

Do We Really Feel Fine?

Towards an Irish Green New Deal

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THE PROBLEM: THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD

The world as we know it is falling apart, but in a thousand different ways. A pandemic rages, but contrary to what the dystopian movies taught us, society is intact. Climate stability is disintegrating, and the delicate ecological balance that allows life to flourish on Earth is severely compromised. But mostly, it's business as usual. Those willing to look could not fail to notice the marked decline in biodiversity, but we still use toxic weed killer to ensure the verges between our motorways look neat to us as we sit in gridlocked traffic.

The political theorist Frederic Jameson famously mused that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. Even as we live through the former, we prefer not to muse on the possible death of the latter. Writing in the summer of 2020, our airwaves, newspapers and social media feeds are full of talk about getting back to normal – meaning escaping the lethal threat posed by SARS-COV-2 – even though our old normal was propelling us deeper into a mass extinction event that will, within a few decades, threaten the very existence of civilisation. “Imagining the end of capitalism” feels like an idea from the 19th Century we forgot to update; another

grand utopian vision destined to never get going or to quickly go off the rails.

Our political culture lurches from crisis to crisis. With our memories truncated by a constant stream of data reduced to 280 characters, we must reach back to remember what life was like before the planes hit the Twin Towers, before the Credit Default Swaps collapsed, or before we first heard about a sickness afflicting people in Hubei Province. We can weave a narrative that includes the disparate pieces of recent history, but the story does not make much sense.

Public exhaustion with political programmes has generated a dangerous cynicism. What can we expect when political campaigns triumph with slogans about “Change” or “The Republic on the Move!” or “A New Politics” and then go on to intensify the policies that have left people so alienated in the first place. We fixate on individuals or lose ourselves in data analysis while the climate and biodiversity crisis accelerates. We label everything we don't like as “populism” while vast swathes of the population remain disconnected from the political process. We index all our political decisions towards economic growth using a measurement that cannot track what the growth is for or how its bounty is distributed.

A Global Jesuit Vision



As an initiative of the Irish Jesuit Province, the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice is part of a global network of initiatives that hope to educate, serve justice, encourage reconciliation, and bring about spiritual growth. We are guided by the Society's Universal Apostolic Principles, the four cardinal orientations which provide a blueprint for our work for the next decade: Showing the way to God, Walking with the Excluded, Journeying with Youth, and Caring for our Common Home. In particular, we are inspired by the call to "Care for our Common Home",¹ which has its basis in *Laudato Si'*.

Through our collaboration and identification with this genuinely global movement, we offer a distinct vision within Irish environmentalism which resists the sterile and misleading dichotomies that constrain our discourse. The line between spirituality and activism is porous. The secularist impulse that often characterises contemporary Irish political discourse may be explicable in terms of our recent history, but it comes across as inescapably parochial when we look around the world, especially to the Global South, and see how religious commitment, spiritual practice, and a holistic appreciation of all the different ways human beings discover and construct meaning are at play. We are unapologetically presenting a Christian – specifically an Ignatian – vision of environmental and political care, but this is explicitly and intentionally inclusive of those who do not share such convictions. The Jesuit preferences call us "collaborate with Gospel depth, for the protection and renewal of God's creation" and, as such, we will make common cause with anyone and everyone who shares that vision. ■

The environment cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on it but we do not – we cannot – heed the warning because the system we have designed drowns out all objections. How can infinite growth come from finite resources? How can we be generating real wealth if we are impoverishing the very soil on which we stand? What's the point of increasing numbers on balance sheets if the gap between the winners and losers in our society grows ever greater? These are not the complaints of idealists; this is the only realistic position left. To seek to return to the old normal is not just depressing. It is utterly delusional.

We can only understand the world we describe and precision in speech generates possibility in action but our political culture reaches in vain for metaphors or frameworks to help navigate this chaos. The great challenges of the last century – defeating fascism or exploring space – fall short in different ways. The threat of climate and biodiversity catastrophe is greater than fascism, and the challenge is almost the opposite of a war – seeing people as expendable to achieve our goals means we have already lost. The problem is more complex than putting a man on the moon because there are cultural factors at play more intricate than any technological issue and the benefits to be gained are much more profound. It is simply the case that climate and biodiversity breakdown is the biggest problem humanity has ever faced. Beginning by stating that we don't have all the answers is worse than banal – it is as useless as someone intruding on an Allied planning meeting in 1940 to point out that no one knew how to get an army of men on to the beaches of northern France. If the threat is genuinely real, then it demands that we focus our resources, attention, and creativity in response. D-Day took longer than 24 hours and we won't have a carbon-free (and nuclear-free) electricity system in the lifetime of this parliament. But as the current pandemic demonstrates, there are capacities for collective collaboration and massive, dramatic policy developments when we agree they are warranted.

The pedant contrarian can score points on prime-time radio programs by rephrasing the existence of this crisis as an excuse to not act against this crisis, but the more

¹ The Society of Jesus, 'Caring for Our Common Home', <https://www.jesuits.global/uap/caring-for-our-common-home/>.

fundamental obstacle may be the categories of “environmentalism” itself. Easily maligned as a bourgeois movement, it has failed to make the case that the situation warrants dramatic intervention. Whether in thrall to the myths of capitalism or the utopian dreams of socialist revolution, Irish environmentalism, despite its very best efforts, has failed to connect the crisis now upon us with the lives and hopes of the fabled “ordinary person”. We do not point the finger at others, but include ourselves in this critique. Whether railroaded by sloppy philosophy, the savvy of our opponents, or the conformism of our own communities, it remains the case that a coherent narrative is rarely expounded. Whatever the “Green movement” has been doing has produced a situation where we are associated with urban elites and it is widely assumed are antagonistic towards rural Ireland. Whatever we have been doing needs to stop. It is not working.

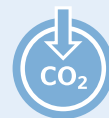
The hunger to replace the politics of crisis with something genuinely new – not just the tired old dreams of the 1800s – grows daily. Around the edges we see how the assumptions of Modernity are already fraying: in a public health crisis, many people do not trust the health advice; in elections, many people do not use their voice; in the face of an ecological cataclysm in the physical world, people retreat to virtual entertainment. This is a system that benefits the very few at the expense of the very many. This is a system that is hurtling towards disaster, but the suffering will not be shared equally. Already it is the poor and the marginalised who suffer the most. Whatever we call this system – capitalism or neoliberalism or business as usual – is a zombie slouching towards total chaos. Our prophets speak in unison – our house is on fire,¹ the earth is in a death spiral,² and the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together.³ Almost everyone agrees. The centre cannot hold. Yet no one can act.

¹ Greta Thunberg, ‘Our House Is Still on Fire and You’re Fuelling the Flames’, World Economic Forum, 21 January 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/greta-speech-our-house-is-still-on-fire-davos-2020/>.

² David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: A Story of the Future* (London: Penguin, 2019).

³ Naomi Klein, *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal* (London: Allen Lane, 2019); George Monbiot, *How Did We Get Into This Mess?: Politics, Equality, Nature* (London: Verso Books, 2016); Pope Francis, ‘Laudato Si’: Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home (Vatican, May 2015), http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html.

Carbon Capture: Storing Up False Hope



While not currently available at scale, carbon capture and storage is stubbornly viewed by policymakers as a viable option for reducing carbon emissions. This awaited future emergence of scalable technology undergirds the argument for the present continued use of fossil fuels. Ireland’s current plan for achieving the 2050 targets relies on the emergence of this not-yet-existing technology. That is not policy; as it stands, it is fantasy.

The process involves separating carbon dioxide from industrial sources,¹ transporting it by pipeline, injecting it deep underground where it would be stored in geological reservoirs including depleted oil and gas fields. While it can be human nature to place hope on this ostensibly simple solution, there are several issues associated with this plan.² Carbon capture is a risky and expensive technology with many gaps in knowledge remaining and scant demonstration of the long-term safe storage of the captured carbon.

It is simply not a substitute for drastic emissions reduction.

Ervia, the company that manages Ireland’s gas and water network, is particularly interested in new iterations of carbon capture for the role it could play in ‘carbon-neutral’ gas powered electricity generation. As this technology would be utilised at point of combustion to capture carbon dioxide it would do nothing for the associated methane leaks³ that occur during extraction and transportation. >

¹ This can include coal, biomass or gas fired power plants or any other large industries such as cement production.

² Haroon Kheshgi, Heleen de Coninck, and John Kessels, ‘Carbon Dioxide Capture and Storage: Seven Years after the IPCC Special Report’, *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 17, no. 6 (2012): 563–567.

³ Methane is a greenhouse gas almost 90 times more efficient at trapping heat than carbon dioxide in a 20-year period. For a more detailed account, see: Clodagh Daly, ‘Meet the New Boss; Same as the Old Boss – The Subsidisation of Natural Gas as a Decarbonisation Pathway in Ireland’, *Working Notes* 34, no. 86 (June 2020), <https://www.jcfjie/article/meet-the-new-boss-same-as-the-old-boss-the-subsidisation-of-natural-gas-as-a-decarbonisation-pathway-in-ireland/>.

