

# origins

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## How Are We to Live in Our Common Home? Reflections on *Laudato Si'*

Cardinal Turkson

Pope Francis' encyclical letter "*Laudato Si'*" "was purposely published in June to allow time for it to influence the road to the U.N. climate change conference" that will be held in Paris Nov. 30-Dec. 11, the head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace said. Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson delivered an address Nov. 2 to 1,200 people at Ohio State University in Columbus. Cardinal Turkson, who the pope has said was one of the lead drafters of the encyclical, said that "with '*Laudato Si'*,' we understand the word 'Earth' — especially its poorest inhabitants,

*"If the Paris summit lacks dialogue, its outcome will easily resemble previous global summits on the environment."*

its most vulnerable species and systems — in a new and hopefully responsible way." He said the message of the encyclical "needs to be integrated into the active commitment of citizens who organize to make the pope's message resonate in the halls of power and who demand courageous action on the part of leaders and negotiators in favor of the poor and of the planet," noting that the day before the climate conference opens, people will demonstrate in cities throughout the world, calling on leaders at the meeting to take action. The conference is also called COP21 because it is the 21st U.N. climate change conference, and Cardinal Turkson said he hoped it would not fail to live up to expectations as other meetings have due to a lack of political will, and he said he hoped the meeting would not be dominated by "the particular interests of individual countries or specific groups." The cardinal's address follows.

■ warmly greet the great community of Ohio State University on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Our council is honored to have assisted the Holy Father in his teaching ministry by helping to prepare the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*.

I know that you have come from every corner of the globe, including my own Ghana, and now are part of the great American melting pot. Mayor Michael Coleman recently announced that Accra is Columbus' newest sister city. Many Ghanaians have settled in Columbus and central Ohio, and Accra is

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People of developed nations share responsibility with the rest of the world to protect the Earth from environmental destruction and assist poor communities in escaping poverty, a cardinal who is a chief adviser to the pope said.

Honduran Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, coordinator of Pope Francis' international nine-member Council of Cardinals, told reporters at a roundtable discussion Nov. 2 that the pope calls people to dialogue in his recent encyclical on ecology so that better understanding occurs across country boundaries.

"As the pope said, it is not only thinking that the rich have to go to the poor, but how can each one of us, every one of us, take their own co-responsibility because all of us are responsible (for) our common home," Cardinal Rodríguez said in reference to the encyclical's title, "*Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home*."

"We cannot ignore that we are co-responsible for all around the world," he continued. "We cannot be closed down in our own borders and looking only to our own places because all of us are citizens of the same Earth and all of us have a common home."

The cardinal met reporters for nearly an hour before he participated in a program on the encyclical at the Georgetown University Law Center.

He focused largely on the encyclical's central message that it is time for a true revolution of heart in realizing that human beings must understand they are connected and that any action they undertake has implications for others as well as the planet.

Pope Francis stresses the importance of dialogue, which has been a mainstay of his papacy, the cardinal said.

"Dialogue is one of the keys for the solutions, and when

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a progressive city in which to do business. Both are capital cities, Columbus of your state and Accra of our country.

In this spirit of brother- and sisterhood, care for our common home marks the encyclical *Laudato Si'* from beginning to end. It wants to bring all persons and peoples into dialogue, all institutions and organizations that share this same concern for our common home. The world situation leads us to discover that different yet important perspectives are ever more intertwined and complementary. These include the riches of faith and spiritual tradition; the seriousness of scientific research; the courage of honest politics and transparent government; and the many efforts of ordinary people organized throughout civil society — all striving for equitable and sustainable development.

Such wide-ranging dialogue is the method the Holy Father embraced in preparing the encyclical.<sup>1</sup> He relied on a wide range of contributions. Some are mentioned in the footnotes, in particular, many episcopal conferences from all the continents. Others who contributed to the various phases of this work, all the way to the complex final phases of translation and publication, remain unnamed. The Lord knows well how to reward their generosity and dedication.

