

## THE SHADOW OF GALILEO: A COMMENTARY ON LAUDATO SI'

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The following text is the English version of Chapter XIII of the book *Lado Seas, mi Señor*, BAC 2015 (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos), a multiple-author commentary on Pope Francis encyclical *Laudato Si'* (former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Card. Müller, writes the first chapter). It has been translated by the author from the original Spanish in the book (which can be bought at [bac-editorial.es](http://bac-editorial.es) ISBN-13: 978-8422018582).

### 1. Discerning good from evil: conservatism versus radical environmentalism.

Was Creation made for Man or was Man made for Creation? How must Man — created in the image of God, saved by his only Son, and called to eternal life— relate to other creatures or to inert matters who do not share such dignity? Does Man have the right to influence Nature, to leave his imprint, to transform it? Or must he respect certain limits? What does it mean to “subdue” the Earth? What balance must there be between economic development and the preservation of Nature? Is Nature fragile or is it rather resistant? Is it true that Man’s actions are affecting the planet’s climate in a decisive manner? Is it possible that an omniscient God created a planet incompatible with industrialization?

Throughout its millenary existence, the Church has had to interpret and perceive the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel, and resist being seduced by the world while maintaining the serene pace of its eternal mission. Each era has its own challenges. The world is presently going through a spiritual crisis, a loss of direction. The opinion of majorities (conveniently shaped by noisy and powerful minorities) enjoys greater legitimacy than the truth and relativism is gaining ground. In countries that in theory are free, citizens are slaves to the invisible tyranny of *pensée unique* and political correctness, spread by media who are often conduits of propaganda and banal entertainment rather than transmitters of reliable and contrasted information.

In the middle of this maelstrom, the Church stands as a witness for truth, intent on avoiding the temptation of what Colombian Catholic thinker, Nicolás Gómez-Dávila, called “electoral Catholicism”<sup>1</sup>, while facing specific challenges, such as the gradual weakening of the family, the scandal of abortion or the bloody persecution of Christians all over the world (particularly in the name of Islam). This hostile atmosphere towards Christianity coexists with an apparently ever growing environmental consciousness which was welcome and necessary in its origins but is nowadays also contaminated by the secularization of the Western world. This has increasingly led to the oblivion of the superior dignity of human beings in relation to other creatures. For instance, the fact that animals today receive more protection than an unborn child or the grotesque Universal Declaration of Animal Rights by Unesco are good examples of this. In this historical context, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* deals with ecology, environment —in a broad sense— and, of course, Man.

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<sup>1</sup> NICOLÁS GÓMEZ-DÁVILA, *Escolios a un texto implícito*, Atalanta, 2009.

In matters concerning environmentalism, two very different schools of thought are often confused among each other. The first school of thought, perfectly compatible with Christian principles, deals with the preservation of Nature for generations to come, acknowledging the obligations that we have as “responsible and diligent administrators” (116) of the gift that God provided for us. This commonsensical nature conservancy movement has no doubt that “man is, as a person, the center of Creation (...), called to ‘subdue’ the earth (Gen. 1:28)<sup>2</sup> with the insight of his intelligence and with the activity of his hands”<sup>3</sup>. Since “Man is the only creature on earth that God willed for itself”<sup>4</sup>, in that “infinite” (65) and “unique dignity” (69) he has the right to use the goods of Creation but, at the same time is obliged to manage them in a responsible manner. Common sense conservationism seeks to limit —as much as possible— pollution and excessive exploitation of natural resources, both of which are often the result of selfish, abusive and short-term behaviors that are just another reflection of the fallen nature of Man. This conservancy movement also worries about preserving for the future generations, yet unborn, the beauty of Nature, whose superabundance and wonderful and incomprehensible complexity leads us so easily to God, but does so in order to protect the rights of their unborn brothers and not the supposed rights of a “Mother Earth”. Therefore, we must not forget that the contemplation of a forest as something beautiful must coexist (as it has done throughout history) with its natural role within Creation as a source of wood to keep us warm or to build us a shelter as protection against the elements and the predators.

“It’s just to rejoice” (102) in the transformation of Nature that Man has carried out from the beginning of time, making use of the gifts of God, which have allowed him to “create incredible things to improve the quality of life” (103). In large parts of the world, Man is no longer a slave of the seasons, as he once was when he was nomad, has overcome numerous diseases and has procured shelter, food and running water for a growing population, indeed populating the Earth following the divine mandate. Such material progress of Humanity has resulted in a tendency in developed countries to forget how hard life was in the untamed Nature and to no longer value the difficult conquest that this fight against natural forces meant. In developing countries, on the contrary, people are still struggling against those harsh and merciless forces. Perhaps this is why environmentalism is, above all, a phenomenon of the developed world. Curiously, in spite of this, “deep ecology enthusiasts prefer the anthropological model of the savage who lives in intimate contact with Nature”<sup>5</sup>, and it’s frequently considered that the paradigm of the ecological way of life is that of the aboriginal peoples (an opinion defended, of course, from the comfort of a European or a North American city). However, a quick look at UN reports on indigenous peoples’ lives shows a somber reality that few Westerners would envy: life expectancy is almost 20 years less than in the Western world, and there is a “disproportionately high” ratio of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, cardiovascular diseases, malaria and tuberculosis. In a certain sense, the History of Humanity has been a flight from these conditions, so nostalgia for a more primitive life dependent on Nature is unfounded. As *Laudato Si*” points out, it’s not possible to “go back to the time of the cavemen” (114).

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<sup>2</sup> Bible quotes: *The New American Bible (Revised Edition) 2012, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)*

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Encuentro con los trabajadores y empresarios in Barcelona, 7 November 1982* (translated by the author)

<sup>4</sup> PAUL VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (24), 7 December 1965.

<sup>5</sup> MARIANO FAZIO, *Historia de las ideas contemporáneas*, Rialp, 2012, p. 373. Translated by the autor,

The second school of thought of environmentalism has nothing to do with the above-mentioned commonsensical conservancy movement, although it astutely takes advantage of its attractiveness. With his usual precision, then Cardinal Ratzinger made a distinction between an environmentalism that can be practiced “as a Christian, based on faith in a Creation that sets limits to the will of Man [...] and an anti-Christian environmentalism based on the divinity of the cosmos”<sup>6</sup>. Let us call it radical environmentalism, a dangerous ideology that seems to be taking control of the world’s environmentalist movement and that has very different sources. First of all, it is Malthusian and seeks to reduce the population of the planet literally by any means, particularly in Third World countries, and particularly in races that are different from its own (mostly white). Authors who speak for the so-called deep ecology go to the length of defending that in order to attain “prosperity for non-human life a decrease in human population is necessary” and, therefore, “sporadic mass mortality would be a good thing”<sup>7</sup>. Second, radical environmentalism is pagan, and believes man is a virus of that old goddess called Mother Earth that should be mostly eradicated in order to protect her. This paganism places man on a lower plane than other creatures. But, as Benedict XVI already warned, “...it should also be stressed that it is contrary to authentic development to view nature as something more important than the human person. This position leads to attitudes of neo-paganism or a new pantheism”<sup>8</sup>. Conscious of this cultural trend—a true sign of the times—, it would be convenient to avoid a personification of the Earth (avoiding calling it “Mother”) which, in another period and with a different lookout, might have been adequate. Third, this environmentalism is anti-capitalist and gathers the followers of those ideologies orphaned after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the human, social, moral and economic disaster that was the socialist tyranny of the 20th century became evident (the “errors” that would be spread by Russia, as the Virgin Mary revealed in Fatima<sup>9</sup>). Fourth, this movement feeds the people massive lies through its intensive use of propaganda in the form of catastrophic predictions; in this sense, it’s not only the sum of many “convenient lies”, but it also takes the form of an apocalyptic sect. And fifth, this environmentalism is just another economic industry that, through its prophets of doom, sells fear and which, as we shall see, manages hundreds of billions dollars a year.

Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace (he left the organization after being CEO and President), sums up this environmentalism as “pagan beliefs and junk science”<sup>10</sup>, and that’s an understatement, because this environmentalism kills. Literally. In 1962, a biologist named Rachel Carson, alarmed by a supposed reduction of the bird population in certain areas of the United States, wrote a book titled *Silent Spring*. Without any serious scientific study to back it, she argued that the cause of this decrease was the use of pesticides, and more specifically DDT, to which she frivolously attributed carcinogenic effects in humans (it has later been revealed that these effects are non-existent). The use of DDT as a powerful contact insecticide had been discovered by the Swiss scientist Paul H. Müller in 1940, a discovery which would earn him the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1948. In his acceptance speech Dr. Müller explained he had been looking for a solution that would be highly toxic to insects but not to mammals (including man), not irritant due to its odor, of persistent and stable action, and cheap. DDT met all these

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in PETER SEEWALD, *La Sal de la Tierra*, Palabra, 1997, p. 143. [*The Salt of the Earth*, Ignatius Press, 1997]. Translated by the author.

<sup>7</sup> MARIANO FAZIO, *Historia de las ideas op. Cit.*

<sup>8</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in Veritae* (48).

<sup>9</sup> *Fatima’s message, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in GREGORY E., PENCE, *Designer Food*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, p. 30.

requirements. Using it to eradicate typhus and especially malaria all over the world (beginning in Europe and in the United States) it had been enormously successful. Thanks to DDT, the number of malaria cases in India dropped from 75 million in 1951 to 50,000 ten years later; in Sri Lanka, there were 2.8 million cases of malaria in 1948 and only 17 in 1963. The National Academy of Sciences of the United States rightly said that DDT “had prevented 500 million deaths from malaria”. In other words, DDT had become an impressive scientific advance, a savior of lives, comparable, to some extent, to penicillin.

Rachel Carson’s book, however, omitted any information regarding the millions of lives that had been saved by DDT and used its false carcinogenic effect<sup>11</sup> as a powerful instrument of alarmism. The book became a best-seller, and hysteria lit up like a flame among the American public who felt completely oblivious to a mortal disease that killed in Third-world countries thousands of miles away, but who was very sensitive indeed to the nearby problem of cancer. In 1972, strong populist pressure resulted in the prohibition to use DDT not only in the United States, but in any Third World country who wished to receive aid from the United States (or the UN). Cynically, the law that banned its use included only one exception: if a national health emergency occurred in the US (e.g., a malaria outbreak), the very law that prevented the use of DDT to combat malaria in distant countries allowed it to be used if the disease affected US nationals in their own country. After decades, and in the face of strong evidence that proves its safety, in 2006 the World Health Organization was forced to recommend again the use of DDT to combat malaria, but prohibition continued to be in place and its use was still impeded in affected populations. In June 2007, the then Director-General of Uganda’s Health System made a desperate appeal in an article titled “Give us DDT”<sup>12</sup>. The piece recalled that malaria had been eradicated from Europe and the United States thanks to the use of DDT and that when it had been used in Uganda (before the ban) the impact of the disease had been reduced by 98%. It also argued that “after decades of extensive scientific study, it’s been proven that DDT is not only safe for humans and the environment, but it is also the most effective antimalarial agent ever invented”. Arguing that, indeed, DDT is the cheapest antimalarial insecticide with the longest duration, persistence and known effectiveness, the article called to remove any possible impediment to use it, and openly accused “Western environmentalists” of discouraging G8 governments to freely allow DDT again, thus undermining the Ugandan government’s desperate efforts to allow its use again.

Since its ban, malaria has caused perhaps between 30 and 50 million perfectly preventable deaths, particularly among children in Third World countries, and still kills about 600,000 people every year today<sup>13</sup>, one person per minute (usually a poor, black child). If malaria had affected white children in Western countries, would DDT have been banned? The case of DDT<sup>14</sup> and malaria is possibly one of the biggest moral scandals of our time and we owe it all to the environmentalist ideology, which continues to revere Rachel Carson and has recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of her book, the icon that started the environmental movement in the world. We must understand that radical environmentalism is not opposed to DDT because of its supposed toxicity. The reason is different. Alexander King, one of the

<sup>11</sup> *Facts versus Fears: “DDT, 1962”*, (extract from a report prepared for the American Council on Science and Health by Adam J. Lieberman and Simona C. Kwon), 3 June 1998.

[https://www.noao.edu/safety/fun\\_and\\_interesting\\_stuff/facts\\_vs\\_fears\\_acsh.pdf](https://www.noao.edu/safety/fun_and_interesting_stuff/facts_vs_fears_acsh.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> SAM ZARAMBA, “Give us DDT”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 June 2007.

<sup>13</sup> «10 Facts on Malaria» World Health Organization, April 2015

<sup>14</sup> To go deeper into the subject, Dr.J. GORDON EDWARDS, «*The Lies of Rachel Carson*» 21th Century Science and Technology Magazine, Summer 1992

founders of the Club of Rome, claimed that his opposition to DDT was rooted in the fact that it contributed to the "population problem" by saving so many lives: "my own doubts came when DDT was introduced for civilian use. In Guyana, within two years it had almost eliminated malaria, but at the same time the birth rate had doubled. So my chief quarrel with DDT in hindsight is that it has greatly added to the population problem".<sup>15</sup> Yes, this environmentalism could really fit in perfectly with the "culture of death" that John Paul II often denounced.

The environmentalists' fight to reduce the world population, which is nothing less than a war against man, accelerated when in 1968 another bestseller titled *The Population Bomb*, written by Paul Elhrich, made the usual wild forecasts that never come true: "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death". It also predicted that the US population would be only 65 million people and that the UK would basically disappear ("by the year 2000 the United Kingdom will be simply a small group of impoverished islands, inhabited by some 70 million hungry people").<sup>16</sup>

Some time later, other environmentalist authors found the way to define quite succinctly in a simple equation the sources of what they considered as the always negative impact of man on the environment. This equation is essential to understand the current radical environmentalist movement. They called it IPAT, that is: I (impact) = P (population) x A (affluence) x T (technology). We could synthesize it a bit further with the following formula:

$$I (\text{environmental impact}) = P (\text{population}) \times C (\text{capitalism})$$

Please do not forget this: to these environmentalists, the goal is to reduce the world population and to destroy capitalism, that is, the free market, a synonym of wealth creation (affluence) and technological progress. In turn, in their goal of reducing the world's population, this radical environmentalism enthusiastically supports abortion and other "population control" policies, to the extreme of suggesting mandatory abortions and extensive sterilization programs<sup>17</sup> and, also, as we have just seen, promoting the sabotage of life-saving substances such as the DDT. Laudato Si' rightly denounces that "some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate" and that, "at times, developing countries face forms of international pressure which make economic assistance contingent on certain policies of 'reproductive health'" (n.50). The encyclical also points out that "some ecological movements defend the integrity of the environment [but] sometimes fail to apply those same principles to human life" (n. 136), and ends making it clear that "concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion" (n.120). Bearing in mind the evolution and track record of the environmentalist movement and taking into account that the goal of reducing the human population is indeed inherent to the environmentalism of today, we should stay away from praising environmentalism in a naïve and general way without specifying quite carefully what we are referring to. An aloof attitude is warranted.