Simplified solutions often betray a simplified understanding of the problems. The environmental crisis is not associated with carbon dioxide emissions alone. By hailing carbon capture and storage as the silver bullet solution to the climate crisis we run the risk of ignoring the other issues such as air pollution, environmental destruction from extraction and transportation of fossil fuels.

As it is for carbon capture and storage, so it is for all technofixes. Solutions such as spraying sulphur into the atmosphere, adding salt to the clouds and deploying mirrors into space to reflect the sunlight back are all lauded as possible solutions to climate yet could lead to further ecological degradation and distract from the real hard work needed to restore our relationship with our ecosystems. In an ecological system as complex as ours “merely technical solutions run the risk of addressing symptoms and not the more serious underlying problems.”⁴ ■

The old revolutionaries worried metaphorically speaking, everything solid melts into air. Centuries into the project they protested, we have burned the fossils of long-dead creatures into the atmosphere to such a degree that the ice caps are receding, the coral reefs are dying, the sea water is acidifying, the soil is denuding, the forests are retreating, the deserts are expanding, climates are shifting, storms are strengthening, droughts are lengthening, extinctions are spreading. But at the same time the rich are getting richer, our lives are being processed into data to be surveilled and tracked and analysed without our intervention, capital can flow freely but people are trapped behind borders, wages stagnate even while productivity grows, services that are needed universally can only be purchased at a price, the West continues to pillage the South, but does so now with the awoken linguistic tics that suggest justice, and absolutely nothing can be achieved without recourse to debt.

It’s the end of our world as we know it, and we feel fine. The collapse is so gradual, so indisputably modelled, so intricately mapped that it does not deserve the term *apocalypse*, which in its true sense means an immediate and sudden *unveiling*. The Irish writer Mark O’Connell, in his excellent recent book describes his boredom at how the collapse of civilization is already normalised: “It’s all horsemen, all the time.”⁴ We change the station, we click to another site, we seek for something, anything, to distract us from this catastrophic normalcy.

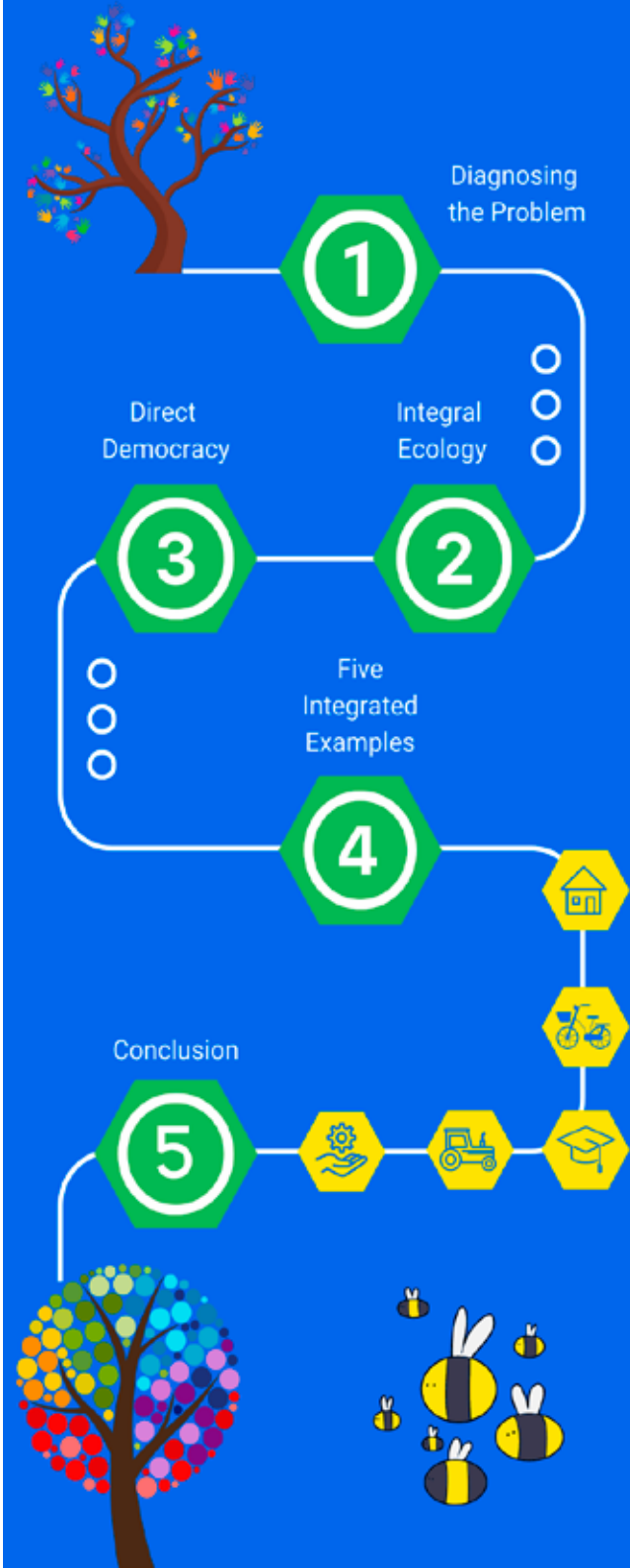
It is time to build a new normal. It is past time to liberate ourselves from carbon captivity. It is time to construct a new narrative that refuses to mystify planetary devastation behind line graphs and percentages. Whether we call it a just transition or a green new deal or an ecological conversion, it is time to finally reject the story we are living, which is so baffling, confusing, contradictory, and boring. Our policies after the pandemic cannot be a more refined version of the old normal. A new tale must be told.

Is this really the end of the world?? Surely some revelation is at hand?

⁴ Pope Francis, ‘Laudato Si’: Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home’ (Vatican, May 2015), §144, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

⁴ Mark O’Connell, *Notes from an Apocalypse: A Personal Journey to the End of the World and Back* (London: Granta Books, 2020).

Towards a Green New Deal



A SOLUTION: INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice has found an unusual source of insight as we seek to navigate this lamentable terrain: the Pope. Francis published *Laudato Si'* five years ago to global acclaim. The document has had little impact in Ireland, no doubt for understandable cultural and historical reasons. Yet we are convinced that there is profound wisdom in the approach advocated by Francis, and that it has significance far beyond those who are Christians.

Although rightfully interpreted as an environmental text, *Laudato Si'* is also a piece of trenchant political critique. Francis' fundamental conviction is that there is no way to consider the climate and biodiversity crisis apart from the profound social problems created by our heedless commitment to GDP growth without qualification. The roots of the ecological crisis are established by human practices. The "dominant technocratic paradigm" reduces the complexity of life down to simple one-dimensional pursuit of *more* without reference to purpose, "a technique of possession, mastery and transformation". All efforts to care for Earth will flounder unless we oppose this alienated parody of progress and instead seek to care for our brothers and sisters who are marginalised by an economic system that presents greed as virtue.⁵ We must fight against the extinction of species, but we must also resist the elimination of native cultures and indigenous ways of life. *Laudato Si'* is thorough in its diagnoses of the exhausting contradictions we endure lurching from crisis to crisis, and is vigilant against how a

⁵ An assumption exists among policymakers that if mainstream economics are simply tweaked, then the ill-effects of climate change can be mitigated. However, a recent paper concluded that mainstream economics is, in fact, an active obstacle to clear thinking and effective action on resources, the environment, and climate change. Consider: James K. Galbraith, 'Economics and the Climate Catastrophe', *Globalizations*, 2020, 1-6.

The Growth of Degrowth



Contrary to its name, degrowth is a growing field of thought within economics and ecology. Prompted by economic models of extracting infinite growth from finite resources, early theorising focused on the contradictions inherent to business as usual. Tim Jackson, in *Prosperity Without Growth*,¹ argues that the ‘decoupling’ of growth and resource-use through greater efficiencies is fanciful. He surmises that societal prosperity will become impossible because of the commitment to infinite growth and its exacerbation of inequality and wealth accumulation for a small cohort.

The immediacy of climate change events and environmental degradation has brought a new impetus to degrowth. In *Doughnut Economics*, Kate Raworth continues to shift the focus away from quarterly growth reports to how environmental sustainability can be addressed alongside social justice concerns.² Raworth concludes that only the creation and maintenance of a socially just and environmentally safe space within boundaries will prevent human deprivation and planetary degradation. Most recently, in *Less is More*, Jason Hickel utilises a sharper redistributive edge by identifying the key role of taxation policy.³ He argues that degrowth is the only viable path forward to sustain and even improve human wellbeing.

Aside from new metrics, the role of the State needs to be rethought and we need to move to a stable state economy. Hickel’s primary solution is the decommodification of public goods and an expansion of the commons. Degrowth requires cutting the excesses of the richest through progressive taxation, while redistributing existing resources >

reactionary response will easily lurch into a green technocracy, where expertise overrules democratic deliberation or some variety of eco-fascism which achieves mitigation through State-sanctioned force, repression, and dispossession.

