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The Church and the Challenge of an Integral Ecology for a New Humanism

Introduction

The global health emergency we are going through, and the lifestyle changes imposed by the spread of the coronavirus have caused a difficult suffering to endure, although humanity in history has passed far worse trials. We are in a state where our modernity is made up of a huge technological protection, globalization, and the market, in short, everything we call ‘progress’, suddenly comes to terms with the ‘simplicity’ of human existence. The Coronavirus epidemic – as an “unpredictable” and dramatic event, able to disrupt existence, to change all perceptions, to lead to the collapse of political, health and economic systems – has recently been repeatedly linked to the concept of “black swan” an expression coined by the Lebanese epistemologist and mathematical and chedimatic Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his worldly success book². In a recent interview in the Italian newspaper «La Repubblica», Taleb stated that “Coronavirus is not a black swan”, as – in his opinion – it is missing one of its essential connotations: unpredictability. He points out that for several years the scientific community had been warning that sooner or later a global epidemic would break out. Already at the time of the Ebola virus it was feared that an exponential and uncontrolled spread could occur, but this did not happen because it had

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² By «black swan» the Taleb means an unforeseen event, with significant impacts for the system on which it impacts. Nassim N. Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (2007); trad. it. *Il cigno nero*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2008.

developed in Central Africa, a place not overly connected with the rest of the planet. Now, however, the epicentre of Coronavirus has been in China, the quintessential interconnected country.

Certainly, the pandemic is an unexpected event for the vast majority of us: we thought we could control everything and instead it is not at all so at the moment when the facts of biology are expressed in a real revolt against man. What is happening is one of the first biological events that will denounce, from now on, the excesses of our globalization. The proof that we are going through is deeply linked to the side effects of unsustainable development models whose price has impacted on our lives, our sociality and our economies, because as the philosopher Mauro Ceruti argues, the threads of biological, anthropological, economic, political globalization are tangled and inextricable³.

As on the set of a new Steven Soderbergh thriller film, the new virus is the author of an epidemic of pneumonia that first reached the health news, in mid-December 2019, in Wuhan, the vast capital of Hubei province, a rich commercial hub crossed by the Blue River and the Han River. Like other coronaviruses, COVID-19, as well as the African Ebola virus and the Indian Nipah virus, is responsible for a zoonosis, in other words an infection transmitted by an infected animal that acts as a reservoir (where the virus completes its biological cycle and proliferates) to humans.

The place where the coronavirus epidemic would have been generated is the Huanan Fish Market in Wuhan, where raw and cooked food is sold and consumed, among numerous shoals of live animals for food use, including markets for pigs, bats, koalas and crocodiles, where people are mixed with other potentially infected mammals. There is talk in the specific case of the outbreak caused by the COVID-19, in fact, of bat-borne diseases which means diseases transmitted by bats, since the bat has not long been considered an effective vector of zoonotic agents.

People continue to wonder why this health emergency is happening only now and precisely in that known part of the world. One of the clues is undoubtedly globalisation which has made it much easier for individuals to move and access to food from other countries. This could be one of the causes of the spread of contagion.

The deforestation of vast areas of rainforests at the hands of man and its excessive intrusiveness into other ecosystems has fragmented these self-regulated environments and broken the web of life. One of the many consequences of these destructive actions has resulted in the transmission of certain viruses, which lived in symbiosis with some animal species, to other species, including humans, causing extremely toxic or even lethal effects.

³ M. Ceruti, *Sulla stessa barca*, Qiqajon edizioni, Comunità di Bose 2020.

Many people in various countries and areas of the world, marginalized by globalization oriented to economic profit alone, have tried to feed themselves by going in search of wild animal meat in these new uncultivated areas, to be used as an additional source of protein, killing monkeys, small mammals, pangolins, rodents and bats. These wild species, which carry many viruses, have also been sold in live animal markets, which has further exposed urban populations to these new viruses.

One clue to the genesis of zoonosis, on the other hand, may lie in climate change and environmental devastation, which China has been a victim of for a decade. Not everyone knows that bats suffer much from climate change (overheating in particular) and deforestation, like intensive crops, which, while on the one hand attract them and make them stay longer in a certain area inhabited by man, overpopulation, on the other hand have the opportunity to come into contact with new infected insects that feed and whose life cycle is disrupted by the climate. For this reason, for some years now, bats have been considered true “barometers” of the effects of climate change.

