that is capable of inspiring us to nothing less than world conversion!

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¹⁸ See Iacopo Scaramuzzi, <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/cambiamento-climatico-climate-change-cambio-climatico-42500/>.