We have also seen that alarmism is another essential feature of this movement, who lives off spreading fears to an imminent threat. The systematic failure of the forecasts of these prophets of doom has never mattered to them as they have continued inventing their apocalyptic scenarios with such straight face that it is easy to take for granted that they might

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by ROBERT ZUBRIN, «The Truth about DDT and Silent Spring», *The New Atlantis*, 27 sept. 2012

<sup>16</sup> ALEX NEWMAN, «Embarrassing Predictions Haunt the Global Warming Industry» *The New American*, 12/8/14.

<sup>17</sup> PAUL R. EHRlich, ANNE H. EHRlich, JOHN HOLDREN, *Ecoscience: Population, Resources, Environment*, 1971. Holdren was President Obama's Chief Science Advisor.

have some scientific basis instead of belonging to the realm of propaganda, where they reside. In this context, sadly but maybe understandably, Laudato Si', with the best of intentions, has not been able to resist the force of such propaganda when it mentions the possibility of an "ecological catastrophe under the effective explosion of industrial civilization" (n.4), when it stresses that "if present trends continue<sup>18</sup>, this century may well witness (...) an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us" (n. 24) or that "doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain" (n. 161).

One of the premises of this environmentalism is that it always goes hand in hand with the belief that nature is fragile, and image conveniently amplified by the media on a regular basis with their sensationalist coverage of oil spills or deforestation activities. However, is nature really that fragile or is it rather resistant? Peter Kareiva, Chief Scientist of Nature Conservancy (one of the oldest and most important environmentalist organizations in the world, founded in 1951) wrote a few years ago a short essay where he acknowledged that the data did not support the concept of a fragile Nature. "We love the horror story", said Kareiva in an interview regarding his essay<sup>19</sup>, adding: "We just love it. The environmental movement has loved it. That, I think, is [a] strategy failure. And it's actually not supported by science." In his essay, Kareiva wrote some paragraphs that can be considered revolutionary for the environmentalist movement:

"Conservationists will have to jettison their idealized notions of nature, parks, and wilderness -- ideas that have never been supported by good conservation science -- and forge a more optimistic, human-friendly vision (...).The trouble for conservation is that the data simply do not support the idea of a fragile nature at risk of collapse. A thorough review of the scientific literature identified 240 studies of ecosystems following major disturbances such as deforestation, mining, oil spills, and other types of pollution. The abundance of plant and animal species as well as other measures of ecosystem function recovered, at least partially, in 173 (72 percent) of these studies. Nature is so resilient that it can recover rapidly from even the most powerful human disturbances. Around the Chernobyl nuclear facility, which melted down in 1986, wildlife is thriving, despite the high levels of radiation. In the Bikini Atoll, the site of multiple nuclear bomb tests, including the 1954 hydrogen bomb test that boiled the water in the area, the number of coral species has actually increased relative to before the explosions. More recently, the massive 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was degraded and consumed by bacteria at a remarkably fast rate. Protecting biodiversity for its own sake has not worked. Ecologists now know that the disappearance of one species does not necessarily lead to the extinction of any others, much less all others in the same ecosystem. In many circumstances, the demise of formerly abundant species can be inconsequential to ecosystem function". Kareiva concluded: "Protecting nature that is dynamic and resilient (...) and that sustains human communities -- these are the ways forward now. This move requires conservation to embrace a priority that has been anathema to us for more than a hundred years: economic development for all."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> «If present trends continue» is a frequent expression of ecological scaremongering, which omits that ad infinitum projections do not usually occur in Nature, always cyclical (there is no point in extrapolating, for example, the growth of young children and tides).

<sup>19</sup> «*Environmentalist: Nature is resilient, not fragile*», [resourcefulearth.org](http://resourcefulearth.org), 23 April 2012

<sup>20</sup> PETER KAREIVA, «*Conservation of the Anthropocene*», The Breakthrough Institute, Winter 2012.

Physics Nobel Prize winner Robert Laughlin does not hesitate to define our planet as a “survivor”, adding that “common sense tells us that damaging a thing this old is somewhat easier to imagine than it is to accomplish—like invading Russia”<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, the glaciations and impacts of past asteroids, tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, storms and, in general, all imposing natural phenomena speak loudly of the strength and resilience of our planet and, in a sense, of the smallness of man.

The image of a fragile and defenseless planet sometimes provokes an excess of zeal in people of good will who seek in good faith to protect the weak. Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church has played an important role in *Laudato Si’*. As he writes in one of his works, throughout his patriarchy “the protection of the natural environment has long been on the top of our pastoral concern”<sup>22</sup>. In the prologue, the Metropolitan of Pergamon writes that “the Church will have to revise radically her concept of sin, which traditionally has been limited to the social and anthropological level, and start speaking of sin against nature as a matter of primary religious significance. In addition to that, the Church must introduce environmental teaching into her preaching”. Bartholomew, in this same book, affirms that “the thoughtless and abusive treatment of even the smallest material and living creation of God must be considered a mortal sin. An insult toward the natural creation is seen as – and in fact actually is – an unforgivable insult to the uncreated God”, adding that “every harm that is wrought upon creation, even out of negligence, constitutes not simply an evil, but a grave sin”, so “it is not too farfetched to speak of environmental damage as being a contemporary heresy or natural terrorism.”<sup>23</sup>

With all due respect, the question arises as to whether the Patriarch has not taken his concern for Nature too far.

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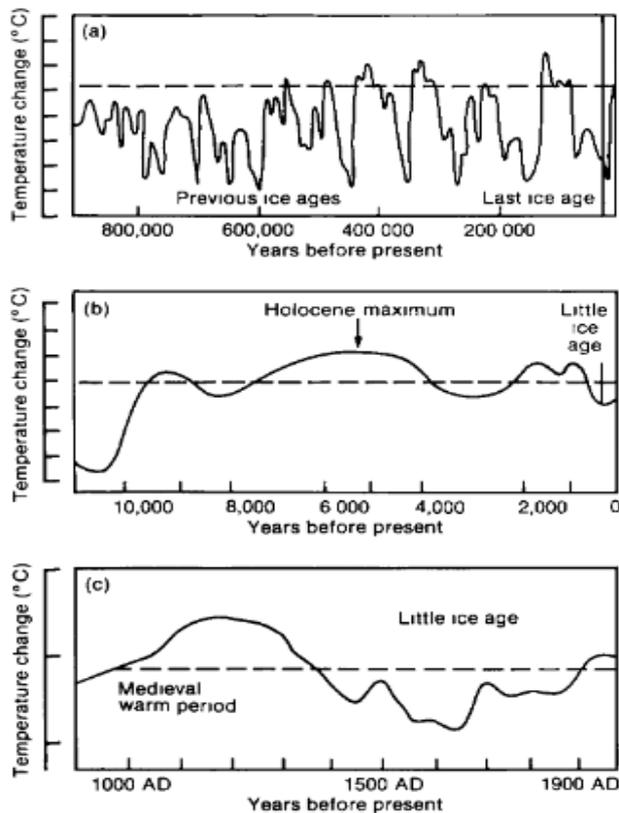
<sup>21</sup> ROBERT B. LAUGHLIN, «*What the Earth knows*», *The American Scholar*, 1 June 2010.

