

“The Encyclical *Laudato Si* and other teachings of Pope Francis:  
An Ethical Basis for efforts to “Fast Track” a More Effective global  
AIDS Response “

Intervention by  
His Eminence Cardinal Peter Turkson  
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on  
**Ethical and Religious Foundations for this Dialogue**

**How can *Laudato Si* inspire a better AIDS response?**

I would summarize the major goals of Pope Francis in preparing this Encyclical were the following:

- to propose a social teaching of the Church that creates awareness about the immensity and urgency of the challenge of the present situation of the world and its poor: the two fragilities which lie at the heart of Pope Francis’ *integral ecology*;
- to make an urgent appeal for a new dialogue about how to shape the future of our planet, especially through an appeal for an *ecological conversion, an education in ecological citizenship and an ethical and spiritual itinerary to reduce our footprint and reverse the deterioration of the natural and social environment*;
- to encourage humanity to respond to the urgent appeal with profound faith and trust in humanity’s ability to work together to build a common home.

In his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, Pope minces no words. He insists that, now more than ever, the world needs leadership in all its fields of endeavour, and the various fields need to work together in pursuit of the common good of humanity. Pope Francis speaks to everyone; everyone must play a role. He exhorts those in high station in politics, business and science, and he encourages those who live and work in very humble circumstances—all must commit to meeting the needs of all who live on this planet and of the planet itself. We are all in this together, each of us responsible for the other.

When he speaks to the business community, Pope Francis encourages a broad sense of vocation, which gives rise to a deepened exercise of responsibility. In his words to the World Economic Forum:

“Business is - in fact - a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life.”<sup>1</sup> These are scarcely the words of someone who misunderstands or disparages business, as some would have you believe.

At the same time, he asks the world’s economic leaders to recognize that “the successes which have been achieved, even if they have reduced poverty for a great number of people, often have led to a widespread social exclusion. Indeed, the majority of the men and women of our time still continue to experience daily insecurity, often with dramatic consequences.”<sup>2</sup>

With specific regard to the major theme of our dialogue today, that of expanding access to life-saving diagnostic tools and medicines, especially to children *Laudato Si’* strongly re-affirms the principle of the universal destination of goods. “The Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property (§ 93).” During his visit to Bolivia in July 2015, Pope Francis delivered this powerful message: “Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labour is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment. It is about giving to the poor and to peoples what is theirs by right. The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church’s Social Teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples.”<sup>3</sup>

**What are the ethical imperatives to develop accessible diagnostic tools and medications, in order to promote the goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030?**

In some schools of religious thought and certainly in today’s secular and economic culture, demands are placed on us to be good stewards of what we do and what we produce. Good stewards take

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Message to World Economic Forum, 17 Jan 2014, quoting *Evangelii Gaudium* §203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 9.7.2015, § 3.1

responsibility and fulfil their obligations to manage and to render an account. In a way, we could compare the “imperative” to be good stewards with our responsibilities as managers – to do strategic planning and implement such plans; to construct a realistic budget and stay within its limits. For those of you coming from the business world, you also are called to account on the profit margin of your enterprises – the shareholders expect dividends and growth in the value of their stock holdings.

In the context of the stewardship and accountability that is expected of you, as executives in the pharmaceutical and diagnostics industries, I would like to take a moment to thank you for the progress that has been made with regard to opening up access to your products. We can think back to the days when no treatment was available and when most people living with AIDS had a survival rate, after diagnosis, of no more than one or two years at most. We can recall when HIV-positive people in so-called “high income” countries, or the very rich in other countries, could even think about initiation of anti-retroviral treatment. We can remember the days of challenges and even pickets around drug availability and pricing, but we here in the room also remember the philanthropic work from a variety of drug companies including many of you, as early as 1990, in the form of patient assistance programs for prescriptions and support for community efforts.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, neither governments nor private industry could ignore the deafening cry of millions of HIV-positive people who demanded access to the medicines that were assuring longer and better quality lives to those living in the “global North”, while continued to die during what otherwise be the prime of their lives and continued to leave millions of orphans and widows, especially those living in sub-Saharan Africa. Governments in high-income countries awakened to the need for solidarity with people living in low-income countries. This new vision resulted in the establishment of such programs as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, and in bi-lateral funding initiatives, such as the USA President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which in turn could successfully assure a more vigorous market demand for anti-retroviral medications in poor countries. It also resulted in greater responsibility being taken by low-income governments for their own HIV-positive citizens.

During this same timeframe, we began to see pharmaceutical companies begin to address, in their business plans, the need to expand access to their products, even to markets that would not yield high profits.

Voluntary registration and licensing, participation in the patent pool, and continuation of philanthropy were increased, in various ways, by those of you in the R&D pharmaceutical companies, and these efforts led to greater and less expensive production by generic companies. Thus, despite the complexity and manufacturing challenges of more sophisticated anti-retroviral medications and of need for redesign to make them available for use in low technology settings, and the lack of strong health infrastructure in many places that have high prevalence of HIV, TB, and hepatitis, we have seen much progress in lowering mortality due to AIDS-related causes and in improving the quality of life for those living with HIV. And I suppose that you in the industry have been able to accomplish this while fulfilling the mandate to be good stewards.