These changes, with the failures of international leaders and the mobilization of young people inspired by the figure of Greta Thunberg; migratory movements and in particular the plight of displaced persons and refugees fleeing hunger and wars; the circular economy and finance attentive to sustainability; the new challenges of the dignity of work in the age of artificial intelligence; Faced with all these phenomena, different but with many similarities, the paradigm of integral ecology is particularly appropriate for visualizing and conceptualizing the ways in which globalization processes take place, with all their interconnections and transversal aspects.

In this regard, two scholars deeply involved in the cause of integral ecology, the physicist and system theorist Fritjof Capra and the English economist Hazel Henderson⁴, recently wrote a four-handed essay entitled *Qualitative Growth*⁵: according to them, theories on human development and progress are false, as measured in a myopic way in purely economic terms, (such as, for example,

⁴ Fritjof Capra, renowned physicist and scholar of the systems theory, is the co-founder and director of the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California. His fundamental text is *The Tao of Physics* (Adelphi, 1982) Some of his other works, fundamental for modern science, are: *The Turning Point* (Feltrinelli, 1984), *The Science of Life* (Rizzoli, 2002) and *The Web of Life* (2001); Hazel Henderson, economista, author of *Ethical Markets: Growing the Green Economy* (2006) and co-founder, with Calvert Group, of the Calvert-Henderson life quality indicators, she was a member of the committee that organised the “Beyond GDP” Conference that addressed the European Parliament in 2007: author of *The Politics of the Solar Age*, Doubleday, New York (1988) e *Mapping the Global Transition to the Solar Age*, ICAEW and The Centre for Tomorrow’s Company (2014).

⁵ Fritjof Capra, Hazel Henderson, *Qualitative Growth* (2009), [trad. it.] *Crescita qualitativa. Per un’economia ecologicamente sostenibile e socialmente equa*, Aboca 2016.

through GDP) by simply increasing the losses from a social and environmental point of view with consequences on air pollution, water and land, with the destruction of biodiversity, the loss of ecosystem services, all aggravated by global warming, by rising sea levels, as well as by severe climatic upheavals.

“The recognition of the fallacy of the conventional concept of economic growth, which was pointed out by one of us as early as 1971, is the first essential step in overcoming the economic crisis. Social-change activist Frances Moore Lappé adds, »Since what we call ‘growth’ is largely waste, let’s call it that! Let’s call it an economics of waste and destruction. Let’s define growth as that which enhances life - as generation and regeneration - and declare that what our planet most needs is more of it«. This notion of “growth which enhances life” is what we mean by qualitative growth - growth that enhances the quality of life. In living organisms, ecosystems and societies, qualitative growth consists in an increase of complexity, sophistication, and maturity”⁶.

These too short-sighted policies have also caused social crises, inequality, poverty, mental and physical illnesses, addictions, distrust of institutions - including the mass media, academic circles, and science itself - and finally a loss of solidarity.

“Accordingly, many of the new indicators of a country’s progress use multi-disciplinary, systemic approaches with appropriate metrics for measuring the many aspects of quality of life. For example, the Calvert-Henderson Quality of Life Indicators measure twelve such aspects and use monetary coefficients only where appropriate while rejecting the conventional macroeconomic tool of aggregating all these qualitatively different aspects into a single number, like GDP.⁸ Similarly, the UN’s HDI, launched in 1990, which has become the principle contender in complementing GDP, brings in such qualitative measures of poverty, health, gender equity, education, social inclusion and environment – none of which can be reduced to money-coefficients or aggregated into a simple number”⁷.

They are also responsible for the pandemics of the 21st century, such as SARS, MERS or AIDS, as well as the various coronaviruses that are featured on the news around the world. On several occasions in recent years, our screens have been filled with shocking images of the Amazon in flames, as well as in Australia, the United States, and Siberia whose media force has ended up putting everyone in front of the dramatic consequences of loss of balance of ecosystems, and therefore of the urgency to take care of the planet we live on.