But primarily, *Laudato Si’* remains a theological argument. It is a conversation with Francis’ namesake, the saint from Assisi who so famously cherished the created world. It is predicated on an understanding that the order and beauty we find in nature has meaning. We love the world because the world was made, and is sustained, in love. Integral ecology is that approach which recognises that the response to the climate and biodiversity catastrophe is “inseparable from the notion of the common good.” We cannot love our neighbour without loving our neighbourhood, and equally, there is no remedy for environmental devastation that does not involve social rejuvenation.

That it is a theological document does not mean that its only audience is people already convinced by the claims of Christianity. Those who do not consider themselves Christians can still engage critically and respectfully with theological concepts. Francis states that “we need a conversation which includes everyone,” while interacting extensively and seriously with contemporary secular thought throughout the letter. Even those who are antagonistic towards Christian conceptions of reality can appreciate the distinctive tone of this manifesto; the fury directed at a “throwaway culture”, joined by a stubborn commitment to hope and generosity, as signalled by the title. *Laudato Si’* is a call to praise, a recognition that the beauty and complexity of our environment calls out of us a response marked by joy, a super-abundant fertility that mirrors in our souls what we so commonly encounter in the world around us. This is a proposition that is markedly different from the cynicism and insincerity that marks so much of our political discourse.

Integral ecology, then, may be a theological claim, but it is the best kind: sourced in the rich history of Christian ethical and spiritual thinking and practice, but directed towards all people of goodwill. As Francis frames it, radical

¹ Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

² Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (London: Random House Business, 2018).

³ Jason Hickel, *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World* (London: William Heinemann, 2020).

environmental action is the inescapable and distinctive responsibility of every Christian, but it is a responsibility to be shared in solidarity with all who believe differently and those who cannot say they believe anything at all. It is not a creedal document that requires agreement with every paragraph. It is an invitation into dialogue, recognising that the scale of the problem requires listening to all voices and hearing from all perspectives.

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice seeks to explore what integral ecology means on a practical policy level as we respond to the housing and homelessness crisis, to the injustices apparent in our criminal justice system, and in our economic arrangements. It is our contention that the disparate, diluted, often half-hearted political policies that have left Ireland as a climate laggard are informed by a philosophical failure. For a generation, the Green movement in Ireland has pursued technocratic expertise and developed admirable, sophisticated policy stances to address this issue and answer that question. But the lack of a coherent narrative means that all our efforts are rejected by the reigning hegemonic power or recapitulated in a domesticated form.

and investing in social goods like universal healthcare, education, affordable housing, alongside libraries and public parks. This would allow an improvement to the welfare purchasing power of incomes so that people can access the things they need to live well, without needing ever-higher incomes. Raworth supports a re-envisioning of the State which strategically invests in areas not concerned with growth. In agreement with Hickel, the State would provide universal basic services by making public goods available to all.

Infinite growth cannot continue with finite resources. Yet, there is little critique of this dogma within Irish policymaking. A moment of reflection would at least acknowledge contradictions. Serious reflection can only conclude that such incoherent thinking kills people and the current trajectory will have devastating effects on ordinary lives. ■



Integral ecology is a source from which we can weave a coherent, compelling, and convincing counter-narrative to the tired and increasingly desperate calls to return to business as usual. To say there is no ecological transformation without social transformation is to state an objective truth, but we need one that spills over in a way that reorganises our political priorities. The only humanism left is one that seeks to remedy social inequality as a means to avert ecological collapse. All these crises that consume us and all this fear induced in us remains a distraction from the definitive catastrophe that looms above us, lurches towards us and already lurks all around us. The climate and biodiversity catastrophe is not just one more problem along with all the others. It is the singular issue that exposes the suicidal nature of our current course.

Incremental change may be all that is possible in practice. Moderate rhetoric might be a winning strategy come election time. But we must speak with ringing moral clarity: the end of our world is already upon us. The voices within the establishment posture about realism and maturity, but their stalling is reckless. Our time to make a difference is short, so we must take positions of power that are open to us. We cannot wait for a better time than now; our time to make a difference is short. We must not squander the power we have on yet more of the same sort of thinking that got us here.

We must be clear that while consensus builds in words around the need for action, those who occupy the controlling seats in our parliaments and our marketplaces will not willingly vacate their place or discard the practices and projects they have developed, regardless of whatever elegant and articulate argument we deploy to demonstrate the futility of their thinking. Success in the face of this imminent breakdown will require struggle against forces with more resources than we have. Our rebellion against the status quo requires an agitating philosophy sufficiently different from prevailing wisdom to disorientate those who oppose adaptation and attract those yet on the fence. This is a moment when integral ecology demands our attention.

Through an integral ecology framework, the fundamental reality can be remembered:

the economy exists to serve society, not the other way round. Growth for its own sake, without reference to the common good, is nihilism wrapped in the promise of comfort. Everything is connected: there is an intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, and reorganising our society and economy to adapt to the reality of climate and biodiversity breakdown is not a “cost”, it is an opportunity. The narrative that emerges from seeing what is plainly true – that our ecological crisis is inseparable from our social crisis – transforms even how we describe simple policy decisions. Every euro spent is not sunk, it is invested. Every step away from the growth mindset is a step back towards strength. Liberation is impossible without aiming to be carbon-free. We only truly care for Earth when we care for each other.

Integral ecology clears space to describe our political miasma more compellingly. Francis talks about the *rapidification* of our societies as a consequence of the techno-economic paradigm which prevails. In lieu of the haste with which we lurch from crisis to crisis, integral ecology demands the patient attention to connect the micro with the macro, embedding the individual’s experience of the climate and biodiversity catastrophe within the social challenges that are generated. Integral ecology allows us to join the environmental and the social together in terms that do not require a familiarity with the long-term effect of methane dispersion in the atmosphere, to describe the problems we face without reducing them to private individual actions in response. In this framing, housing is no longer a separate issue from ecology that we can get around to retrofitting at some point. In this understanding, how we welcome immigrants is no longer a distinct sphere from environmental care. From this perspective, the sustained period of asset price inflation which we are enduring, which benefits the wealthy at the cost of everybody else, is no longer some unfortunate happening beyond our control; it is a product of the rapidification which looks at our common home as a resource to be exploited and treats us similarly.

Before we can construct a meaningful Green New Deal for Ireland, we must first enact this takeover of our political imagination by

the terms of reality revealed in the ecological crisis. Climate and biodiversity breakdown are not specialised problems to be addressed by a niche office within a single ministry. The closest present analogy is that the challenge of the ecological crisis is greater even than our present half-century long obsession with GDP growth. Education has been replaced with job preparation, the arts has been repackaged as an industrial sector, and priorities across the public sector have been manipulated by an empty-vessel concept called “efficiency”. The narrative that has been spun – exposed as threadbare by the pandemic – emphasised personal autonomy and the pursuit of self-interest but it also reconstituted questions that were previously outside the remit of economic analysis as cost-benefit proposals.

A tool designed for the narrow purpose of budgetary planning is now recited ad nauseam as justification for an entire way of life. Any political conversation that cannot guarantee growth in the measurement known as GDP can't get off the ground. GDP captures all that is wrong with our obsession with data: it is a useful tool, extended so as to often be worse than useless. It bypasses well-being, it ignores pollution, it leaves untouched the vast realm of altruism and social care that is not economically transacted but upon which the economy rests. Instead it offers a truncated picture of reality that functions to narrow all conversations that suggest fundamental change. It grows and expands, while employment, living standards, and the real facts of social mobility retract.

We cannot dismantle the Master's house with the Master's tools, but we can learn from them how things are put together. A successful intervention against the climate and biodiversity catastrophe now unfurling demands a political imagination that integrates the demand for justice and the demand for sustainability as the basis for a rejuvenated society. This is the beginning of a story that can shatter the misconception that environmental concern is an indulgence of the wealthy or the young, and a death sentence to the tired call-and-response discourse that allows soft-climate sceptics to present themselves as hard-nosed realists.

Trading Away Justice



Whatever set of movements, documents, and policies emerge to constitute a much-needed green deal for Ireland, we must ensure that we use them to ensure the transition to a carbon-free society is a means by which to achieve greater justice and equity for all, especially for those who are marginalised. A multi-layered radical experiment in national, regional, and local democracy is a means by which to initiate and guide this transformation. This guards against the twin risks of technocracy and populism, framing our discourse around widely agreed upon, scientifically-informed models but implementing them with local adaptability and flexibility.

This approach cannot be proposed as comprehensive because so much of our potential policy arena is determined in advance by international agreements which are opaque, if not impermeable, to democratic consultation. Without a revision of how macro trade deals and bilateral agreements are developed, we cannot hope to achieve a Just Transition. Last summer's controversy over the incoherencies of the EU promoting a New Green Deal while also committing to the Mercosur deal is one recent example of how the democratic viability of a just transition to a low carbon society is bankrupted by what appears to be extra-democratic arrangements.