However, returning to our reflection on *Laudato Si*, a major surprise is that the term “stewardship” appears only twice in the document. Perhaps this lack of emphasis on “stewardship” is due to the fact that one can be a good steward without feeling connected. Beyond jobs and accountability, care is a more intimate relationship. This concept is raised dozens of times in the Encyclical. Perhaps the reason for this focus is that, if one cares, one is connected. To care is to allow oneself to be affected by another, so much so that one’s path and priorities change.

Pope Francis proposes that we think of our relationship with the world and with all people in terms of caring. In the Christian Scriptures, we know that Jesus presented himself as the Good Shepherd who does not flee when the wolf threatens the flock (Jn 10:11-15). According to Pope Francis, caring for our common home, and for all people who live on this earth, requires not just an economic and technological revolution, but also a cultural and spiritual revolution—a profoundly different way of living the relationship between people and the environment, a new way of ordering the global economy. Pope Francis insists on the urgency of changing our sense of progress, our management of the economy, and our style of life.

### **What are the commonly shared values of faith-inspired teaching and action in this regard?**

The biblical narrative teaches us that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself” (§66). When one of these relationships is broken, the others are broken too, and our insertion in the

universe is no longer integral – it is fractured and partial. In the second chapter of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis articulates the “tremendous responsibility” (§90) of humankind for creation. “The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (§95). This collective good and this responsibility of all underpin the insistent message about the moral dimension of how we treat nature and the rest of creation. For “Creation is the order of love,” he says. It is a loving gift– not some show of “arbitrary omnipotence” and God’s love enfolds us, and all things, with his affection (§77).

### **How can religious teaching and action advance this goal?**

Pope Francis decries the selfishness and short-term thinking that sabotage progress on saving the environment, on peace-building, and on public health crises as well. He insists on dialogue "as the only way to confront the problems of our world and to seek solutions that are truly effective". Authentic dialogue is honest and transparent. It does not permit the particular interests of individual countries, or specific interest groups, to dominate discussions. The Holy Father offered this ideal in his remarks in Nairobi: "What is needed is sincere and open dialogue, with responsible cooperation on the part of all: political authorities, the scientific community, the business world and civil society. Positive examples are not lacking; they demonstrate that a genuine cooperation between politics, science and business can achieve significant results." Catholic social teaching contains helpful principles for true dialogue. How can we promote and sustain positive dialogue that results in positive actions? Three helpful principles for such dialogue are: solidarity, subsidiarity, and concern for the common good. Solidarity means we care about the concerns of others as much as our own. Subsidiarity means we accept others as equals, they speak for themselves, we listen, and we help them to participate if they need such help. As for the “what” of dialogue, Catholic social teaching tells us to always focus on the common good and to show special concern for the poor and for the earth.

Dialogue is transformative. It inspires a culture where the Other is truly a person, not something impersonal. When we open this door and find persons on the other side, not objects, what develops is "a culture of care - care for oneself, care for others, care for the environment - in place of a culture of waste, a 'throw-away culture' where people use and discard themselves, others and the environment" (Pope Francis, Nairobi, 26 November 2015).

Pope Francis proposes a new mindset, one based on the concept of “integral ecology.” It is an expression that captures an ancient awareness that all living beings, human groups and systems as well as non-human ones — that is, all of creation — are fundamentally interconnected. Only with attentive care for these bonds, says Pope Francis, will we come “to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today’s world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests.”

In our open and honest dialogue today, let us try to avoid the traditional excuses, or worse yet, finger pointing on one side or other, as we confront the public health challenges that still plague our global human family. Let us confront them honestly and transparently, and try to search for more effective and efficient solutions. Despite the tremendous progress that has been made, we still find, in middle- and low- income countries and even among the poor and marginalized populations in high-income countries, babies being born with HIV, adults needing second and sometimes third line medications, lack of a well strong health infrastructures, and intermittent or non-existent access to electricity to assure stability of medicines that require refrigeration. We must all be part of the story, part of the solution to accessible, affordable care for these vulnerable brothers and sisters.

If we look toward the third Sustainable Development Goal as a guide we find a call to: *attain healthy lives for all at all ages*. We must addresses maternal/child health, epidemics of AIDS, TB, malaria and neglected tropical diseases, hepatitis, water-borne diseases, and other communicable diseases, and reducing non-communicable diseases in order to meet this goal. Thus we believe that all must be part of the story, including pharmaceutical and diagnostics companies, as we strive to fulfill the moral imperative to increase access to health, product development (diagnostics, vaccines and medicines), affordable pricing, and delivery systems, thus expanding access to pharmaceuticals for all people who need them, but especially children and our poorest and most marginalized brothers and sisters throughout the world.