Capra and Henderson argue that «we cannot understand the nature of complex systems such as organisms, ecosystems, societies, and economies if we

⁶ F. Capra, H. Henderson, *Qualitative Growth*, p.6.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

describe them in purely quantitative terms». Since «qualities arise from processes and patterns of relationships» they need to be mapped rather than measured (p.7). There are close parallels between the difference in how economists and ecologists understand the concepts of growth and development. While economists tend to take a purely quantitative approach, ecologists and biologists know how to differentiate between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of both growth and development⁸.

The current pandemic has made us understand, if we had not yet realized it, that everything is really connected and that we need to “re-join the web of life, to meet our needs without reducing the opportunities for future generations. For this purpose - suggests the scientist Fritjof Capra - we must become, so to speak, ecologically educated. Being ecologically educated, or ‘competent’, means understanding the principles of organization of ecological communities (ecosystems) and using those principles to create sustainable human communities”⁹.

Capra concludes by stating that “in order to regain our full human nature, we must regain the experience of connection with the entire web of life. this reconnection, *religio* in Latin, is the true essence of the spiritual foundation of profound ecology”¹⁰.

1. The Church and the environmental challenge

In the second encyclical published in 2015, with the title *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis, in consonance with the world of science more sensitive to the environmental issue, was able to give voice not to fear, but to the hope that consists in recognizing that there is always a way out, that we can always change course, that we can always do something to solve problems¹¹.

Five years and a pandemic passed over since it was published. A text that still maintains its ability to contribute in a disruptive way to the reading of the present. It does so through the lens of an integral approach (to which the whole chapter IV is dedicated), where «Everything is connected» (LS, nos. 117 and 138, from which derives the push not to consider «two separate crises, one environmental and another social one, but a single and complex socio-environmental crisis», a perspective that forces us to think about complexity and that focuses on relationships: those between men and women, between them and

⁸ Ibidem, p. 7.

⁹ F. Capra, *La rete della vita*, (1996), Rizzoli, Milano, 2018, p. 327.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 325.

¹¹ *Lettera Enciclica Laudato Si' del Santo Padre Francesco sulla cura della Casa Comune*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

animals, nature and the planet they live in. “If we take into account the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we should recognize that the solutions cannot come from a single way of interpreting and transforming reality. It is also necessary to resort to the different cultural riches of peoples, art and poetry, interior life and spirituality [...]”.

That text helped to create the foundations of a renewed ecological awareness, a new way of being activists. In five years, what was difficult even to imagine at the time has happened: the climate issue has begun to occupy the streets, to enter public debate and political agendas. attention to the connections between the many dimensions - ecological, economic, political, social, cultural, ethical, spiritual, etc. - of all phenomena. By doing so, we have explored better and better the meaning of the expression “integral ecology”.

Laudato Si' is not a theoretical treatise, but an integral vision (theological, anthropological, existential) of the cosmos and the human being in their intimate relationship; a goad that pulls us away from our comforts, from our commonplaces. It is no.17 of *Laudato Si'* to refer us to a continuous confrontation with reality: “Theological or philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound like a repetitive and empty message, if they do not present themselves again starting from a confrontation with the current context, in what is unprecedented in the history of humanity”.

This lesson proves very timely as we confront the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a global phenomenon in time and space, because it involves all the inhabitants of the planet in the same way: we are all struggling with the lockdown and the fear of contagion. But we can also define it as “integral”, because it crosses all dimensions of social and personal life. It concerns health and medicine but also the economy and work, as well as daily habits, culture, and the collective imagination, on which it will have profound and lasting consequences. It also impacts on the relationship with the media and new technologies, and obviously on spirituality: it asks us questions of meaning, but it also makes us experiment forms of extraordinary participation in rites through the media, without making them spectacular.

It is an encyclical for everyone, not just for Christians. It is a very important letter because for the first time the Catholic Church publishes an official document on the issues of the environment and its protection. Not that men of the Church and Christians have never taken the theme into consideration (for example, St. Francis of Assisi in 1200, which is mentioned in the title of the encyclical). But today’s document is part of the Magisterium (that is, of the teaching) of the Church. It is the official and authoritative voice of the Catholic Church.

Divided into six chapters, the Encyclical collects, with a view to collegiality, various reflections from the Bishops’ Conferences of the world and ends with two prayers, one inter-religious and one Christian, for the safeguarding of creation.