Citizen engagement grounded on a radical commitment to democracy is the only path available considering the deficit in electoral support for transformative environmental change and the strength of the status quo powers that seek to shuffle their feet. Power will not be relinquished without a battle; fighting to redraw these documents – a painstaking and expert task – to represent citizens before sectors is not tangential to the environmental project. ■

Climate Dialogue: Activating Communities

The scale of the problem we face is so complex, that it is only through a complex arrangement of conversations that we can explore possible solutions. These conversations will need to take place in a flexible system that allows for changes in circumstances and functions. Engaging and inviting people to participate in broad environmental topics; targeting specific communities for particular issues and moving the context of the discussion on to embrace and protect the natural environment in every aspect of our national conversation as well as facilitating action will all be needed if we are to succeed.



One of the first steps in this process is piquing people's interest. Public concern for climate change is largely derived from media consumption.¹ Reassessing how the media, in particular Ireland's State-funded broadcaster RTÉ, covers and discusses climate change and action would contribute massively to the national dialogue. Ireland has particularly low climate coverage which peaks around international events and extreme weather events and mainly concentrates on the political and ideological dimension of climate change. A prolonged national awareness campaign would help stress the dangers of climate breakdown and the importance of action.

Increasing the awareness of the public, while important, does not equate to a dialogue so much as a monologue. Mechanisms allowing engagement with local people, academics, and experts in their respective fields (agriculture, climate science, energy) will be needed.² While national policies and targets are required >

¹ Eileen Culloty et al., 'Climate Change in Irish Media', EPA Research Report (Ireland: Environmental Protection Agency, 2019), http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/climate/Research_Report_300.pdf

² "What are needed are new pathways of self-expression and participation in society." Pope Francis, "Fratelli Tutti" (Vatican, October 2020), §187, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

A METHOD: DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

What would it look like in practice to try to implement an integral ecology approach to policy? Engaging with the finest, evolving scientific expertise is essential for any response to this crisis. It is impossible to grapple with the catastrophe that is coming without recourse to advanced expertise. We rely on a vast number of scientists in dozens of fields to track and model the changes that are occurring and to generate possible responses. The effort spans society, from public research universities, to private firms, to citizen ecology that conducts biodiversity censuses or community groups engaged in grassroots environmental restoration. We also need poets and musicians, artists, and pastors to help us integrate this learning. In the contemporary arid jargon, this crisis calls for collaboration across STEM and the Arts and Humanities, along with civil society.

But while these responses are essential, we are again bound to fail as long as these domains remain the primary point of engagement with the problem. As such, the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice proposes a comprehensive social and political experiment in consultative democracy as the preparatory step towards a formalised Green New Deal. Integrating democratic wisdom with technical and creative expertise is a solid methodological approach to explore what policies would best encapsulate the vision of integral ecology. How do we specify the responses needed to ensure a just transition into a carbon-free future? The path forward is dialogical, not technocratic.

The malaise with electoral politics cannot be addressed by refined slogans or A/B tested campaigns from marketing executives who have successfully rebranded as change-makers. For the last decade we have seen progressive politics trade in the language of seeing and hearing and standing with those on the margins while remaining blind and deaf and passive in the face of the escalating extinction event. Those left behind by the onward march of a growing economy that never seems to benefit them do not need a more calculating political representation. They need to represent themselves. Gathering people –

diverse and disagreeing people – around tables to talk and listen and debate is the only viable method for crafting a genuinely new politics.⁶ Integral ecology will arise from integrating conversations.

The Constitutional Convention and the Citizens' Assembly were the first steps towards this sort of an approach. We propose that this collective deliberation be designed so as to inform and equip the widest selection of our citizenry in a sustained conversation about the kind of society they want to pass on to the next generation. The reigning common sense is so committed to private property, private self-interest, and private autonomy that no narrational transformation is likely to occur without such deliberation. A pandemic arrives and the middle-classes and the middle-aged long to get stuck back into the middle of how life used to be when we were exhausting ourselves and our planet in pursuit of illusory percentage points of productivity gains. But a large-scale conversation – the like of which we have never attempted before – will offer the foundations to think through, with a green political imagination, what we want to have on offer for the children born today as they reach adulthood. The children of Millennials, Generation Alpha, will face unique challenges as they grow up in a world that is scrambling to cope with the cascading effects of climate breakdown.

The scale of the problem we face is so complex, that only a complex arrangement of conversations can hope to help us think through possible solutions. The steps that need to be taken presently appear beyond the reach of the electorate. Only when bringing everyone to the table can we hope to generate the conversations where no strategy is automatically off the table.⁷ The forces that seek to dampen or oppose climate and

⁶ "Lack of dialogue means that in these individual sectors people are concerned not for the common good, but for the benefits of power or, at best, for ways to impose their own ideas. Round tables thus become mere negotiating sessions, in which individuals attempt to seize every possible advantage, rather than cooperating in the pursuit of the common good. The heroes of the future will be those who can break with this unhealthy mindset and determine respectfully to promote truthfulness, aside from personal interest." Pope Francis, 'Fratelli Tutti' (Vatican, October 2020), §202, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

⁷ No humanistic strategy. Implicit and explicit in our integrated ecology proposal is an outright rejection of the failed utopias that arise with depressing regularity from the minds of the technocrats and populists. Nuclear power or fantasy carbon capture technology only accelerate our problem. Closing the borders and building a verdant halcyon splendid in her isolation only creates new problems while evading the present crisis.

to ensure Ireland is on the right path towards sustainability, it is at the local, ground level that these policies need to be implemented. Herein lies the importance of meaningful engagement with grassroots groups and local communities. Early and sustained consultation with community members who will be impacted most by climate action and environmental restoration projects can help identify and remediate issues that arise early in the project development and implementation. While this would obviously result in more work during the development stage of any project, it could help generate a better solution and negate any issues down the line which would come in the form of appeals, protests, and objections. Engaging at the local level can also result in more activated communities.³

While the importance of involving local stakeholders cannot be overstated, it is only one layer of the complex conversation that needs to happen. For this dialogue to be beneficial in transforming our environment and society it must be guided by experts. To develop truly holistic and environmentally sustainable action plans, ecologists, hydrologists, soil scientists, public health experts, climatologists, land use planners and environmental NGOs must be involved in the development stage beyond the current situation where some policy is mainly dictated by industry. But the category of "expert" must be expanded beyond this narrow interpretation to recognise those who speak from the Humanities, from the Arts, and from deep embodied local knowledge that is so easily overlooked when we inhabit the gaze of the technocrat. Only by grappling with the full complexity of our ecological situation and considering all possible interactions and consequences can we make progress.

This complex arrangement of conversation will require systems in place which facilitate it. Efforts and capabilities at >

³ Jens Newig et al., 'The Environmental Performance of Participatory and Collaborative Governance: A Framework of Causal Mechanisms', *Policy Studies Journal* 46, no. 2 (2018): 269–297.

both national and local government will need to increase to meaningfully engage public participation. While the Constitutional Conventions are important inspirations for this kind of intensified democratic deliberations, as representative samples of the population at large they were designed in such a way as to almost guarantee excluding the most marginalised and directly affected. On the other hand more informal and localised fora such as the PeopleTalk project have a lot to offer. In 2013 Galway County Council invited PeopleTalk⁴ to set up a Citizen's Jury with an open-ended brief to consider people's experience of government at ground level and come up with proposals. The Jurors held listening sessions around the county and they were also informed that they would receive all necessary back up of expertise and administrative experience to assist their inquiries. They rejected this offer, however, and instead they devised an entirely novel approach. They asked to meet public servants working at ground level in different agencies including the County Council, the Gardai, the HSE and Social Protection. This approach proved to be highly effective and resulted in practical proposals which were promptly implemented. This model could usefully be adapted to a national dialogue on climate action.

Building a rich ecology of fora, across all levels of government and with different formalities, in which to discuss how climate and biodiversity breakdown impacts localities and the steps that can be taken in response is essential for including all voices. Trained facilitators and full-time coordinators at local authority level who are able to translate local conversations to inform the national agenda will be vital.⁵ Recruiting ecologists, planners and engineers into local authorities to increase the capability >

biodiversity adaptation know how to win if we allow the struggle to occur in their territory. Returning power to people in their localities is an insurrectionist move which establishes the maximum space of response instead of allowing the terms of the conversation to be set by the people who have thus far failed to act.

As we read it, *Laudato Si'* is an inoculation against the risk of tyranny hiding behind these crises. Without intervention, it is not the case that everyone's homes will be swept up in seasonal flooding, nor that everyone's pantries will run dry during years of bad harvests, nor that everyone's standard of living will fall without ceasing. Some will profit massively – as we see with their net-worth gains during the pandemic, the 1% need never let a crisis go to waste. The two practical threats facing our political stability as the climate and biodiversity catastrophe bites deeper are fascism and/or autocracy. We should take a page out of the ruling classes' playbook – let's not waste this crisis but use its arrival as an opportunity to re-establish the truly democratic nature of our discourse and our policy formation and how it is we share in common the things we love the most.

