

Editorial

In May 2015 Pope Francis published *Laudato Si'*,¹ his Encyclical Letter on Caring for our Common Home. Five years on, his appeal to every person on this planet remains as relevant.

“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. ... I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.”
(LS' § 13-14)

This issue of *Working Notes* is facilitating this dialogue by bringing together a selection of voices from across different sectors in Ireland. Through an integral ecology lens, we can see that “the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together” (LS' § 48). Only through finding and developing solutions that address these issues in an interconnected way can we achieve change.

The Covid-19 pandemic erupted while this edition of our journal was in development. The major upheaval it has caused has cast the inequalities that are embedded in our societies' functioning in a stark light. Reflecting on *Laudato Si'* during this time of uncertainty can help to illuminate a path to protect our common home with the type of communal action that, until now, has seemed impossible. “The present crisis is an opportunity to start anew, and to make sure that the world that arises after this crisis has passed is sustainable and just.”²

The essay “‘Everything is Interconnected’: Interdisciplinary Challenges in Implementing Environmental Policy,” by Gerard Whelan SJ, introduces us to the teachings of a leading climate economist, Ottmar Edenhofer — specifically his policies on carbon pricing. Whelan approaches the topic from a pragmatic perspective encouraging those working within the Catholic Social Teaching tradition to engage more readily with the discipline of economics to facilitate the development of integral ecology policy proposals. For policies to be truly effective they need to not only garner public support but also achieve the goal of lowering emissions; “What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis” (LS' §109). Whelan shows us how the social implication of policies cannot be disconnected from their perceived effectiveness, and explores the tensions of the ethics and the practicalities of implementing effective climate policies. What is ethical is not always the most palatable to implement, resulting in developing policies that will be acceptable rather than fair. Utopia literally means “no place,” and in Whelan’s conception, utopian thinking has no place in responsible policy formation in this “second-best world.”

¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*.

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

² <https://laudatosiweek.org/coronavirus/> (accessed on 20/05/2020)

This same quandary is articulated from a different direction in Orla Kelleher's essay, "A Reflection on the Experience of Climate Justice in Ireland" depicting Ireland's journey in developing its Climate Laws and Just Transition policies in the context of international law. Kelleher tracks the lack of ambition in climate action by the Government which has resulted in Taoiseach Leo Varadkar admitting in 2018 that we would not meet our 2020 target for emissions reductions.³ While this failure will cost millions of Euro in fines to the EU it also brings into sharp relief Ireland's shirking of responsibilities towards the most vulnerable people, both at home and globally. Pope Francis recognised that climate change does not impact people equally but that "its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries over the coming decades..... Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that same sense of responsibilities for our fellow men and women." Kelleher argues that strong climate laws will be a vital component of Ireland's climate justice movement, echoing Pope Francis' teachings that "the establishment of a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems has become indispensable."

This lack of ambition by the Irish Government to generate and implement effective climate legislation is compounded by the active subsidisation of the natural gas industry in Ireland as Clodagh Daly's essay, "Meet the New Boss; Same as the Old Boss – The subsidisation of natural gas as a decarbonisation pathway in Ireland", highlights. Daly's meticulous study of the different ways in which the Irish Government is diverting public money into the private gas industry articulates how "economic interests easily end up trumping the common good" (LS' § 135). She illustrates the results of the lobbying power of the fossil fuel industry by reflecting, not only on direct producer subsidies, but also the lax environmental regulations and the favourable research opportunities. The risks posed by facilitating the expansion of the fossil fuel industry in Ireland, are borne not only by the Irish tax-payer but by the vulnerable in society who will suffer the most by the effects of climate change. Redistributing the vast quantities of money currently propping up the fossil fuel industry into public infrastructure for the 'common good,' will facilitate Ireland's transition into a decarbonised society.

While progression of certain areas of environmental and climate policy by the Irish Government has been recalcitrant, there are certain areas in which innovative solutions are being trialed and rolled out. Dr Caroline Sullivan, a leading researcher in farmland biodiversity policy, discusses results-based agri-schemes in her essay "High Nature Value (HNV) Farmland: Getting Results from Farming for Biodiversity." Loss of biodiversity and deterioration of environmental quality is an increasing problem in Ireland, with holistic agricultural policies needed to stem this deterioration. "Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for a quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation" (LS' § 36). Operating in some of the most beautiful places in Ireland, these types of schemes have the potential to transform agriculture in Ireland to protect both farmers and biodiversity as well as to reduce emissions. These results-based schemes are carefully designed and highly flexible, incorporating the principles of integral ecology. Careful dialogue with and incorporation of farmers in designing and implementing these programmes has resulted in more active participation than traditional agri-schemes. This follows Pope Francis' caution that "attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical interventions can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community. New processes taking shape cannot always fit into frameworks imported from outside; they need to be based in the local culture itself" (LS' § 144).

³Juno McEnroe, *Ireland will miss EU emission targets for 2020, admits Taoiseach* (Irish Examiner, Nov 21, 2018) <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/ireland-will-miss-eu-emission-targets-for-2020-admits-taoiseach-886731.html>

For climate and ecosystem-friendly policies to be successfully implemented, we need a collective ecological conversion. In his essay “Designing Within a Culture of Sustainability,” Michael Haslam illustrates, through Fritjof Capra’s philosophies, the role design and architecture can play, not only in designing low-energy buildings, but also in re-establishing our connection with nature. Pope Francis recognises the “interrelationships between living space and human behaviour”, and notes that “those who design buildings, neighbourhoods, public spaces and cities, ought to draw on various disciplines” in the service of “people’s quality of life, their adaption to the environment, encounter and mutual assistance” (LS’ § 150). Capra, whose thinking on systems is so fertile for designers, recognises an ally in the writings of Pope Francis.⁴ Designing with an eye on the larger interconnected system is an applied expression of what the Pope terms “integral ecology” (LS’ §10-16). As we see the increasing consequences of climate and biodiversity breakdown, there is an opportunity for designers and artists of all kinds to join in the challenge of designing a culture of sustainability, recognising how our independence is dependent on our place within a grand system of infinite complexity and diversity. Rarely have practical and philosophical questions intersected so explicitly.

Pope Francis notes that “integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation” (LS’ § 225), warning that “if we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers” (LS’ § 11). During this global health crisis we have experienced a much slower pace of life. The restrictions of movement we have placed on ourselves to slow the spread of Covid-19 could perhaps be a catalyst in our “ecological conversion” (LS’ § 216-227). In the words of the Irish writer, Michael Harding:

“Sometimes the virus feels like a darkness. And grief seeps up out of the ground. But yet the garden where I pass the time in the hills above Lough Allen was never as beautiful, or never as peaceful as it appears this spring time. ... I’m astonished by small things; the budding trees, the goofy gait of a pheasant, or two crows on an oak branch, wobbling in the wind as they sing their lamentations in the evening; like cowled monks, or like old bewildered men.”⁵

⁴ Fritjof Capra, *The Ecological Ethics and Systemic Thought of Pope Francis*, (2015)
<https://www.fritjofcapra.net/laudato-si-the-ecological-ethics-and-systemic-thought-of-pope-francis/>

⁵ Michael Harding, *The world was never this quiet in my entire life*, (Irish Times, 2020)
https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/michael-harding-the-world-was-never-this-quiet-in-my-entire-life-1.4222149?fbclid=IwAR1ksWrd7pE0xxhs4WsZmRhO4NAXwJ_qs0ti6ByyEvFpcgZDYmJE516aXS0