The encyclical takes its name from the invocation of St. Francis of Assisi: "*Laudato si' mi' Signore*" "Praise be to you, my Lord," that begins the Canticle of the Creatures. The canticle calls to mind that the Earth, our common home, "is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us" (No. 1). The attitude of St. Francis also runs through the entire encyclical: a spirit of prayerful contemplation. The encyclical looks toward the "poor one of Assisi" as a source of inspiration.

St. Francis is "the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. ... He shows us just how inseparable is the bond between concern for nature, justice for

the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" (No. 10). The Holy Father quotes the U.S. bishops, who said that greater attention must be given to "the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests."<sup>2</sup>

Midway through *Laudato Si'*, we find this question: What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? The Holy Father continues, "This question does not have to do with the environment alone and in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal." This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its values that are the basis of social life:

"What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the Earth have of us?"

"If we do not ask these basic questions," says the pope, "it is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations" (No. 160).

These questions arise from an observation: Today the Earth, our sister, mistreated and abused, is lamenting; and its cries join those of all the world's forsaken and "discarded." In scientific language, greenhouse gas emissions are rising fast, dangerously disrupting the climate system and posing a grave threat to sustainable development everywhere. The Earth groans under the awful burden of pollution and degradation. It cries for the loss of biodiversity, of entire species disappearing before human carelessness. It weeps dry tears because water is misused and the deserts are growing.

Pope Francis invites us to listen to these sufferings. He urges each and every one — individuals, families, local communities, nations and the international community — to "change direction" by taking on the beauty and responsibility of the task of "caring for our common home." The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, underlines the seriousness of this responsibility: "Human beings ... destroy the biological diversity ... by causing changes in its climate, contaminate

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the earth's waters, its land, its air and its life — these are sins" (No. 8).

### To Change Direction = Ecological Conversion

In 1973 Karl Menninger published his famous book whose title is a provocative question, *Whatever Became of Sin?* Indeed, over the past 50 years or so, the idea of *sin* seems to have faded away. Nevertheless, despite the general loss of the sense of sin, the related concept of *conversion*, as intended by Pope Francis, has found much resonance also in the secular press. *Conversion* means "to change direction," to change our very seeing and judging and acting.

Fifteen years ago, St. John Paul II called for an "ecological conversion."<sup>3</sup> Yet today in a time of even greater indifference to sin and more widespread ethical relativism, Pope Francis has succeeded in calling many to a new openness to ecological conversion.

The Holy Father himself gives credit to the long years of hard work on the part of various ecological movements. "Worldwide, the ecological movement has made significant advances, thanks also to the efforts of many organizations of civil society. ... Thanks to their efforts, environmental questions have increasingly found a place on public agendas and encouraged more farsighted approaches" (No. 166). Accordingly, more people are increasingly aware of the responsibilities we have toward our "common home."

Pope Francis dedicates six paragraphs, from Nos. 216 to 221, to ecological conversion. They are particularly appealing, addressed to the whole world but particularly to Christians: "The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of 20 centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity." An authentic ecological spirituality is "grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living."

Ecological conversion is essential for turning our ideas and intuitions into a lived spirituality, guiding our choices in personal lifestyle, charity and service toward others, and the exercise of political responsibility. Such "a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world" (No. 216).

The pope also highlights "ecological virtues" (No. 88) and the good habits that constitute the everyday practice of care for our common home. He cites many practices, from consuming water and electricity carefully to planting trees, and then asserts: "All of these

reflect a generous and worthy creativity that brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love that expresses our own dignity" (No. 211).

Pope Francis acknowledges that environmental awareness is growing nowadays, along with concern for the damage that is being done. Based on this observation, the Holy Father remains hopeful about the possibility of reversing the trend: "Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home" (No. 13). "Men and women are still capable of intervening positively" (No. 58). "All is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start" (No. 205). Ecological conversion is already underway; the change of direction is beginning to take place.

### Conversion to Integral Ecology

Pope Francis proposes a new mindset, one based on the concept of *integral ecology*. It is an expression that captures an ancient awareness that all living beings, human groups and systems as well as nonhuman ones — that is, all of creation — are fundamentally interconnected.