The central point? «The earth is wounded, and - the premise is a must - it is not a scientific document, it is a spiritual document that invites first of all to an “ecological conversion”. Safeguarding the environment is linked to justice for the poor and solving the problems of an economy that pursues only profit. The three issues cannot be separated, and, in fact, the environmental theme is treated by Francis in a broader context, that of the social doctrine of the Church.

The starting point is the analysis of scientific data, but Pope Francis does not wish to intervene in the scientific debate or establish the percentage of global warming caused by man. These issues are the preserve of scientists only. However, Francesco explains that “there is a very consistent scientific consensus which indicates that we are in the presence of a worrying warming of the climate system”, due for the most part to the large concentration of greenhouse gases.

The title is taken from the *Canticle of the Creatures* of St. Francis «Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth»¹² for which Pope Francis follows in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi to explain the importance of an integral ecology, in which concern for nature, equity towards the poor, commitment to society, but also joy and inner peace are inseparable.

In the six chapters of the Encyclical, the Pope highlights that our land, abused and plundered, requires an “ecological conversion”, a “change of course” so that man takes on the responsibility of a commitment to “the care of our common home “. A commitment that also includes the eradication of misery, attention for the poor, equal access, for all, to the resources of the planet.

From a conceptual point of view, Pope Francis assumes the term “ecology” not in the generic and often superficial meaning of some “green” concern, but in the much deeper one of approach to all complex systems whose understanding requires putting in place foreground the relationship of the individual parts with each other and with the whole. The reference is to the image of the ecosystem.

In chapter II the environment is a gift from God, a common inheritance not to be destroyed: the “tremendous responsibility” of the human being towards creation is reiterated and it is recalled that “the environment is a collective gift, patrimony of the whole humanity”, a “common heritage” to be administered and not to be destroyed. Following the biblical account of Creation, Pope Francis highlights the three fundamental relationships of man: with God, with neighbour and with the earth.

Each creature has its own function, none is superfluous, and everything is a “caress of God”, writes the Pope, recalling that “any mistreatment of any creature is contrary to human dignity”. However, the care of other living beings

¹² St. Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of the Creatures*.

must always be accompanied by “compassion and concern” for man. And this is why the awareness of a universal communion is needed.

Furthermore, the Catholic Church is open to dialogue with philosophical thought, and this allows it to produce various syntheses between faith and reason: «starting from the principle that everything is connected» (n. 138), it follows that nature cannot be considered «as something separate from us or as a mere frame of our life. We are included in it, we are part of it and we are penetrated by it. The reasons why a place is polluted require an analysis of the functioning of society, its economy, its behaviour, its ways of understanding reality» (n. 139).

It is therefore necessary to seek integral solutions, «which consider the interactions of natural systems with each other and with social systems. There are not two separate crises, one environmental and another social, but a single and complex socio-environmental crisis. The guidelines for the solution require an integral approach to combat poverty, to restore dignity to the excluded and at the same time to take care of nature» (ibidem).

It follows from this that environmental, economic and social ecology is inseparable from cultural ecology, which affects mentalities and requires respect not only for nature but also for the historical, artistic and cultural heritage of a community or a people, often equally threatened (n.143), and from the ecology of daily life, which involves every inhabitant of the planet in their habits and behaviours.

With this in mind, Pope Francis proposes very significant reflections on a possible “theology of the city” and its consequences, which should be taken into account: «It is necessary to take care of public spaces, perspectives and urban reference points that increase our sense of belonging, our feeling of being rooted, our “feeling at home” within the city that contains and unites us».

In the third chapter, the Encyclical explores the roots of the current situation, in order to grasp not only the symptoms but also the deepest causes of it. A basic observation contextualizes the analysis: «Humanity has never had so much power over itself and nothing guarantees that it will use it well, especially if we consider the way in which it is being used» (n. 104).

A great risk lies in the mentality that enormous technological growth has helped to spread: «What interests us is to extract everything possible from things through the imposition of the human hand, which tends to ignore or forget the very reality of what it has. before. For this reason, the human being and things have ceased to shake hands amicably, instead becoming contenders» (n. 106).