<sup>22</sup> PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I, *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer*

<sup>23</sup> PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW op. cit.

## 2. A few scientific objections to Laudato Si'

Laudato Si' makes statements of a scientific nature, sometimes in a very specific way, which produces surprise and should be treated with caution. The encyclical speaks first of "a very solid scientific consensus" that indicates that we are facing a "disturbing" global warming (23), in the line defended by the IPCC of the UN (Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change), of which we will speak in depth later. Logically, science is not a search for consensus, but a search for truth, and truth is not accredited by majorities or consensus, concepts that are more typical of politics. Moreover, it is far from clear that such a consensus exists. As climate change expert Tom Tripp explains, "despite what you've heard in the media, there's nothing like a scientific consensus on whether [climate change] is a problem"<sup>24</sup>. We will elaborate on this later. Regarding global warming, the following table<sup>25</sup> shows the long history of the Earth's estimated temperature over the last million years, the last 10,000 and the last 1,000 (until 1990):



As the graphs above show, the planet's temperature has undergone continuous variations caused by natural factors (obviously not man-made) throughout its millions of years of history, including periods of glaciation (Ice Ages). In the last 1,000 years, the Earth is estimated to have been just as hot as it is today between the 10th and 14th centuries (the so-called Medieval Warming Period); later the Earth suffered the Little Ice Age (approx. from the 15th century until the middle of the 19th century, when the river Thames in London usually froze); since then, the Earth has warmed up again. More recently, it should be noted that from

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by PETER SULLIVAN, *Punch-Drunk on CO<sub>2</sub>*, p 323

<sup>25</sup> IPCC *Climate Change Assessment Report 1990, Chapter 7, p 202*

approximately 1940 to 1975 temperatures broke this trend and fell (the ecological scaremongering of the time, believe it or not, predicted a Global Cooling in books, articles and media headlines), while from 1975 to the end of the twentieth century they increased again (origin of the current Global Warming scaremongering). In the last 17 years warming has stopped (a fact that has not received much publicity, to put it mildly). In any case, using the term "disturbing" with respect to current temperatures, as if they had no precedent, is very debatable.

The encyclical also states that "in recent decades, this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level" (23). However, one of the world's foremost experts on the subject, geologist Dr. Nils-Axel Mörner, once head of the Department of Paleogeophysics at Stockholm University and former chairman of the INQUA Commission on Sea Level and Coastal Evolution, and who has been studying sea levels for 40 years, said in an interview in 2007 that although sea levels had risen by 1 mm per year (10 cm per century) from 1850 to 1930-40, since then observations on the ground indicated that there had been no significant increase in sea levels, confirmed by the most recent raw satellite data. "If you go around the world, you don't find any rise[in sea level], but they[the IPCC] need to show an increase, because without an increase there is no death threat"<sup>26</sup>. Dr. Mörner's surprise was enormous when the IPCC established a "correction factor" in the sea level data received by the satellites to show an upward trend, a full-fledged "falsification of the data set", according to him. This expert was hired as head of the Maldives Project, which sought to establish that the Indian Ocean's archipelago was slowly sinking into the sea (due to global warming). On his trips to the islands, Dr. Mörner found no evidence of this, but the Maldives government banned publicity of the results because "they believed they would lose money" in the form of UN funds they expected to receive because they were victims of global warming. The IPCC mentions different mean sea level data in different reports, but agrees that "very likely" over the last 100 years sea level would have risen by between 1 and 2mm per year. If we use the lower range of this growth rate, since Columbus discovered America the sea level would have risen half a meter, 50 centimeters, just over two hand spans, in 500 years. Pretending that this is a global emergency seems exaggerated.

Laudato Si' also denounces the "loss of forests and woodland" (32). Since wood has been a necessary natural resource for human beings since ancient times, the felling of forests (and also their reforestation) is a well-known fact. However, FAO tables show that in the last 20 years the total area of forests in the world has increased very slightly due to reforestation and their natural growth<sup>27</sup>; some experts say that the world's forest area has hardly changed since the end of the Second World War<sup>28</sup>. It is true that tropical forests (a small part of the forest cover) have been reduced, but according to FAO satellite data the rate of decline is only 0.46% per year, without forgetting that a significant part of the logging is carried out for the very legitimate purpose of providing land for agriculture. In the USA (one of the five countries with the largest forest cover in the world) there are more trees today than there were a century ago, and in Brazil deforestation has been reduced by 70% in the last ten years, an

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<sup>26</sup> «Claim that Sea Level is rising is a total fraud», Interview with Dr. Nils-Axel Mörner, EIR Economics 33, 22 June 2007

<sup>27</sup> *Global Forest Resources Assessment 2005*(p.4) and *2010* (p.12), *Food and Agriculture Organization*. The text contradicts the tables and speaks of an annual loss of 0.1% since 2000.

<sup>28</sup> BJORN LOMBORG, «*The Skeptical Environmentalist*»(p.117), Cambridge University Press, 23<sup>rd</sup> ed.2014

extraordinary success given that a third of the world's rainforest is in the Amazon. In fact, 80% of the original or primitive Amazon rainforest is still standing, a surprisingly high figure<sup>29</sup>. Again, there is little information inviting alarm or "urgent" action (Laudato Si' uses the word "urgent" fifteen times). The encyclical also mentions that "most of the paper we produce is thrown away and not recycled". True: it is cheaper to produce new paper than to recycle, and the process is likely to consume less energy. However, the world's demand for paper can be permanently satisfied by the timber production of just 5 percent of the current forest cover"<sup>30</sup>.

The encyclical also mentions that "each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species" (33). Firstly, the extinction of species is a natural phenomenon, since the planet is not in balance but in constant dynamic change and adaptation. Of course, humans, who belong to nature and as the maximum predator affect it, have contributed to increasing the rate of extinction through habitat destruction or hunting. Secondly, the figure of several thousand 'every year' does not seem to be correct either. The IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), an organization founded in 1948 and which publishes the official list of endangered species, estimates that "in the last 500 years human activity has forced the extinction of 869 species"<sup>31</sup> (of the two million species defined today). The actual figure is likely to be even lower.<sup>32</sup> The Brazilian Zoological Society analyzed 291 animal species that existed before the massive felling of Brazil's Atlantic tropical forest (not to be confused with the Amazon), which in the 19th century was cut down by 88%, and could not find any that could be declared extinct.

Also, Laudato Si' explains that "the way natural ecosystems work is exemplary: plants synthesize nutrients which feed herbivores; these in turn become food for carnivores, which produce significant quantities of organic waste which give rise to new generations of plants" (22). However, this chain is incomplete: how do plants synthesize their nutrients if not using CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) in the natural process of photosynthesis? In fact, farmers around the globe artificially increase the CO<sub>2</sub> content in their greenhouses so that plants grow faster; also, we know thanks to NASA satellites that the planet is getting significantly greener thanks to the increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Despite this, climate change propaganda has grotesquely stigmatized such an essential food for plants. In this sense, it is a pity that the encyclical repeatedly seems to call one of the sources of life on the planet a "pollutant" (26, 169-171), calling for an "urgent" and "enforceable" reduction in its emission. CO<sub>2</sub>... a pollutant? That is, in the words of one scientist, "an abuse of language, an abuse of logic and an abuse of science"<sup>33</sup>. The CO<sub>2</sub> that we expel every time we breathe is a hundred times more concentrated than the one we find in the atmosphere at current levels (4% compared to 0.04%): are we human beings "pollutants" just for the sake of living? Environmentalists would not hesitate to respond in the affirmative.