Only with attentive care for these bonds, says Pope Francis, will we come "to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today's world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests" (No. 110).

Integral ecology is a paradigm at the center of the encyclical that articulates the fundamental relationships of the person with God, with him/herself, with other human beings and with creation:

"When we speak of the *environment*, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society that lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.

"Getting to the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, the ways it grasps reality and so forth. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.

*you see from Chapter 4 to the end of the encyclical, you see that the pope is always asking for dialogue, dialogue, dialogue; with different denominations within the religious aspect, with governments, with NGOs, with private foundations; dialogue with all kinds of people," he explained.*

*Cardinal Rodríguez said the pope is calling for revolution, not in the political sense, but "a real revolution... to turn upside down, a change that is total."*

*"We need a revolution in ecology under the ethical perspective, of course," he said.*

*The encyclical, he said, is built on long-standing Catholic social teaching on human dignity.*

*The cardinal questioned the pope's critics who suggested that the pontiff should limit his observations to theological questions rather than economic and scientific issues, especially those surrounding the climate, even before the encyclical was released.*

*"It (the encyclical) was criticized before being published. People said, 'What does the Holy Father know about science? It's not about science. It's about life,'" Cardinal Rodríguez said.*

*"It's what we used to call justice with the creation. What we have to do is be just with the creation, with this treasure that was given to the human being. It's to be preserved and cultivated, not destroyed."*

*Acknowledging that resistance to the encyclical's call for action to protect the environment and for a change in the human heart will continue, Cardinal Rodríguez simply said the world "cannot continue ignoring" climate change. He added that he feels confident that a comprehensive agreement to address climate change will emerge from the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting in Paris Nov. 30-Dec. 11.*

*"Otherwise, I don't think countries will have a future,"*

he said.

The cardinal also called on the energy industry to abandon carbon-based fuels and to embrace alternative energy. He also supported efforts by various institutions, including Catholic colleges and universities, to divest from fossil fuels.

"Oil is like roulette, now; a raffle," he said. "To trust in only one kind of industry in energy is a big mistake. Every day it's more clear.

"Secondly, the market is not a god and this is one of the criticisms that the encyclical makes: Market is an instrument for development, but not for making money only. This is one of the perspectives that the world has to learn."

Cardinal Rodríguez held up entrepreneurs pursuing alternative fuels and whose business model is based on the development of people.

The encyclical also has a message for elected officials everywhere, he said, who must be more responsive to the development of people rather than focusing on their next election or maintaining power.

During the public program Cardinal Rodríguez stressed the urgency that the encyclical be shared within parishes, schools and other settings. He called on parishioners to step up to bring the message of "Laudato Si'" to their faith communities if their pastors and bishops do not.

Bishops also must step up to motivate pastors to make sure the encyclical is being discussed in parishes, he added.

The program was co-sponsored by several Georgetown programs including the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought & Public Life, the Environmental Law Program, the Climate Change Center and the Global Futures Initiative.

"We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged and at the same time protecting nature" (No. 139).

The various issues treated in the encyclical are placed within this framework. In the different chapters they are picked up and continuously enriched starting from different perspectives (cf. No. 16):

- The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet.

- The conviction that everything in the world is intimately connected.

- The critique of the new technocratic paradigm and the forms of power that arise from technology.

- The value proper to each creature.

- The human meaning of ecology.

- The need for forthright and honest debates.

- The serious responsibility of international and local policy.

- The throwaway culture.

- The proposal for a new style of life; and

- The invitation to search for other ways of understanding economy and progress.

This list shows the breadth of integral ecology and conversion to it. At the core of the needed conversion Pope Francis sets both a spirituality that inspires the individual to "a more passionate concern for the protection of our world" and a "community conversion" that empowers individuals to join together in this undertaking (Nos. 216, 219). He goes on to enumerate the attitudes that are called for:

"[Ecological conversion] entails [1] gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works: 'Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing ... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Mt 6:3-4). It also entails [2] a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined in a splendid universal communion.

"As believers, we do [3] not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings. By [4] developing our individual God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems and in offering ourselves to God 'as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable' (Rom 12:1)" (No. 220).