«A Promethean dream of domination over the world has made its way into conscience, which has caused the impression that caring for nature is something for the weak. Instead, the correct interpretation of the concept of the human being as lord of the universe is to understand him as a responsible administrator» (n. 116). Practical relativism opposes this responsibility, which

gives absolute priority to contingent interests and neglects long-term prospects. On the contrary, a just sense of responsibility is fostered by attention to the dignity of work: «In any approach to integral ecology, which does not exclude the human being, it is essential to integrate the value of work [...]».

The environmental challenge thus joins the educational one, based on the possibility of being personal to grow in the awareness of one's responsibilities and to act accordingly in an ecologically sustainable and supportive manner, first of all within the family. It is necessary to create an «ecological citizenship», in which one helps each other to “take care of creation with small daily actions [...] to the point of giving shape to a lifestyle».

A particularly relevant aspect of the Encyclical, then, is its giving voice to collegiality: numerous are the documents of entire episcopates cited also for long developments in the text, the voice of peoples and situations that in the various continents make one feel the urgency of an ecological conversion involving the entire “global village”.

Also relevant is the citation of authentic prophets of the modern era, often unheard or marginalized, such as the great Jesuit, philosopher, anthropologist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, or the Italian-German thinker Romano Guardini, much studied and loved by Jorge Mario Bergoglio, or the Protestant philosopher Paul Ricoeur.

An Encyclical for Catholics, of course, but capable of truly speaking to everyone, because our common home concerns every human person and no one can be called out of responsibility towards him. Moreover, the relevance and accuracy of the analysis from which the text starts, the strength of the denunciation, including political, that it proposes, the rigor of the reasons given to the proposals put forward, both rational and properly theological-spiritual, the existential implications that are suggested they make this Encyclical a gift and a provocation to the whole of humanity, from which it seems to me no one will be able to morally escape.

Humanity must «become aware of the need for changes in lifestyles, production and consumption. The Pope takes into consideration the melting of the ice and the loss of biodiversity. The heaviest impacts “will probably fall on developing countries in the coming decades”.

“Therefore, the development of policies has become urgent and urgent so that in the coming years the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases will be drastically reduced». The picture that Francis recounts in the first chapter of his encyclical is depressing: deterioration of the quality of human life and social degradation. The pontiff's point of view is that of a theologian: Francis recalls that «the human environment and the natural environment degrade together» hitting the weakest. Problems that «do not find sufficient space in the agendas of the world”.

The Pope points out that our land, mistreated and plundered, requires an “ecological conversion”, a “change of course” so that man takes on the responsibility of a commitment to “the care of our common home”. A commitment that also includes the eradication of misery, attention for the poor, equal access, for all, to the resources of the planet.

The “tremendous responsibility” of the human being towards creation is reiterated and it is recalled that “the environment is a collective gift, the heritage of all humanity”, a “common heritage” to be administered and not destroyed.

Following the biblical account of Creation, Pope Francis highlights the three fundamental relationships of man: with God, with neighbour and with the earth. Each creature has its own function, none is superfluous, and everything is a “care of God”, writes the Pontiff, recalling that “any mistreatment of any creature is contrary to human dignity”. However, the care of other living beings must always be accompanied by “compassion and concern” for man. And this is why the awareness of a universal communion is needed.

Starting from the outlined overview, Pope Francis continues: “If we take into account the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we should recognize that solutions cannot come from a single way of interpreting and transforming reality. It is also necessary to have recourse to the different cultural riches of peoples, to art and poetry, to the interior life and to spirituality [...]”.

Listening to the most experienced exegesis, Pope Francis recalls that the biblical texts, read «in their context, with a correct hermeneutic, [...] invite us to cultivate and guard the garden of the world» (cf. Gen 2:15). While “cultivating” means plowing or working a land, “guarding” means protecting, caring for, preserving, conserving, watching over. “This implies a relationship of responsible reciprocity between human beings and nature” (n. 67) [...].

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The last chapter, the sixth, is entitled “ecological education and spirituality”: it stems from the need for change that humanity cannot fail to feel in light of the challenges and stakes represented by the safeguarding of creation. First of all, it is necessary to focus on another style of life, educating to the alliance between humanity and the environment, stimulating what can be called “ecological conversion”, which alone will be the harbinger of true joy and lasting peace.