Laudato Si' also mentions in point 23 a list of greenhouse gases, beginning, of course, with carbon dioxide. First of all, it is important to stress that if there were no greenhouse effect the temperature of the planet would be 18°C below zero, instead of +15°C. Secondly, the list is again faithful to the environmentalists' propaganda guidelines of omitting the most

<sup>29</sup> «Deforestation Success Stories», *Union of Concerned Scientists*, June 2014

<sup>30</sup> BJORN LOMBORG, op. cit. (p.117)

<sup>31</sup> «Species Extinction: The Facts», *cmsdata.iucn.org*, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> S. FRED SINGER Y DENNIS T. AVERY, *Unstoppable Global warming* (p.167), *Rowman& Littlefield* 2007.

<sup>33</sup> ROBERT M. CARTER, *Climate: The Counter Consensus* (p. 85), *Stacey International* 2010

important greenhouse gas, water vapor, which accounts for 95% of the total volume of greenhouse gases. Naturally, water vapor cannot be described as "polluting" and is hardly attributable to capitalism, so environmental propaganda avoids mentioning it at all costs.

The encyclical also states that "it would appear that this warming has been accompanied (...) by an increase of extreme weather events" (23), again blindly repeating the latest slogan from environmentalism propaganda. However, even the UN's IPCC itself has been forced to acknowledge that "current data indicate that there is no significant trend in the frequency of tropical cyclones globally (...)", "there is not enough evidence of increased droughts since the middle of the 20th century (...)" or of "the magnitude or frequency of floods globally"<sup>34</sup>. Extreme weather events statistics do not show an upward trend, and the death toll that accompanies them has been greatly reduced thanks to economic progress. Nevertheless, environmental propaganda takes advantage of the extensive media coverage that extreme phenomena always enjoy (even if they are cyclical, such as El Niño) to continue to link them to the hypothesis of human-caused climate change, whatever science, truth and logic may say.

St. John Paul II reminded us that "the Church has a duty to be attentive to the pastoral implications of her word, which (...) must correspond to the truth"<sup>35</sup>. The Church, as an advocate of truth (maybe truth's last line of defense), always strives to be extremely careful in the field of technology or science. I think that by entering the field of factual, observable and quantifiable statements, probably provided by third parties (which should have been more properly vetted by the corresponding Church filters) but in any case subject to objective scrutiny, *Laudato Si'* has placed itself in an uncomfortable position with regard to the contrast of such scientific data.

### 3. *Laudato Si'*'s support to a dubious scientific theory

*Laudato Si'* agrees with the theory that "most of the global warming of the last decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (...) released mainly as a result of human activity" (23), recognizing at the same time in a perhaps contradictory way that "on many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion" (61) nor "presume to settle scientific questions" (188). In the same vein, St. John Paul II reminded us that "divine Revelation, of which the Church is the guarantor and witness (...), does not in itself imply a particular scientific theory, and the assistance of the Holy Spirit in no way lends itself to guaranteeing explanations that we would like to profess concerning the physical constitution of reality"<sup>36</sup>. It is therefore appropriate to review the details of this theory.

In the last 150 years (after the Little Ice Age), the Earth has experienced an increase in temperature and CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. As is well known, it is precisely in this period that the industrialization of the planet begun and unprecedented material progress was achieved. The scientific hypothesis or theory (in no case is it proven evidence or "settled science") that states that human activity is the main determinant of climate (in this case, of warming) automatically transforms this weak correlation into causality (breaking the well-known principle that

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<sup>34</sup> IPCC *Assessment Report 5, WGI, Chapter 2*

<sup>35</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse aux participants à la session plénière de l'Académie Pontificale Des Sciences, 31 October 1992 (translated from the French by the author).*

<sup>36</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Speech on the occasion of the 350th Anniversary of the Publication of Galileo, 9 May 1983.*

correlation does not imply causality). This hypothesis is based on several premises (comments in parentheses):

1. The Earth's temperature was ideal a century ago (why? Says who?)
2. Until then it was in balance (false; the climate has been cyclically changing since the dawn of time).
3. There is unprecedented global warming (false – i.e., Medieval Period and Holocene Maximum).
4. This warming is caused exclusively by an increase in CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere (the greenhouse effect exists, but the climate has very complex interactions, its sensitivity and mechanisms of variation are not well known and the geological evidence does not support such a relationship)<sup>37</sup>.
5. The increase in temperatures is proportional to the increase in CO<sub>2</sub> (false: even if there were such cause-effect relationship, additional increases in CO<sub>2</sub> would only produce a small increase in temperature)<sup>38</sup>.
6. Man is responsible for this increase in CO<sub>2</sub> (only partly correct; an estimated 1 in 32 CO<sub>2</sub> molecules in the atmosphere is caused by human action)<sup>39</sup>.
7. If we do nothing, the temperature will continue to rise and the consequences of warming will be catastrophic (pure musings based on ad infinitum extrapolations that omit the overwhelming evidence of the cyclical nature of climate).

The hypothesis of the human origin of global warming raises many doubts among the scientific community, contrary to the slogan (repeated *ad nauseam*) about the "consensus". Indeed, science is still in its infancy in terms of its capacity to understand the enormous complexity of the climate system. If industry is to blame for the rise in temperatures, why has the earth been suffering from climate variations for millions of years, including glaciations and subsequent warmings? Why were there times long before the Industrial Revolution when temperatures were similar to or higher than today's? Why did climate variations have natural causes until 50 years ago, and since then, magically, natural causes disappear and it is only man who determines the climate? Man occupies less than 1% of the Earth's surface and his activity affects the composition of the atmosphere in 1 molecule out of every 85,000 that make it up: does he really determine the planet's climate? If CO<sub>2</sub> is the main cause of the evolution of temperatures, why does the geological evidence show that CO<sub>2</sub> tends to increase some 800 years after the rise in temperatures<sup>40</sup> (suggesting, in any case, an inverse relationship)? Does this not obviously call into question the cause-effect relationship? Is the greenhouse effect the only cause of the rise in temperatures? What is the role of our star the Sun, the source of heat in the galaxy (which doesn't count for the IPCC), the oceans (such an important factor!) or the cloud coverage? Given that cold temperatures cause many more health problems than warm temperatures, that biodiversity is richer in the warmer climates, more habitable than colder ones, and that warmth is synonymous with life and coldness with

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<sup>37</sup> IAN PLIMER «*The Science and politics of Climate Change*», Climate Change, The Facts, Institute of Public Affairs 2015, and for more in-depth studies on the subject of CO<sub>2</sub>, co2science.org.

<sup>38</sup> ROY W. SPENCER «*The Great Global Warming Blunder*», p 43-45. Encounter Books 2010.

<sup>39</sup> IAN PLIMER «*The Science ... op. cit.*».

<sup>40</sup> S. FRED SINGER Y DENNIS T. AVERY, *Unstoppable Global warming* (p.108), Rowman& Littlefield 2007.

death, why should we fear a slight rise in temperatures? If increases in CO<sub>2</sub> facilitate the growth of plants, won't a higher concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> have positive consequences for feeding a growing population? If historical variations in temperatures and sea levels have been so slow, won't we have plenty of time to adapt to them if necessary, and wouldn't that course of action be much wiser and much cheaper? Weather forecasts fail three days down the road: are we really to believe that climate models are reliable in 100 years' time? (Indeed, IPCC climate models have proven troublingly wrong time and again, always erring on the alarmist side).