Stemming from our faith, these attitudes make for ecological conversion, for a different capacity to help and to serve, and for exercising the serious responsibility — to the planet and to the poor, to our brothers and sisters now and to future generations.

I will now summarize the encyclical and conclude with reflections on the world's efforts on the road to the Paris conference at the end of this month.

### **The Path of *Laudato Si'***

The encyclical is divided into six chapters. The starting point (Ch. 1) is a spiritual listening to the results of the best scientific research on environmental matters available today by "letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows." Science is the best tool by which we can listen to the cry of the Earth.


Extremely complex and urgent issues are addressed, some of which — such as climate changes and above all their causes — are the subject of heated debate. Greenhouse gas emissions are rising quickly, dangerously disrupting the climate system and posing a grave threat to sustainable development in all countries. But the aim of the encyclical is not to intervene in what is the responsibility of scientists and even less to establish exactly in which ways the climate changes are a consequence of human action.

The best evidence of science says that human activity is one of the factors that explains climate change. This has inescapable moral consequences. We humans have a serious moral responsibility to do everything in our power to reduce our impact and avoid the negative effects on the environment and on society, especially on the poor who are least able to defend themselves.

The next step in the encyclical (Ch. 2) is a review of the riches of Judeo-Christian tradition, above all in the biblical texts and then in theological reflection upon it. This expresses the "tremendous responsibility" of human beings for creation, the intimate link between all creatures and the fact that "the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone" (No. 95).

The analysis then deals (Ch. 3) with "the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes" (No. 15). Here the dialogue is between philosophy and the human sciences. The aim is to develop an integral ecology (Ch. 4), which in its diverse dimensions comprehends "our unique place as human beings in this world






and our relationship to our surroundings," in economy and politics, in various cultures, in particular those most threatened, and in every moment and every varied aspect of our daily lives.

On this basis, Chapter 5 addresses the question about what we can and must do. A series of perspectives are proposed for the renewal of international, national and local politics, of decision-making processes in the public and business sectors, of the relationship between politics and economy and of that between religion and science.


For Pope Francis, it is imperative that practical proposals not be developed in an ideological, superficial or reductionist way. This is why dialogue is essential, a term present in the title of every section of this chapter: "There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. ... The church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good" (No. 188).



Finally, based on the conviction that "change is impossible without motivation and a process of education," Chapter 6 proposes "some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience" (No. 15). Along this line, the encyclical offers two prayers, the first to be shared with believers of other religions and the second among Christians. The encyclical concludes, as it opened, in a spirit of prayerful contemplation.

### **Toward Real Dialogue and Political Expression at Paris**

Even the brief summary I have just given makes it clear that *Laudato Si'* is not a "green," ecological or climate-change document<sup>4</sup> but a full social encyclical in the church's tradition going back to Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* of 1892. Ever since, in the dramatically changing situations facing the human family, the social encyclicals have met the need to enunciate the basic principles of the church's social teaching.



"The church's social doctrine illuminates with an unchanging light the new problems that are constantly emerging."<sup>5</sup> We find *Laudato Si'* solidly within this tradition, for it wants to accompa-

ny humanity in facing the crucial "new problems" of social exclusion and environmental degradation that threaten our common home.

Yet *Laudato Si'* can and must have an impact on the important and urgent decisions which must be made at this time. Pope Francis' teaching document on climate change was purposely published in June to allow time for it to influence the road to the U.N. climate change conference (COP21) in Paris, Nov. 30-Dec. 11, 2015. "According to his advisers, Pope Francis wanted to use his popularity and authority to firmly frame climate change as a symptom of a planet whose ethics have gone haywire."<sup>6</sup>

As it looks now, there are important positive signs on the road to COP21. We have the U.S./China agreement, the commitment of the G-7 to decarbonization and India's agreement to reduce emissions. However, the current state of the so-called Intended Nationally Determined Contributions is troublesome. The INDCs will largely determine whether the world fulfills its 2015 agreement.