Sceptics will reject all manifestos for a changed world with a brush of the hand, declaring that it's just all talk. They underestimate the power of simply talking, and more importantly, listening. Meeting with the other, with the opponent, even with the enemy, around a table and hearing their perspective, their position, their hopes and fears and taking that seriously – there are few avenues open to us with more potential for deep-rooted, authentically revolutionary change. By its nature, it will be an open process. We cannot guarantee in advance that the outcome will meet our particular policy preferences or reflect our deepest values. But whatever emerges it will be a compromise that is generated not as it stands currently – from a failure of principle, a weak hypocrisy – but from the integrity of welcoming our neighbour as an equal and recognising that the only way forward is to move together.

⁴ Edmond Grace SJ, 'Enabling Citizens: A Two-Way Street...' (Dublin: The Wheel, 2018), <https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2019-11/Two-Way%20Street.pdf>.

⁵ There are structures in place that could be used to facilitate this discussion. The Public Participation Network is already in place across the country and could be resourced to allow for a national discussion on climate action.

HOW DO WE INTEGRATE POLICIES?

In a journal dedicated to the theme of *Policies After a Pandemic*, it would be a cop-out to simply state that the crisis will be addressed by just getting together and talking it out. We have a conviction – which is precisely analogous to faith – that a method which foregrounds democratic deliberation will not lead us far astray and is a much more fertile investment of energy than the current technocratic system of centralised control where a select few ‘expert’ voices are listened to, public participation is a facade tick box exercise and where policies tend to lean towards sectoral interests.

The hunger for an alternative to slow collapse already has a shape – rampant inequality, precarious and meaningless labour, inaccessible housing, years of our lives spent commuting, the ceaseless demand to leave more and more of ourselves at work, if we are lucky enough to have it, the creeping suspicion that subsequent generations will have it even worse again – which marks out what people want in lieu of the present system. While we wholeheartedly support traditional ecological preoccupations it is important to note that the growing political appetite is not directed towards saving the whales, but about somehow retrieving the idea that people have a right to medical care without needing to pay for it.

We integrate the reality of climate and biodiversity into our political agenda through the means of an ecological conversion which allows us to see how these issues are not in competition for our attention and affection with traditional green concerns. They are only addressed when we see them as green concerns.

The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice is one of a number of groups that has already begun thinking about what this means in an Irish context. There is no aspect of our political life that is detached from this concern, but we will focus on five central social questions – housing, transport, education, agriculture, and human services – and explore how they integrate with the ecological challenge.

at local level will result in better planning, housing and transport overall. Barriers to implementing policies and action at the local level will need to be removed allowing for decisions to be made and action to be taken quickly and at reduced cost. Rational policies will need to be developed that allow for flexible, context specific solutions.⁶ Almost invariably, such an approach will require a shift away from the highly centralised budgeting system used in Ireland, divesting increasing power to local authorities to implement solutions that work well in specific places. The JCFJ is convinced that through focused climate dialogue, we can achieve justice best by putting our faith in the people. ■

⁶ Theresa O'Donohoe, 'Climate Dialogue, Covid19 Ready, in 7 Steps', Building Bridges between Policy and People (blog), 26 July 2020, <https://theresaod.com/2020/07/26/climate-dialogue-covid19-ready-in-7-steps/>.

Migration: When Regions Become Unliveable



For a nation which trades both on its history of emigration and its reputation as a welcoming country, Ireland's recent response to refugees and asylum seekers has been an abysmal failure. From the creation of a labyrinthine bureaucratic system for appeals, to the privatisation of accommodation, Ireland is severely ill-equipped for the rising levels of migration which will happen as a consequence of climate change and environmental breakdown.

Direct provision must be ended as a matter of urgency.

But this alone will not solve the myriad of policy failings which contribute to migrants and refugees remaining on the periphery of Irish society. In the five years up to 2019, 1.7 million people – Syrians, Afghans, and Iraqis – applied for asylum in Germany while Ireland received a paltry 16,882 applications. In spite of strong political opposition, Angela Merkel guides Germany to a compassionate immigration policy.¹ In Germany today more than 10,000 people have passed language tests to enrol in university. More than half work and pay taxes. Conversely, in Ireland, over 800 people with permission to remain languish in direct provision sites as the housing crisis prevents people moving on with their lives.

A public housing building programme will be a key policy strand to allow Ireland to play its part in the global response to climate migration. Examples of the scale needed are easy to find. Denmark plans to respond to its housing affordability crisis by building a new island – Lynetteholmen – with 35,000 new homes close to Copenhagen city centre.² A fifth will be >

¹ Philip Oltermann, 'How Angela Merkel's Great Migrant Gamble Paid off', The Observer, 30 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/30/angela-merkel-great-migrant-gamble-paid-off>.

² Maddy Savage and Benoit Derrier, 'The New Island Solving a Nordic Housing Crisis', BBC, 19 September 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/gallery/20190918-the-new-island-solving-a-nordic-housing-crisis>.

HOUSING POLICY IS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Homelessness has been normalised in Ireland. The number of people living without a home at any one time is about three times as high as it was six years ago. An entire industry has risen up to facilitate the government in sheltering people who fall into this dire situation – the majority of whom suffer from nothing more complex than a failure to pay stratospheric market rents. For decades, the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice has been at the forefront of the analysis of this problem and has insisted that this is not a crisis, so much as the logical endpoint of the policy positions pursued by successive governments. What is required is an ambitious commitment to publicly owned housing, a medium-term ban on evictions, and an expanded mortgage-to-rent scheme.

These steps would alleviate the homelessness crisis. But the housing crisis would persist. For a long time now, assets and investments have accrued value far faster than wages or inflation. There is no way we can have a situation where homes are a store of growing value and have a situation where everyone is housed – the market will always price homes beyond the reach of some.

This apparently intractable problem is utterly transformed when we reconceive the issue around environmental concerns. If housing becomes the forefront of our ecological response, we suddenly slice through the long-established distorting and unproductive orientation of the Irish economy towards real estate. By committing to a large-scale public housing project, the State can relieve the trauma of child homelessness, which is a scandal. But by using those developments as the means by which to lay out communities ready for the 21st century, they can catalyse a series of changes which make climate and biodiversity rehabilitation possible.

Ireland has a rich tradition in public housing developments that pre-dates the establishment of the State. It used to be a policy arena where experimentation occurred, whether that was with early rent-to-buy schemes or cutting-edge design. Developments in the 1960s and 1970s that

are often caricatured as abject failures – with ideological intent – contributed to a culture that overwhelmingly favoured the model of private ownership. Building projects waxed and waned depending on the larger economic and political context but we went from being an impoverished nation that habitually built 7500 social houses a year to being a wealthy nation that managed in 2015 to build only 75.⁸

Development fit for the challenges we face would reject the idea that public housing is a residual service provided to those with the least means. Following the example of some of the most liveable cities in the world – Copenhagen, Berlin, and Vienna are often cited but dozens of European cities could serve as role-models – we propose that this public housing would consist of a rich arrangement of traditional public housing, affordable housing, cost-rental housing, and co-operative housing. These developments should be designed with the expressed purpose of adapting to life stages and generating communities where there is a real demographic mix. They should be populated by space orientated towards flourishing biodiversity and designed to a specification that minimises the carbon footprint of the family home. Alongside a large-scale State-subsidised retrofitting project – which will go some way to addressing fuel poverty, which is one of the most obvious forms of deprivation exacerbated by complacent environmental policy – this initiative alone has the capacity to transform our environmental performance, promote our economic recovery after the pandemic, and to do so in a way that enshrines a fundamental facet of any just transition by offering secure and meaningful jobs to those who will be affected by the closure of highly polluting industries.

affordable rental housing for students and low earners. Financed entirely by the Danish government, this plan provides multi-generational, medium-density housing which is not car dependent.

High immigration is likely to have a detrimental effect on low-skilled and low-paid native workers. This is evident in the work practices, taxation loopholes and sick-pay policies which are endemic in meat processing plants in Ireland. Sloganeering about immigration is trivial; serious work needs to be done to make Ireland more open to new arrivals in reality. A critical question is how to deepen our commitment to openness, without harming the already precarious working class who are most at risk of being exploited by the capital-owning class. In a time of weak unions and growing inequality, immigration policies should be designed to ensure the bargaining power of workers is not weakened, but strengthened. ■

⁸ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 'Overall Social Housing Provision: Rebuilding Ireland - Progress against Targets', <https://www.housing.gov.ie/housing/social-housing/social-and-affordable/overall-social-housing-provision>.