Nobel Laureate in Physics Robert Laughlin believes that the causes are natural and that there is no reason to be alarmed: "Please remain calm. We have no power to control the weather. Climate variation is a matter of geological time, something that the Earth does routinely without asking anyone's permission or explaining itself"<sup>41</sup>. Another Nobel Laureate in Physics, Ivar Giaever, acknowledged: "I am a sceptic (...); global warming has become a new religion". I would venture to say that most of the planet's geologists smile incredulously when environmentalists extrapolate only the last 150 years of Earth's climate history and blatantly assert that a climate that has changed naturally over millions of years suddenly is determined largely by human action. For example, 103 and 143 scientists, respectively, wrote to the UN Secretary General before the 2007 and 2009 climate summits with messages questioning this theory, as did the 197 scientists who signed the Manhattan Declaration, the 700 scientists mentioned in a US Senate report (Morano, 2009) or the 202 scientists and thinkers who sent an open letter to the Holy See prior to the publication of *Laudato Si'*.

In reality, there are literally thousands of scientists, silenced by aggressive propaganda and bullying tactics, trying to make their voice heard in a field of science that has been completely hijacked by politics and ideology. The conclusions of a group of experts in climatology, atmospheric physics and geology may serve as a guide for us to understand the opinion of many of them: "Climate changes naturally all the time (...). A distinct human signal has not yet been identified within the variations of the natural climate system, to the degree that we cannot even be certain whether the global human signal is one of warming or cooling. Though it is true that many scientists anticipate that human warming is the more likely, no strong evidence exists that any such warming would be dangerous. The gentle global warming that probably occurred in the late 20th century falls within previous natural rates and magnitudes of warming and cooling, and is *prima facie* not alarming. Atmospheric carbon dioxide is certainly a greenhouse gas, but the empirical evidence shows that the warming effect of its increase at the rates of modern industrial emission and accumulation is minor (...). It can be noted too that no global increase in temperature has now occurred since 1998 despite an increase in carbon dioxide concentration of about 5 per cent (...). In dealing with the certainties and uncertainties of climate change, the key issue is prudence"<sup>42</sup>.

I agree with Richard Lindzen, an eminent atmospheric physicist, author of several books and professor for 20 years at the prestigious M.I.T., when he states that "global warming is about politics and power rather than science"<sup>43</sup>. I would add that it also has its fair share of a very sinister ideology. Given the enormous doubts it raises, it opens up the possibility that the global warming/climate change hysteria we are facing might be a scientific and political hoax of colossal proportions, and so I am concerned that *Laudato Si'* has taken such a clear stand. In

<sup>41</sup> NEIL REYNOLDS, «*Please remain calm. The Earth will heal itself*», *Globe and Mail* 19 July 2010.

<sup>42</sup> ROBERT M. CARTER, *Climate: The Counter Consensus* (p.244-245), *Stacey International* 2010

<sup>43</sup> RICHARD LINDZEN, «*Global warming, models and language*», in *Climate Change: The Facts*, *Institute of Public Affairs* 2015

fact, it is defensible to believe that part of the UN's desperation lies in the growing scientific questioning of this theory, less and less supported by the data. Ironically, some research suggests that we may face a new global cooling.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4. The political background of environmentalism

"Watch out when one offers advice; find out first of all what he wants. For he also may be thinking of himself" (Sir 37:8). The UN has undoubtedly played an advisory role in this encyclical, particularly through the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). This apparently scientific body, but with a political leadership where a handful of people are in charge, is the main leader that spurs and sustains the expansion of the theory of man-made global warming. Its statutory objective is to find the causes of climate change, but only those that may have their origin in human action (excluding natural causes), which logically biases its action. The IPCC has been making potentially apocalyptic projections in its computer models for 25 years, and these have been proven stubbornly wrong<sup>45</sup>. In the world of science, when a hypothesis is scientifically tested and the data observed do not corroborate it, the hypothesis is discarded. The IPCC does the opposite: it clings to its CO<sub>2</sub> hypothesis and instead "adjusts", twists the arm of the observed data to show an upward trend (even if infinitesimal) that, extrapolated ad infinitum, throws up an apocalyptic scenario that is duly publicized by the media and provokes a wave of fear and the corresponding political action of response.

Over time, the IPCC has been radicalizing its alarmist message to the detriment of its scientific rigor, getting rid of any trace that the climate is cyclical and that there are historical precedents well before the Industrial Revolution both in temperature and in CO<sub>2</sub>. Its evolution in this sense is clear: just as in 1990 it stated that "the increase in temperature observed in the 20th century may have been fundamentally caused by natural variability", in 2007 it argued that "most likely [at least 90% probability] most of the increase in temperatures in this century is due to the increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases caused by man"<sup>46</sup>.

The IPCC has published five reports since 1990. Each report contains a very voluminous scientific part and a summary prepared for policymakers. On many occasions, this political summary has not reflected a true picture of the scientific studies that support it, exaggerating some aspects and silencing others. In 1995, in order not to contradict the policy conclusions that had apparently been decided beforehand, the "few in charge" deleted some texts of the scientific part ex post. These deleted paragraphs stated categorically that "none of the studies cited above has shown clear evidence that we can attribute the observed climate changes to the specific cause of increases in greenhouse gases (...), no study has quantified the magnitude of a greenhouse gas effect (...) and no study to date has positively attributed all or part of [climate change] man-made causes"<sup>47</sup>. The then President of the American Academy of Sciences wrote an article in which he denounced that "in my more than 60 years as a member

<sup>44</sup> DON J. EASTERBROOK, «Global cooling is here», [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca), 2 Nov 2008, matches ROY W. SPENCER, *The Great Global Warming Blunder*, LARRY VARDIMAN, «New evidence for Global Cooling», Institute for Creation Research, 2010; «Irregular heartbeat of the sun», *Royal Astronomical Society* 9 July 2015.

<sup>45</sup> PATRICK J. MICHAELS, «Why climate models are failing», *Climate Change: The Facts, Institute of Public Affairs* 2015

<sup>46</sup> ROBERT M. CARTER, *Climate Change: The Facts, Institute of Public Affairs* 2015

<sup>47</sup> S. FRED SINGER and DENNIS T. AVERY, *Unstoppable... op. cit.*

of the American scientific community (...) I have never witnessed more alarming corruption of the peer reviewed process (...)”<sup>48</sup>. It is a perfect example of 'concealment of information' (184), which Laudato Si' rightly denounces in reference to consumerism, but which it unfortunately overlooks with regard to the current environmentalist movement, which is so prone to it. These have not been isolated cases. Without prejudging the honesty of each and every one of its scientists, several of those who collaborated with the IPCC have denounced the flawed bias of the entire process. For example, Dr. Kiminori Itoh of Japan has stated that climate change is "the worst scientific scandal in history" and Dr. Vincent Gray said that "the IPCC is fundamentally corrupt"<sup>49</sup>. This is the IPCC that apparently has gone hand in hand with the Holy See in this encyclical.