In order to proceed toward a low-carbon, climate-resilient future, a ceiling of 2 degrees Celsius is the crucial minimum. Of course, 1.5° C would be much better — and even that threshold accepts increasing droughts in Syria and the Sahel region of Africa. So the minimum target of 2° C does not promise a future free of disastrous environmental changes, just a more manageable future than the present suicidal course.

Right now, though, the INDCs add up to an international commitment of 2.7° C.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, keep in mind that these are statements of intent. They are not results. There is still a long way to go from expressions of commitment to concrete, effective and verifiable measures.<sup>8</sup>

Pope Francis is adamant that dialogue is the only way to seek solutions that are truly effective. Negotiation does not always involve dialogue. If the Paris summit lacks dialogue, its outcome will easily resemble previous global summits on the environment, which, he says in *Laudato Si'*, "have not lived up to expectations because, due to lack of political will, they were not able to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment" (No. 166).

What the pope proposes is authen-

tic dialogue: honesty and transparency. This means not allowing the particular interests of individual countries or specific groups to lead the negotiations. It means rather to negotiate based on the principles which the social teaching of the church promotes: solidarity, subsidiarity, working for the common good, universal destination of goods and a preferential option for the poor and for the Earth.

As important as they may be, Pope Francis and his *Laudato Si'* will not guarantee that COP21 produces an equitable climate agreement, one that is legally binding and generates real change. It needs action and organization from below; it needs mobilization. As Pope Francis himself said at a meeting of landless farmers and informal workers in Bolivia in July, "The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change."

The message of *Laudato Si'* needs to be integrated into the active commitment of citizens who organize to make the pope's message resonate in the halls of power and who demand courageous action on the part of leaders and negotiators in favor of the poor and of the planet. On Nov. 29, this is what hundreds of thousands of men, women and children will do in the Global Climate March on the streets of Paris. They will gather not just in Paris, but in London, Berlin, Madrid, Amsterdam, Bogotá, Johannesburg, Dhaka, Kampala, Omaha, Rome, São Paulo, Sydney, Seoul, Ottawa, Tokyo and some 3,000 other cities.

In gathering and calling for action, they will exercise what Pope Francis calls "*ecological citizenship* — with a sense of solidarity that is at the same time aware that we live in a common home that God has entrusted to us" (No. 211).

Let me sum up this way. Climate change is an issue that concerns everyone, for what is at stake is justice between people and generations, the dignity of those who inhabit the planet now and those who will inhabit it in the future. The very possibility of human life on Earth hangs in the balance.

*Laudato Si'* has spotlighted the gravity of the situation facing humanity and the urgent need to find ways to escape what he calls "the spiral of self-destruction that currently engulfs us." Pope Francis is giving voice to those who are crying out — the Earth, which is our mother and sister, and the millions of poor people who live on Earth — but who struggle to be heard. And on their behalf, he addresses world leaders several times, urging them to take responsibility for the common good even if they have to go against "the mindset of short-term gain that dominates present-day economics and politics."

## Conclusion

A week ago (Oct. 26), nine of the world's bishops, cardinals and patriarchs, representing the church's regions worldwide, signed a declaration calling on the leaders at COP21 to heed the call of *Laudato Si'*. The appeal asserts "that climate and atmosphere are global common goods that are belonging to all and meant for all," and then calls for "a fair, transformational and legally binding global agreement based on our vision of the world that recognizes the need to live in harmony with nature and to guarantee the fulfillment of human rights for all, including those of indigenous peoples, women, youth and workers."<sup>9</sup> The appeal ends by asking the God of love to "teach us to care for this world our common home."

Every time we say the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." With *Laudato Si'*, we understand the word *Earth* — especially its poorest inhabitants, its most vulnerable species and systems — in a new and hopefully responsible way. Through dialogue, unity and good will toward one another, may we respond generously and responsibly. And may God use us to help fulfill our prayer on the earth, the common home he gave us.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is what the pope himself said on the flight to Manila in January and so is already known: "Cardinal Turkson and his team prepared the first draft. Then, with some help, I took it and worked on it, then with a few theologians I made a third draft and sent a copy to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the second section of the Secretariat of State, and to the theologian of the papal household. ... Three weeks ago, I got their responses back, some of them thick, but all of them constructive. Now I will take a week of March, an entire week, to complete it. I believe that by the end of March it will be finished and sent out for translation. ... If the work of translation goes well ... then it can come out in June or July"

(Jan. 15, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good" (June 15, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Catechesis (Jan. 17, 2001), 4: *Insegnamenti* 41/1 (2001), 179.