HOUSING POLICY SPILLS INTO TRANSPORTATION POLICY

The standard suburban development model in Ireland since at least the 1970s has assumed private car ownership. By planning these new towns to be traversable by foot and bike and by connecting them to efficient public transport options, the contentious issue of transport gets reorganised on the local level towards environmental sustainability.

Adapting our transportation network features a number of stubborn challenges. As an island nation, we cannot easily forsake air travel. As an island with a small population, it is crucial that we maintain easy and affordable routes for foreign trade. As an island marked by sparse population spread, solutions like high-speed rail may be permanently out of reach. Industrial lobby groups which oppose moves to decarbonise the economy almost always make good arguments – as long as they are interpreted as if we are not actually in a climate and biodiversity crisis – and we should not assume that a magical technology will arise that achieves carbon neutrality overnight.

Recognising that there are aspects to this problem that remain knotted only emphasises the extent to which we should commit

fully to the aligned areas that are open to transformation. Ireland has a temperate climate. All but one of our cities are still within the scale that can be traversed easily by bike. The massive rise in cycling brought about by the Covid-19 lockdown has encouraged some local authorities to proactively develop solutions that make cycling a possibility for more and more people. For most of our journeys, most of the time, the majority of us do not need a car. With sustained and increased funding for public transport, especially focusing on accessibility for those who are mobility impaired, the question of where we live would be radically altered. As it stands, our housing developments and our cities, towns, and villages provoke us back into the gridlocked traffic.

One of the knock-on benefits of the kind of integrated housing policy we envision is the way in which it will provide genuine competition to the private market property development, which has been protected for too long by complacent government policy. If you can rent high quality housing at predictable and affordable rates in a local authority development or through a co-op, that is also arranged in a fashion that makes the need for a car optional, the developers who

have been satisfied to hastily throw up copy-and-paste dwellings for decades will have to get on board with the local loop transformation of transport policy.

We cannot solve all the problems at once, but when viewed as an environmental issue, housing suddenly cascades into a renewed vision for transportation. And that, in turn, affects other areas of policy.

TRANSPORTATION POLICY SPILLS INTO EDUCATIONAL POLICY

There are many significant trends in Irish education policy. One of the most striking is how the mode of transport to school has shifted towards private car ownership.⁹ There are few people who can step back and see this as a positive development. But it is a coherent response to the malaise in housing planning, to the pressure to balance the competing demands of work and family, and because there is often no option to walk safely, never mind cycle.

Integral ecology integrates the primary school into the heart of the community. The school already is a site of social mixing, where families with different stories of origin, different class positions, and different views on the world come together to participate in the kind of shared good which serves everyone. One of the slogans that Pope Francis calls upon most commonly is that “time is greater than space”. What he means by this is that lasting change occurs when processes shift. It is tempting to fight for domination and control of an issue, but it is much wiser to commit to developing the habits and practices that bring about the change needed without recourse to crushing opponents.

When we consider the physical fact of a school in the communities that we are calling for as a response to the housing and homelessness crisis, we will quickly recognise a significant

⁹ Continuing the early-autumn tradition of bemoaning the increase of traffic with the start of the academic year, two news articles, 21 years apart, show the ongoing dependence on private cars for school journeys. Most significantly, they elucidate how little has changed, ‘The School Run Is a Major Contributory Factor in the Growth of the City’s Traffic’, *The Irish Times*, 30 August 1999, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/the-school-run-is-a-major-contributory-factor-in-the-growth-of-the-city-s-traffic-1.221795>; Shauna Bowers, ‘Traffic Volume Increases up to 16% as Schools Reopen’, *The Irish Times*, 31 August 2020, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/traffic-volume-increases-up-to-16-as-schools-reopen-1.4342849>.

Taxation: A Simple Act of Solidarity



When the relevant parties gathered to discuss a potential Programme for Government in Spring 2020, one foundation was established before any other – there would be no tax hikes.

Taxation is one of those issues that brings the bigger picture into focus. We see why a new narrative must be woven when we consider how the present narrative around tax obstructs meaningful progress. Our language is revealing: citizen has been replaced by “taxpayer” and talking heads rail against the government spending “other people’s money”. You are a citizen of a republic without respect to the tax you pay; why is this linguistic tic towards feudalism not called out? The “Government” is made up of citizens who are taxpayers; why is this bogus public/private-sector dichotomy allowed to stand?

The facts are clear: our tax is some of the best value money we spend. It pays for streetlights and primary school blackboards and maternity leave. There is very little wasted. Apart from telecoms – an industry at the heart of this generation’s technological revolution – none of the privatisations of public services has generated markedly better or cheaper services. The State alone can deliver universal services that are free at point of use. This is because of taxation, when well-administered and well-designed (and carbon tax reminds us that this is no simple achievement), is a hugely effective means of achieving efficient action.

A Just Transition will entail Irish people – especially wealthier Irish people – paying higher taxes. This cannot be avoided; it should even be embraced. The case can be made that this is an act of social solidarity more potent than any of the individualistic acts of ethical consumerism or privatised activism which attract so much of our attention. Death and taxes, they say, are inevitable. If we want a just transition, telling a different and better story about why we should be proud to pay more tax is an inevitable challenge we must face. ■

difference. While current schools are sometimes equipped to receive a few students on bikes – you’ll often find one or two bike shelters and they are now allied to the positive trend of community “cycling buses” – the school placed within a community planned to adapt to the ecological crisis will have secure, demarcated cycling and pedestrian routes established as a default so that every student can get themselves to school.

This appears to be a small change, but is in an example of a change-for-time. Children raised to get to school in the back of an SUV never need to be convinced by glossy advertisements that the car should be the default mode of transport. They are raised in captivity to the carbon machines. Against that, a primary school population that walks and cycles to school has all kinds of pro-social implications – reduced obesity, increased self-confidence, even reduced journey times for those who have to use motor transport – but it also inculcates the habit of active transport. There is an old aphorism attributed (with shaky documentary evidence) to the Jesuits – give me a child to the age of seven and we’ll give you the adult. The ability to shape local transportation policy towards human-powered modes of mobility allows us to adopt that old Jesuit canard and direct it towards ecological ends. The new narrative which rejects rampant individualism in lieu of a solidarity born from the realisation that everything is connected is just fine theory – literally a mere story – without the habits and practices that support living it out.

The implications of integral ecology don’t end at the bike shed. As it stands, our educational system is comparable to the best in the world, but it is geared towards third-level participation and towards job acquisition. While we are not against either of these ideas in principle, the underlying commitment behind curricula development has been that school is about producing shovel-ready workers to keep the economy growing. Environmentalism is a subsection within the sciences or a module within geography. A student might stumble over ecological poetry or be exposed to *Laudato Si’* in religion class. But the fundamental fact that will shape her future – the escalation of

the already unfurling climate and biodiversity crisis – is not integrated into the curriculum. We are not preparing our young people to be active citizens or even to be competitors in the vast globalised economy while we are not equipping them to think critically and creatively about the ecological, political, societal, cultural, economic, and ethical implications of this crisis. There is no subject that cannot be advanced through this perspective and framing the idea of schooling around sustainability can creatively open up opportunities for many rich tangential conversations. It is time to green our schools. Unlocking the potential of our education system goes beyond teaching the younger generation the importance of ecological integrity. Ireland is a land of Saints and Scholars – we need the full power of both in the climate emergency. There is huge potential within Ireland’s 3rd level teaching and research institutes that could be harnessed to tackle the environmental crisis.¹⁰ Funding for these institutes could pivot towards environmental solutions with resources and funding given to communicate findings to the public.

EDUCATION POLICY SPILLS INTO RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

One of the recurring problems facing the environmentalist movement in Ireland is the consistent framing of the cause as antagonistic towards the concerns and priorities of rural Ireland. There is no single political obstacle to be overcome that is more significant than this one. Considering it objectively, the farming community ought to be the core of the Green movement in Ireland. They are the group most closely and directly affected by the climate and biodiversity crisis. Also, it is important to note that for all the framing of the issue in media discourse, it is simply not the case that farmers are set firmly against environmentalism and vice-versa. But granting that there are rich spheres where fertile overlapping occurs, the fundamental suspicion

¹⁰ This would entail the inclusion of the humanities and social sciences, among other subjects, to address climate change, leading to a much broader span of subjects concerned with climate change than the traditional “hard” sciences and engineering. Deirdre Lillis has framed the addition of other academic disciplines as an opportunity for Irish third-level institutions obsessed with global university rankings and funding: ‘Comment: Ireland Has Dazzling Opportunity to Lead on Climate Change’, Business Post, 19 August 2020, <https://www.businesspost.ie/insight/comment-ireland-has-dazzling-opportunity-to-lead-on-climate-change-d6fb8747>.

that climate and biodiversity mitigation is a threat to communities outside our urban centres must be acknowledged and addressed.