John Paul II said that "the first condition [for the promotion of science] is that freedom of spirit be assured. In research, in fact, it is necessary to be free to seek and announce the results"<sup>50</sup>. However, scientists who dare to question the politically correct thesis so far are socially and professionally lynched with *ad hominem* criticism, and risk having their research neither funded nor published. In fact, they are even cynically labelled "deniers", the epithet used to describe those who deny the Jewish Holocaust. They are also systematically denied scientific debate in a totalitarian style, declaring the debate "settled". Let's put forth an example. An American television program wanted to organize a debate between Roy Spencer, a well-known NASA scientist and author of several books skeptic on the theory of man-made climate change<sup>51</sup>, and some scientist of the supposed "consensus" of the IPCC. Roy Spencer immediately agreed. However, the IPCC-aligned scientists excused themselves one after the other by saying that there was nothing to discuss because the debate was "settled", until one of them agreed to go to the program under the condition that Roy Spencer and he did not physically coincide on the set. Thus, the debate had to take place with each of them alternately leaving the set table when the other spoke.<sup>52</sup> Roy Spencer, by the way, is a convert to Christianity who wrote a beautiful account of how science led him to God.<sup>53</sup>

These scientists are also generically accused of being paid by the oil companies. This propaganda tool is effective and is designed to quickly deceive the unwary. Naturally, money can buy wills and corrupt people (as can the promise of political power). The point is that there is a great deal of money wanting the hypothesis of man-made warming to be true (or to be considered true even if it is not). Today, about \$350 billion is invested annually in renewable energy<sup>54</sup>, six times more than in 2000. This entire renewable industry (a trillion dollars invested in the last five years) has thrived on the heat of the UN IPCC and the theory of man-made global warming; it all depends on continued alarmism and catastrophism to continue to receive the subsidies that allow it to compete with oil and gas, and it looks forward to the coercive reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In the field of science, too, the vast majority (if not almost all) of money spent on climate research is reserved for those who support the theory of human origin.

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<sup>48</sup> HENRY H. BAUER, *Dogmatism in Science and Medicine*, p.212, McFarland & Co 2012.

<sup>49</sup> KIMBERLY STRASSEL, «*The Climate Change climate change*», Wall Street Journal, 26 June 2009, and LAWRENCE SOLOMON «*IPCC too blinkered and corrupt to save*», National Post ([www.financialpost.com](http://www.financialpost.com))

<sup>50</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Discurso a las Reales Academias de España, 3 November 1982 (translated by the autor).

<sup>51</sup> ROY W. SPENCER, *The Great Global Warming Blunder*.

<sup>52</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=V96k4BO2sBw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V96k4BO2sBw)

<sup>53</sup> ROY SPENCER «*Testing Truth with an open Mind*» the Evolution Crisis.

<sup>54</sup> «*Global Landscape of Climate Finance 2014*», Climate Policy Initiative, November 2014.

Laudato Si' affirms that "the Church knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views" (61). By not voicing the scientific opinions of those who question both the human origin of climate change and the alarmism that has arisen, and by simultaneously calling "obstructionists" those who "deny the problem", Laudato Si' does not seem to have been an example of encouraging such "honest debate" when it was still a draft before its publication<sup>55</sup> (I hasten to add that it would be closer to the truth to say that the Pontifical Academy of Sciences actively closed the door to any scientist contrary to the "consensus", preventing any honest and open debate to take place). However, the Church is still on time to create what would be an oasis of freedom by promoting a true scientific debate that will advance the understanding of the causes of climate change and all the honest and humble acknowledgement of all the unknowns of climate science.

The solution provided by environmentalism is to replace fossil fuels (oil, coal and gas) with renewable energies. Laudato Si' also argues that they should be "progressively replaced without delay" (165). The problem with renewable energies (mainly solar and wind) is that they are inefficient, expensive and intermittent, and cannot be used on the entire surface of the planet, as they depend on weather and climatic conditions (sunny or windy). It is easy to forget today how much man owes to coal and oil. Without them, the world's forest mass would have been decimated, as we would continue to consume wood as a regular fuel; without them the world would not have been able to benefit from the material progress of the last two centuries and would still be plunged into widespread poverty; and without them, the material progress of many developing countries will be damaged in the future. If coal and oil are demonized, it is also worth asking what the exact role they play in Creation is or whether they are a taboo mysteriously forbidden to man.

Thomas Carlyle wrote that "our main task is not to see what lies dimly in the distance, but to do what is clearly at hand". Instead of focusing on the blurred predictions of a dubious scientific theory flawed by ideology, the ambition for political power and a bunch of lies, we can focus on fighting poverty, which unfortunately is so close at hand. It is absurd (and maybe immoral) to divert a huge amount of resources into funding expensive and inefficient energy sources that could be used for better alternatives. Fossil fuels might be finite, but so is money.

The UN, like any political organization, naturally tends to extend its power. Global warming is undoubtedly a golden opportunity in this regard. Out of my love for the Church and my deep respect for her Magisterium, I cannot ignore my deep concern over the reiteration of the call to create a World Political Authority (175), this time in the context of climate change. This concept of world government, which mismatches the principle of subsidiarity, was originally mentioned in 1963 by John XXIII and mostly silenced by the Church's magisterium for almost half a century, until it was recovered in *Caritas in Veritate*. The biographer of John Paul II, George Weigel, thinks that the reason for such reappearance is what he calls "fideism" in relation to a completely imaginary "inherent superiority of transnational governance". In my opinion, this request, even if made vaguely and on only three scattered occasions, clashes so head-on with the empirical evidence, the knowledge of the nature of the human being and the dynamics of political power, that I will limit myself to quoting Weigel himself: "It is one of the enduring mysteries of the Catholic Church why the Roman Curia places such faith in this fantasy of a "world public authority," given the Holy See's experience in battling for life,

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<sup>55</sup> ANTHONY FAOILA, «*How climate-change doubters lost a papal fight*», Washington Post 20 June 2015.

religious freedom, and elementary decency at the United Nations"<sup>56</sup>. Experience dictates, without any doubt, that such an authority would be a fierce enemy of freedom, truth and the Church itself.

### 5. Laudato Si' and the economy

From its defense of the environment and its concern for the poor, Laudato Si' criticizes an economic system that is never perfectly defined, but can be identified, paradoxically, with the most effective system for reducing poverty<sup>57</sup>: the free market, misnamed capitalism.

When we talk about economics, it is essential to understand the origin of wealth creation: how and why have individuals and peoples throughout history achieved a higher level of material prosperity? Is it the result of luck, is it an injustice or, on the contrary, is it the result of a specific system and values? By answering this question wrongly, many economically erroneous beliefs and cause-effect relationships arise, such as the belief that economics is a zero-sum game, that is, that some have little because others have too much. As a result of its own answer to this question, the encyclical states, for example, that when one part of the world consumes a lot of resources, it "robs" from poor nations (95) and recommends "to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth." (193). Laudato Si' is extremely suspicious of the market, criticizing an unexplained 'magical conception' of it and going so far as to equate the logic of 'sexual exploitation' with the logic of those who believe that we should allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy (123). The encyclical prevents that "contemporary man has not been trained to use power well" (105) – although I would say that has been the rule throughout history and not only in contemporary times, as power is a breeding ground for all sort of temptations for the human soul -; however, Laudato Si' strangely seems to apply such prudence in its view on the potential for abuse of power only to technology and the market, never to politics. In fact, quoting Caritas in Veritate, he argues that one of the objectives of the above-mentioned World Political Authority (whose members it takes for granted that they would never misuse their immense power) should be to "govern the world economy", and that "given the real potential for a misuse of human abilities, individual states can no longer ignore their responsibility for planning, coordination, oversight and enforcement within their respective borders" (177). It is difficult to understand this after the catastrophic experience of 20th century socialism's central planning of economies. In fact, as Saint John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus*, "when people think they possess the secret of a perfect social organization which makes evil impossible, they also think that they can use any means, including violence and deceit, in order to bring that organization into being", and "where self-interest is violently suppressed, it is replaced by a burdensome system of bureaucratic control which dries up the wellsprings of initiative and creativity."<sup>58</sup>. Naturally, the free market is imperfect and that "production is not always rational" (189) because it is decided by men subject to error, but this does not imply taking such rationality for granted in a supposed governing elite endowed with an imaginary superhuman, clairvoyant and beneficial capacity, which would place it above fallibility and man's fallen nature. I am concerned about

<sup>56</sup> GEORGE WEIGEL «*Caritas in Veritate in Gold and Red*» National Review, 7 June 2009.