<sup>4</sup> The magisterial, pastoral and spiritual dimensions of *Laudato Si'* must not be put in second place. Its value, breadth and depth cannot be reduced to the practical aim of influencing environmental policies.

<sup>5</sup> *Caritas in Veritate*, 12, quoting Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/10/26/cardinal-turkson-popes-top-climate-adviser-to-workers-future-of-humanity-is-in-your-hands](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/10/26/cardinal-turkson-popes-top-climate-adviser-to-workers-future-of-humanity-is-in-your-hands).

<sup>7</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/environment/climatechange/11966314/UN-climate-pledges-make-significant-dent-in-global-warming](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/environment/climatechange/11966314/UN-climate-pledges-make-significant-dent-in-global-warming).

<sup>8</sup> <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/key-elements-for-success-on-climate-change-mitigation-at-cop21-in-paris>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2015/10/26/0824/01831.html#in> (Items 2 and 3). ■

# Apostolic Letter Motu Proprio Reforming Canons That Deal With Annulments

## Pope Francis

*While a juridical process is necessary for making accurate judgments, the Catholic Church's marriage annulment process must be quicker, cheaper and much more of a pastoral ministry, Pope Francis said. Rewriting a section of the Latin-rite Code of Canon Law and of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Pope Francis said he was not promoting "the nullity of marriages but the speed of processes as well as the simplicity" of the procedures so that "the cloud of doubt" does not hang over Catholic couples for prolonged periods. The Vatican released Sept. 8 Latin and Italian versions of the texts of two papal documents, "Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus" ("The Lord Jesus, the Gentle Judge") for the Latin-rite church and "Mitis et misericors Iesus," ("The Meek and Merciful Jesus") for the Eastern Catholic churches. The changes, including the option of a brief process without the obligatory automatic appeal, go into effect Dec. 8, the opening day of the Year of Mercy. The rules for the Latin and Eastern churches are*

*substantially the same since the differences in texts refer mainly to the different structures of the hierarchy with Latin churches having bishops and Eastern churches having eparchs and patriarchs. Pope Francis said the changes in the annulment process were motivated by "zeal for the salvation of souls," and particularly "charity and mercy" toward those who feel alienated from the church because of their marriage situations and the perceived complexity of the church's annulment process. The Vatican posted English versions of the texts in late October. The letter dealing with the Code of Canon Law follows, copyright © 2015 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

The gentle judge, our Lord Jesus, the shepherd of our souls, entrusted to the apostle Peter and to his successors the power of the keys to carry out the work of truth and justice in the church; this supreme and universal power of binding and loosing here on earth asserts, strengthens and protects the power of pastors of particular churches, by virtue of which they have the sacred right and duty before the Lord to enact judgment toward those entrusted to their care.<sup>1</sup>

Through the centuries, the church, having attained a clearer awareness of the words of Christ, came to and set forth a deeper understanding of the doctrine of the indissolubility of the sacred bond of marriage, developed a system of nullities of matrimonial consent and put together a juridical process more fitting to the matter so that ecclesiastical discipline might conform more and more to the truth of the faith she was professing.

All these things were done following the supreme law of the salvation of souls<sup>2</sup> insofar as the church, as Blessed Paul VI wisely taught, is the divine plan of the Trinity, and therefore all her institutions, constantly subject to improvement, work, each according to its respective duty and mission, toward the goal of transmitting divine grace and constantly promoting the good of the Christian faithful as the church's essential end.<sup>3</sup>

It is with this awareness that we decided to undertake a reform of the processes regarding the nullity of marriage, and we accordingly assembled a committee for this purpose comprised of men renowned for their knowledge of the law, their pastoral prudence and