

On June 18, 2015 Pope Francis revealed to the world his vision regarding the relationship between humanity and creation. In *Laudato Si'*, Francis challenges what he calls the “technocratic paradigm” and its damage to the environment and to the poor. Needless to say, the world media responded to such a heartfelt and, at times, difficult call.

The National Catholic Reporter dove into the science Francis relies upon when he confirms the human effect towards global warming. *NCR* quotes Michael E. Mann, Distinguished Professor of Meteorology at Penn State University, who writes in an email that Francis “accurately reflects what the science has to say.” He continues stating that the consensus of scientists is that Francis “got the science right.”

National Catholic Reporter:

<http://ncronline.org/news/global/francis-encyclical-step-right-direction-those-outside-church-say>

Beyond meteorology and climatology, Francis argues that there exists a technocratic paradigm which blinds us to the negative consequences of unbridled advancements in science, technology, and free market capitalism. *The New York Times* explains, “His most stinging rebuke is a broad economic and political critique of profit-seeking and the undue influence of technology on society. He praised the progress achieved by economic growth and technology, singling out achievements in medicine, science and engineering. But, he added, ‘Our immense technological development has not been accompanied

by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.’”

New York Times:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/19/world/europe/pope-francis-in-sweeping-encyclical-calls-for-swift-action-on-climate-change.html?action=click&contentCollection=Europe®ion=Footer&module=WhatsNext&version=WhatsNext&contentId=WhatsNext&configSection=article&isLoggedIn=false&moduleDetail=undefined&pgtype=Multimedia>

America Magazine continues on this theme writing, “He challenges the mentality of technocratic domination that leads to the destruction of nature and the exploitation of people and the most vulnerable populations, and the technocratic paradigm ‘that tends to dominate politics and economic life’. He notes that ‘humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads’ because never before ‘has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used.’” Francis’s reflection seems particularly challenging to the health care community where we praise the newest imaging technology or high end pharmaceutical, where the hospital with the most expensive surgical or diagnostic equipment becomes the jewel in a network’s crown. His highlight of this paradigm drives the rest of the encyclical’s call for a radical change in society. *America Magazine*:

<http://americamagazine.org/content/dispa>

[tches/pope-calls-bold-cultural-revolution-save-our-common-home](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-calls-bold-cultural-revolution-save-our-common-home)

How does this relate to the environment and the person? The pope frames his response to the needs of creation through the idea of integral ecology. Jim Yardley and Laurie Goodstein take up this idea for *The New York Times*, “‘integral ecology,’ links care for the environment with a notion already well developed in Catholic teaching — that economic development, to be morally good and just, must take into account the need of human beings for things such as freedom, education and meaningful work. ‘The basic idea is, in order to love God, you have to love your fellow human beings, and you have to love and care for the rest of creation,’ said Vincent Miller, who holds a chair in Catholic theology and culture at the University of Dayton, a Catholic college in Ohio. ‘It gives Francis a very traditional basis to argue for the inclusion of environmental concern at the center of Christian faith.’”

The connection between ecology and human ecology goes further to encompass the moral necessity to protect the least among us. The *Catholic News Agency* quotes a section of the encyclical which will appease the more conservative wing of the church. Francis writes, “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.” *Catholic News Agency*:

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-blasts-abortion-population-control-in-new-encyclical-10491/> The connection between the treatment of the poor and the management of the environment rings clear for Crux writer, Thomas D. Williams, in his article “For Pope Francis, ‘Green’ Equals Pro-Life.” <http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2015/06/18/for-pope-francis-green-equals-pro-life/>

Meanwhile, some Catholic bloggers have noticed areas in need of expansion and unanswered questions. On the fairly new, but extremely popular blog *Daily Theology*, Assistant Professor Kevin Ahern of Manhattan College highlights three things missing from this text. He posts, “First, there is no mention of social or structural sin. This surprised me given his analysis of the root causes. Second, there is little mentioned about the effect of war on the environment and the poor. There are rumors that the next encyclical will be on disarmament, but this is a big hole in the text. Finally, it lacks a strong call to action on the part of parishes, schools and other church institutions. I can see a pastor, university president or hospital administrator looking at this and saying “so what?”. The challenge is to find a way to articulate, with some moral weight, how the church and church institutions can and should live up to our vocation to be ‘instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness.’ (53)” *Daily Theology*:

<http://dailytheology.org/2015/06/18/the-catholic-response-to-the-anthropocene-a-brief-overview-and-outline-of-laudato-si/>

Finally, we might wonder what impact the pope's words can and should have on Catholic health care. Adam Rubenfire poses this question for *Modern Healthcare* in his post titled, "Catholic Healthcare Providers Echo Pope Francis on Sustainability Efforts." Rubenfire quotes Sister Carol Keehan, CEO of Catholic Health Association. Sister Keehan "praises the pope's initiative, noting that Catholic health ministries have learned firsthand the harmful effects climate change can have on public health." Rubenfire quotes Sister Keehan as saying, "I think that this is an incredible gift, not only to the Catholics of the world but to all the people of the world. There is no question that there are horrible consequences for the way we're treating the planet, and the Holy Father points these out."

The article by Dan DiLeo in this issue, along with the reflections in "From the Field," further explore implications of Francis' *Laudato Si'* for Catholic health care and provide examples of what some organizations are currently doing. But there is much more to be done to mine the richness of the encyclical and to embrace the challenges it poses. Catholic health care organizations would do well to devote time over the next six to twelve months to study *Laudato Si'* and to explore how its insights can be translated into action.

Nathaniel Hibner
 Graduate Student
 Albert Gnaegi Center for Health Care
 Ethics
 Saint Louis University
nhibner@chausa.org