And as we enter the phase of the relaunch, it is good not to forget the lenses of that integrated approach to which *Laudato Si* urges, to build a society where human life, especially that of the weakest, is defended; where everyone has access to care, and that nature is not indiscriminately plundered, but cultivated and guarded for those who will come after us.

Conclusion

The relentless lesson of interconnectedness of the pandemic shows us how emergencies can be defeated first of all - comments the Pontiff - with the antibodies of solidarity, urging us to be builders of a change that cannot be postponed.

With the encyclical *Laudato si*’, Pope Francis tears the veil of current hardness to glimpse a horizon that sees the human family united in the search for integral human development. This is «the alternative of the civilization of love», with which His Holiness concludes the document. Not a naive longing, but a possible utopia with a committed effort of all, a committed community of brothers.

Also because, as the philosopher and epistemologist Mario Ceruti argues, the emerging network of knowledge and experiences can allow our species to learn to be truly global, to bind, through new sustainable relationships, to all ecosystems and to learn to knowing how to exploit the creative potential of cultural diversity.¹³

¹³ M. Ceruti, *Il tempo della complessità*, Prefazione di Edgar Morin, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano 2018.

It is in this perspective that the horizon of a new planetary humanism is outlined which, if it occurs, will be produced by the consciousness of what the philosopher calls the ‘community of destiny’ which now binds all individuals and all peoples of the planet, as well as the whole humanity to the global ecosystem and the Earth.

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Streszczenie

Kościół a wyzwanie integralnej ekologii dla nowego humanizmu

Pandemia COVID-19 była zdarzeniem nieoczekiwanym: dotychczas światu wydawało się, że może kontrolować wszystko, tymczasem okazało się, że istnieją pewne zjawiska biologiczne, wobec których człowiek jest bezsilny. Fakty biologiczne, które miały miejsce w czasie pandemii, zdemaskowały liczne zagrożenia, jakie mogą być niesione przez procesy globalizacyjne. Jest to związane z pewnymi efektami ubocznymi niezrównoważonego rozwoju i wpływa na nasze życie, społeczność i gospodarkę. Mauro Ceruti twierdzi, że elementy globalizacyjne w takich dziedzinach jak biologia, antropologia, ekonomia czy polityka są ze sobą nierozzerwalnie związane i nie da się ich odseparować. Papież Franciszek, w odpowiedzi na potrzeby świata nauki, wrażliwego na kwestie środowiskowe, opublikował w 2015 roku swoją drugą encyklikę pod tytułem *Laudato si'*. Jest to dokument adresowany do wszystkich, nie tylko do chrześcijan. W tej encyklice Kościół katolicki po raz pierwszy wypowiada się na temat środowiska naturalnego i jego ochrony. *Laudato si'* nie jest traktatem teoretycznym, ale przedstawia integralną wizję (teologiczną, antropologiczną, egzystencjalną) kosmosu i człowieka w ich intymnej relacji, wzywającą nas do dokonania zmiany, której nie wolno odkładać na później.

Słowa kluczowe: COVID-19, dialog międzyreligijny, ekologia integralna, *Laudato si'*, relacje religijno-społeczne, zrównoważony rozwój

Summary

The pandemic is an unexpected event for the vast majority of us: we thought we could control everything, and instead, when the facts of biology are expressed in a real revolt against man, we find this is not the case. This virus is one of the first biological events that will denounce, from now on, the excesses of our globalisation. What we are going through is deeply linked to the side effects of unsustainable development models, the cost of which has impacted our lives, our sociality, and our economies. As the philosopher Mauro Ceruti argues, the threads of biological, anthropological, economic, political globalisation are tangled and inextricable. In consonance with the world of science and sensitive to the environmental issue, Pope Francis published the second encyclical in 2015 with the title *Laudato Si'*. It is an encyclical for everyone, not just for Christians. It is a very important letter because, for the first time, the Catholic Church has published an official document on the issues of the environment and its protection. *Laudato Si'* is not a theoretical treatise but an integral vision (theological, anthropological, existential) of the intimate relationship between the cosmos and human beings, urging us to be builders of a change that cannot be postponed.

Key words: COVID-19, interreligious dialogue, integral ecology, *Laudato Si*, religion-society relationship, Sustainable Development.