Once we recognise the truth that our schools are restricted in fulfilling their potential by the pressure placed on them to serve GDP growth, we begin to crack open the space to talk seriously about the challenges that rural Ireland faces. It is not just that *in theory* that farmers should be environmentalists. It is that the only solution to the malaise ahead of rural communities is through an integrated ecological revolution. This is the case because for decades rural Ireland has been limited by the fundamentalist pursuit of economic growth.

There are few areas of our life more subject to the logic of rapidification than agriculture. There are fewer and fewer people able to farm as a fulltime vocation because the demands of the market are increasing while the rewards – in most instances – are reducing. There are many ways to describe this decline – and it ought to be a priority of the environmentalist movement to more clearly chart how the environmental decline in rural Ireland is mirrored and complexly created by the social decline in rural Ireland – but the most effective for our present purposes is to simply consider the question of debt.

The European Union extensively subsidises farming across the member nations. This is one of the merits of EU membership. Food should be available at an affordable price, with a high nutritional value, and produced in a way that cares for the animals and environments involved – all this can be shaped by strong EU intervention. But partly because anything framed as a “cost” is perceived within the old normal narrative as bad and partly because it would serve the priorities of large farming and agri-food interests, this subsidy scheme is directed towards a bogus “marketisation” system. To compete – in a game that is already rigged to help the strong grow ever stronger in the name of efficiency¹¹ – ordinary farmers around the country have taken on high levels of debt to improve their productivity.

¹¹ Murray W. Scown, Mark V. Brady, and Kimberly A. Nicholas, ‘Billions in Misspent EU Agricultural Subsidies Could Support the Sustainable Development Goals’, *One Earth* 3, no. 2 (21 August 2020): 237–50.

Forgive Us Our Debts



The preoccupation with economic growth, encapsulated in the obsession with GDP, and in rebellion against the fundamental fact that infinite expansion cannot be generated through finite resources, has delivered massive productivity gains over recent decades. This is undeniable. The average annual productivity gain over the 18-year-period to 2017 stands at 7.1%.¹ In the same period, the average industrial wage rose by about 1.1% per year .

An important question arises: where does the productivity go?

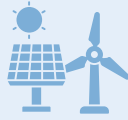
The obvious answer is that it gets hoovered up disproportionately by those who earn higher-than-the-average and it gets exported, back to where it was arguably actually generated before Ireland’s favourable tax and intellectual property regime attracted it here for accounting purposes.

The gap that has opened up between productivity gains and wage stagnation has been largely bridged by a massive increase in indebtedness across the western world. Ireland is no exception. Aside from the financial risk that this represents, debt needs to be understood as a tool of political domestication. The indebted person is the person who cannot afford to experiment, cannot afford to cut back, cannot afford to protest. Debt is what fuels the asset price inflation that is the cornerstone of our housing crisis. Debt is what our students must increasingly incur to even enter competitively into the labour market. It is no coincidence that the society that mortgages the future to bridge the incoherencies of the present is a society that is committed to squandering the resources that accumulated over aeons in the past for the sake of a luxury here and now.

There will be no Just Transition without dismantling the system that is so reliant on us living in arrears. ■

¹ Central Statistics Office, ‘Statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2018’, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-syi/psyi2018/econ/earn/>.

Renewables: When the Wind Doesn't Blow and the Sun Doesn't Shine



There is a mantra that ‘when the wind doesn’t blow and the sun doesn’t shine’ we need gas to keep the lights on.¹ This statement masks a much more nuanced discussion. While renewable energy intermittency is a technical issue that makes incorporating wind and solar energy into the grid complicated, it is simply not the case that to have renewable energy we also need to invest more in the gas industry. Continued investment in fossil fuel infrastructure locks us into a high carbon society and diverts investment away from other climate smart solutions.² Considering that fossil fuel infrastructure is designed to last for decades, what we build now we will be using in 2050 when we aim to be carbon neutral.

While running our grid on 100% renewable energy is technically difficult, it is possible. Several different measures can be taken to bring this ambition into a reality including investment in more renewable generation, diversifying the energy being utilised, reducing demand for energy as much as possible, distributing power generation across the country, investing in energy storage³ and improving our electric grid to be ‘smarter’⁴ and more connected with the rest of Europe. >

¹ Intermittency of renewable energy sources are used across the world as the standard argument against renewable energy, see, for example: Energy Services South, ‘Achieve a Secure Energy Environment with Natural Gas and Renewable Energy’, 25 March 2020, <https://energyservicesouth.com/secure-energy-environment-with-natural-gas-and-renewable-energy/>. The same argument has been deployed in Ireland in defence against the potential to ban gas and oil exploration and the building of new fossil fuel infrastructure. Consider: Christina Finn, ‘Bruton: “When the Wind Doesn’t Blow and the Sun Doesn’t Shine, We Need a Back-up - and It Remains Oil and Gas”’, *TheJournal.ie*, 30 May 2019, <https://www.thejournal.ie/oil-and-gas-drilling-ban-fine-gael-4661405-May2019/>.

² For more, see Clodagh Daly’s excellent recent essay; ‘Meet the New Boss; Same as the Old Boss – The Subsidisation of Natural Gas as a Decarbonisation Pathway in Ireland’, *Working Notes* 34, no. 86 (June 2020), <https://www.jcfj.ie/article/meet-the-new-boss-same-as-the-old-boss-the-subsidisation-of-natural-gas-as-a-decarbonisation-pathway-in-ireland/>.

³ Energy storage does not only include chemical batteries. Energy storage can include kinetic energy through fly wheels, pumped hydro plants, thermal energy including molten salt as well as through synthetic fuel generation and green-hydrogen production to name a few.

⁴ Kate Aronoff et al., *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal* (London: Verso, 2019).

Notice the prevalence of key words from the old normal narrative here – competition, efficiency, productivity. What do they mean here but that the political system pits neighbour against neighbour, that creatures are converted into commodities, and that what counts as progress is making more even if how we make it is worse and no one quite knows what we are making it for.¹²

Incomes are stagnating or declining. Villages are depopulating. The pressure to produce is inducing people into debt – and the person who is indebted is a person who is domesticated because they can’t take a wild risk that might pay off big time if next month and the month after that for years to come, the bank needs another big cheque. The meat processing firms and the supermarkets have controlling stakes in how to dictate the price – what a sham of a market has been constructed on top of the subsidy scheme. It is not the environmentally inclined politicians who are ruining rural Ireland, but the so-called “moderates” who pretend to think that the farmer is the fulcrum of traditional Irish values while slowly erasing that way of life from the landscape.

Farming lobby groups – which are often in thrall to the concerns of the large producers who have benefitted from these developments – will not publicise the simple facts but everyone who considers it for a moment knows that markets *never* expand constantly without contraction. And when farming hits a recession – a prospect only heightened by climate instability and biodiversity decline – those heavily indebted traditional Irish farmers working every hour God sends to produce

¹² Ireland is one of the leading producers of baby formula in the world. While this is obviously healthy for the dairy industry’s profit-making and shareholder return, the ethics of aggressively marketing the health benefits this product in regions such as West Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Central America are much murkier. Infant formula is an important alternative in certain cases but, for most people, formula is an expensive alternative which could result in worse health outcomes than if babies were fed naturally. See: Suzanne Campbell, ‘The Hidden Cost of Our Farmers’ Winning Formula’, *Farming Independent*, 2 April 2015, <https://www.independent.ie/business/farming/dairy/the-hidden-cost-of-our-farmers-winning-formula-31109175.html>. Coupled with the hard sell of baby formula on unsuspecting families, the Irish dairy sector have also developed markets to accept the waste product of our booming butter industry. After all the fat is removed, the remaining product is supplemented with cheaper palm oil to produce an ersatz milk. Finally, it is dehydrated and sent to African countries having a detrimental effect on their indigenous dairy industry. Consider: Simon Marks and Emmet Livingstone, ‘The EU Milk Lookalike That Is Devastating West Africa’s Dairy Sector’, *Politico*, 12 August 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/interactive/the-eu-milk-lookalike-that-is-devastating-west-africas-dairy-sector/>.



Five Simultaneous Cyclones in the Atlantic, 14 September 2020

more out of less will be the ones holding the bill. What will happen to those farms? They'll be hoovered up in liquidation fire sales by the meat processors.¹³

This is the current vision offered by the old normal. Eventually, a debt tsunami will wipe out those stubborn farmers who don't leave for greener pastures. Politicians who are trusted at the moment to protect rural Ireland must be aware that this devastation is coming. "Don't worry," they may counsel, "you can get a precarious, low-paid, seasonal job tending to the land that you used to own and farm."

Education has been truncated to job preparation and farming has been contorted into commodity production. The prospect of an environmental transformation of agriculture is the best hope left for rural Ireland. Farming communities know the decline they are enduring is accelerating. An integrated ecology promises the possibility of renewing rural Ireland by remembering what farming is for. No farmer is excited by the prospect of contributing to global commodity trading. Farmers care about their animals and their land. The subsidy scheme has been redesigned in the past, and can be redesigned again to reward care and attention instead of

Investment is needed in the research and development stage to make more renewable energy sources such as tidal, wave and geothermal energy commercially viable options. Advances will need to be made in planning and technology to reduce the biodiversity harm that even these approaches offer and we should never forget that even renewable energy involves a significant carbon cost in the production of the machinery.