<sup>57</sup> *Centesimus Annus* recognizes such empirical evidence: "the free market is the most effective instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs" of economic goods (34).

<sup>58</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus* (25).

this confidence in political power that turns a blind eye to historical evidence and the psychology of power, and that truly does a disservice to the cause of the world's poor. On the other hand, *Laudato Si'*'s criticism of "the salvation of banks at all costs (...) without a firm decision to review and reform the entire system", referring to the financial crisis of 2008, points in the right direction, as does the prediction that "will only give rise to new crises" (189).

*Laudato Si'* duly expresses concern for the poor everywhere. How can poverty be eradicated? It is not economists but two popes, true references of the Social Doctrine of the Church, who offer us the answer. Material prosperity requires three ingredients: a particular economic system, a legal system or rule of law, and individual and social virtues. St. John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus*, gives us a measured definition of this system that allows its moral qualification. While warning that "the Church has no models to propose", he affirms: "If by "capitalism" is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a business economy, market economy or simply free economy (...)"<sup>59</sup> - provided that it is based on the rule of law and has a judicial framework based on ethical standards. At *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII had developed several of the fundamental pillars on which this system should be built: one, "the first and most fundamental principle, therefore, if one would undertake to alleviate the condition of the masses, must be the inviolability of private property (...), safeguarding it by legal enactment and protection"; two, that private property "be not drained and exhausted by excessive taxation"; three, "fully and faithfully to perform the work which has been freely and equitably agreed upon"; and four, "State chiefly prospers and thrives through moral rule, well-regulated family life, respect for religion and justice, the moderation and fair imposing of public taxes (...)"<sup>60</sup>. But, as Paul VI wrote in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, "endowed with intellect and free will, each man is responsible for his self-fulfillment even as he is for his salvation. He is helped, and sometimes hindered, by his teachers and those around him; yet whatever be the outside influences exerted on him, he is the chief architect of his own success or failure"<sup>61</sup>. In this very sense, St. John Paul II rightly explained how prosperity depends, of course, on man's individual response: "The moral causes of prosperity are well known throughout history. They reside in a constellation of virtues: diligence, competence, order, honesty, initiative, frugality, thrift, a spirit of service, keeping one's word, courage; in short to love work well done. Without these virtues, no social system or structure can magically solve the problem of poverty"<sup>62</sup>. Here are the keys to eradicating poverty.

On the other hand, *Laudato Si'* makes a continuous parallel between the poor and Nature. He speaks, for example, of hearing "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (49), of the concern "for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment." (214), and comes to make a strange analogy between the "the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power" (241). These comparisons are difficult to understand, and the fact that they are also used by radical ecologists to achieve their spurious ends requires extreme caution. For example, Naomi Klein, a Canadian journalist,

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<sup>59</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Centesimus Annus* (42)

<sup>60</sup> LEO XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (15, 20, 32, 38, 47) [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>61</sup> PAUL VI, *Populorum Progressio* (15)

<sup>62</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to CEPAL in Chile*, 3 April 1987.

social activist in feminism and environmentalism who, in the wake of *Laudato Si'*, was strangely invited to participate and present an event on climate change organized by the Justice and Peace Commission, defended in one of her books "the parallels between the abuse of the natural world advocated by the economic model and the abuse of human beings who are considered worthy of being sacrificed (...)". She continued: "Karl Marx, for example, recognized the irreparable fracture between capitalism and the natural laws of life, and feminist thinkers have long pointed to the existence of a connection between the dual warfare of the patriarchy against women's bodies and against the body of the Earth (...)".<sup>63</sup> Apart from the eloquent environmentalism-anti-capitalism-feminism connection, I find a bit disturbing the parallelism with this part of the encyclical.

## 6. Conclusions

*Laudato Si'* makes a necessary appeal to the anxious man of today to recover his spirituality, his center and his inner peace and to regain a true control of his life. However, the reading of this encyclical, despite its light and its merits, is unsettling in some aspects. It is full of technical details (some of them very debatable), takes sides in scientific controversies, echoes the standard catastrophic litany of environmentalism and, above all, can generate confusion about the relative importance and superiority of Man in relation to other creatures. There is also a certain distrust of man and of the fruitfulness of his freedom on the material realm when he speaks of "irrational confidence in progress and human abilities" (19) or of "serious problems arise" with human intervention (the Spanish version talks in point 34 about "the constant disasters caused by man"). Perhaps, in an encyclical that deals with an always uncontrollable and unpredictable future, a mention of Divine Providence, a permanent source of hope, would have been appropriate. The world of today, gripped and enslaved by its fears, needs more than ever a "liberation from fear" (9), the apt expression of *Laudato Si'*, that "do not fear" so often pronounced by Christ. On the other hand, there are parts, such as the beautiful epigraph Joy and Peace (222-227), which would undoubtedly have deserved further development.

"See that no one deceives you" (Mk 13:5). Knowing that "the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation (...) than are the children of light" (Lk 16:8) and that evil is especially dangerous when it appears disguised as good, the Church must remain alert so that its credibility and moral authority are not used by worldly forces that so often disguise their spurious goals under a camouflage of goodness and purity of intentions. In this regard, it seems legitimate to feel some concern about the reaction to the publication of this encyclical. The powers of this world, including, of course, the UN, but also well-known politicians from all over the world and powerful international media traditionally hostile to the Church have dedicated unanimous applause to it (Luke 6: 26: "Alas for you when everyone speaks well of you!"). So have radical environmentalists like Peter Singer, who has denied the sacredness of human life, holds the legitimacy of eliminating children with physical or mental disabilities, equates man with animals and defends that the lives of sick adults have no intrinsic value<sup>64</sup>. That Singer has welcomed *Laudato Si'*<sup>65</sup> should be, I believe, a cause for concern.

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<sup>63</sup> NAOMI KLEIN, *Esto lo cambia todo: El Capitalismo contra el clima Ed. Paidós (translated by the author)*

<sup>64</sup> Quoted by MARIANO FAZIO *Historia de las ideas contemporáneas*, Rialp, 2012, p. 373. Translated by the author

"We are not God" (67): we know only a very small part of the wonderful complexity of Creation and we cannot predict the future of the planet with any computer program. Neither are we God to decide the exact capacity of the planet, that is, how many human beings must occupy it, nor what the exact degree of industrialization or poverty they should have, as environmentalism defends. The arrogance of such a proposition clashes head-on with the humility that *Laudato Si'* (224) so opportunely claims. Thousands of years later, the call to humility in the book of Job, which puts man in his place, is still valid: "The Lord answered Job out of the storm: Who is it who darkens counsel with words of ignorance? (...) I will question you and you tell me the answers! Where were you when I founded the Earth? Tell me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:1-4).

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<sup>65</sup> PETER SINGER, «*El dominio del hombre*», *El País*, 20 August 2015