These solutions are all possible and just need the political will and planning to make them a reality. We need to change the mantra from 'when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine' to 'climate change is the most important crisis of our time and we will find the solutions'. Recognition of the scale of the problem, and acceptance of the changes that are required, is a vital step in moving towards carbon neutrality. ■

¹³ Mark Paul, 'Goodmans Embroiled in Row after Buying Repossessed Farm', *The Irish Times*, 5 May 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/agribusiness-and-food/goodmans-embroiled-in-row-after-buying-repossessed-farm-1.3484732>.

benefitting blind output growth. Attempts in this direction are already being made and schemes that support high nature-value farming are important signposts to what the future can look like. What is lacking is how to piece these important, disparate pieces together into a narrative that allows people to see the truth as it is: the restoration of vibrant, traditional rural Irish communities can't happen without the rejection of rapidification, and of debt-laden, industrial agriculture.

INTEGRATED ECOLOGICAL THINKING CASCADES INTO UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES AND PROTECTIONS

Elaborating how different political problems are reorganised when we address climate and biodiversity breakdown with appropriate seriousness could be extended across all 18 government ministries in Ireland. This is the important work ahead of us – presumably through a series of iterative, radical sectoral proposals under a cohesive Green New Deal for Ireland. But underpinning each of these rejuvenated political conversations lies a baseline which, if established, offers us the foundation for transformative change.

Because we cannot separate the human crisis from the environmental crisis, what is called for is nothing less than the guarantee of universal provision of basic human services and of basic environmental protections in all contexts. What is to be considered a basic service can be discerned through democratic deliberation. The contrarian pedant will raise various *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. They can only be knocked back down if we remember that standalone policy proposals will be robbed or rejected; what is required is a compelling narrative that envisions a new normal.

We cannot have a healthy social environment while fundamental basic needs like housing, healthcare, and education are only available to those with resources. It is becoming a prerequisite that we must take on debt to make ends meet, which is devastating in the long term for everyone so burdened, but utterly crushing to the underclass that will be created, who cannot access credit in the first place.

So what constitutes a basic need? Does broadband count, for example? Some would mock the mere suggestion, but those who have tried to continue education for their children during the pandemic lockdown might silence such guffaws. There are complex policy questions about payment – are all these services to be free at point of use or should some services be accessed by some fee applied to some people? The details of what is entailed will not be laid out in a manifesto or a policy scheme but through democratic deliberation of the kind we insist is central to the adaptation.

The provision of single-tier, universally accessible services can restore health to our society which is weakened by growing inequality and deepening rapidification, but it must be paired with a range of universal protections of our shared environment.¹⁴ The water we drink, the air we breathe and healthy functioning ecosystems are central to life. Protecting these is complex, considering that we impact their quality in how we travel, grow our food, and function as a society. In the same way that universal services provide a floor on which society can stand, setting a threshold on these impacts could provide a ceiling which shelters our shared environment.

The Irish environmentalist movement – from the grassroots groups of volunteers, through the NGO sphere, and up to our elected representatives – must navigate a treacherously narrow path. There is no time to settle for incremental change, but what other change can we insist on when electoral support for the green agenda is rarely above 10%? We cannot settle for incremental progress but simultaneously we must take every opportunity to shape policy. Every bill that is passed, every policy that is proposed, every initiative that is implemented must be orientated towards the cleaning of our air, the restoration of our biodiversity, the reduction

¹⁴ A useful model to visualise what universal protections could entail is described in *Doughnut Economics*, by Kate Raworth. She lists a series of nine planetary boundaries: climate change; freshwater use; nitrogen and phosphorus cycles; ocean acidification; chemical pollution; atmospheric aerosol loading; ozone depletion; biodiversity loss; and land use change as metrics that could be monitored to ensure sustainable economic development. Collectively, these planetary boundaries for our common home form an ecological ceiling to prevent critical degradation. The author's argument is an essential read in its entirety. See: Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (London: Random House Business, 2018).

of our carbon outputs *and* towards the restoration of our social fabric that has been systematically weakened by decades of aggressively pro-market policies informed by the famished delusion that humans are motivated primarily by self-interest.

Integrated ecology leaves behind the idea that the challenge before us can be won by securing a policy here for carbon reduction and a programme there for species protection. Fighting on all fronts to guarantee universal access to the basics of a dignified life is a sort of political north star for a movement seeking to navigate this narrow path. This commitment is spacious enough to allow a compelling narrative to form. The good life in the old normal was to be found in affluence without limit, autonomy without purpose, and a common home that was treated like a resource waiting to be captured and processed for profit. The new normal waits to be established but insisting that everyone in Ireland works together to guarantee that everyone gets the fundamental goods demanded by our innate dignity and to guarantee that we protect the environment because of its innate value is a better story than what the establishment dares to offer. It is possible, we just have to build it with a patience and creativity that moves at a speed incomprehensible to those who think rapidification is the only way to achieve anything.

CONCLUSION

The world as we know it is falling apart. We currently settle for vague yet still aspirational commitments to be carbon neutral by 2050, but reality demands that we shift our efforts to true carbon zero faster than we think is possible. A zero-emission, ecologically integrated society is easily described as idealistic. That is not the damning condemnation that establishment spokespeople like to think it is. What, after all, is their vision except more of the same old normal but with green fringes? A faux Green New Deal will not cut it.

Voices from across the political spectrum called for a green stimulus after the 2008 crash. Political movements across the

Climate Grief: Coping with Irreversible Loss



Hope drives climate change advocacy and activism; an anticipation that our actions will result in a global shift in consciousness that will lead us to stop destroying Earth. But underlying this may also be a sense of profound grief, for what has already vanished of the natural world and for the futures we had envisaged. This despair is compounded by the knowledge that nothing was lost through misfortune or chance but as a direct result of our actions - we who comprise the most privileged section of the planet's population.

The well-known Kubler-Ross model of grief, which describes the process that a dying person goes through while coming to terms with their terminal illness, states that the journey begins at denial and moves through several stages before finally arriving at acceptance. In the context of climate grief, acceptance means fully acknowledging the enormity of our situation. The disappearance of the glaciers, the extinction of species, the regions of the world no longer inhabitable, the acidification of the oceans, the wildfires, the heatwaves, the floods, the droughts.

Much of the damage that has been done is irreversible, and the lives we have lived until now are no longer sustainable. We must accept this, and grieve for the modern conveniences and throwaway culture that has brought us affordable luxury but literally cost us the earth.

To cope with losses of such magnitude, and grieve for the future we thought we were planning for, we can look to spiritual sources, such as *Laudato Si'*, and we can turn to each other and offer mutual support as we collectively make the journey to acceptance, and beyond.

Grief is also described as parallel train tracks running alongside other emotions, ever present in life but not an ending in itself. Our grief over the harm that has been done can never leave us but it should not overwhelm us so that we become paralysed and hopeless. There is still time to act to save what we can of our beautiful world, and we should each do whatever we can and know that it will count. ■

planet have called for various versions of a Green New Deal after the publication of “H. Res 109”, a 14-page sketched bill presented to the United States Congress in February 2019. In the midst of the pandemic, organisations as moderate and established as the OECD have echoed these calls. There is almost inescapable momentum behind this idea. The detail in each sector will have to be worked out piece by piece¹⁵ and more than once as the cultural, political, technological, and environmental context shifts. The JCFJ hopes to play a leading role in that process, through its independent research and its membership of various coalitions and alignments with different movements.

As a result of being a policy research centre informed by deep philosophical and theological commitments and active across a range of issues, we at the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice are keenly aware that there must be a coherent and compelling narrative that people can commit to. Simply restating the nightmare that will come upon us if we do not act will not be enough. No one wants to live in a horror movie. The story we are telling need not be a tragedy. There is time to act. There are grounds for hope. Recognising that there is no way to separate our care for the environment from our care for our neighbours is the first step out of the chaos of a world hurtling into dystopia.

“Genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.”¹⁶

We do not yet know how all the pieces will fit together that will tackle this monumental challenge. We know grassroots democratic discourse is central. We know our entire political imagination must undergo an ever-deeper ecological conversion. We know that establishing this respect for others and for the earth as our fundamental value – not efficiency, not ideological purity, not even success – is the place to start. The old normal is suicidal. Let’s start telling a better story.

Genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others.

¹⁵ Sinead Mercier has written an admirable guide to our fundamental first steps in a transition to a low-carbon, more technological Ireland which will help to protect vulnerable workers and firms. See: Sinead Mercier, ‘Addressing Unemployment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland’ (Dublin: National Economic and Social Council, March 2020), http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_reports/en/149_Transition.pdf.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, ‘Laudato Si’: Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home’ (Vatican, May 2015), §70.