

Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of Scotland on the Sixth Anniversary of *Laudato Si'* Pentecost 2021

God saw all that he had made and indeed it was very good.^[1]

God's creation is a great gift to all humanity, and humanity itself is an integral part of that creation. We are blessed by having the earth for our common home. It is a place of great beauty, teeming with life of all kinds, a world full of wonderful resources which enable us not only to live but to enhance our way of life. In nature, God's glory is revealed for all to see.^[2] St Francis of Assisi was prominent among the saints in giving praise to God for the wonder of creation.^[3]

We have been entrusted by God with the care of the earth,^[4] but sadly we have not just used the earth we have abused it. We are destroying the seas, polluting the atmosphere and consuming the abundant but limited resources of this world while neglecting the needs of our poor brothers and sisters and showing no concern for tomorrow.

The earth, our common home, is given to all of humanity and its resources are not just for us to use now but to be preserved and passed on to future generations.^[5]

As Christians we thank God for gift of creation, but, because we have taken that gift for granted, when we look at creation as it is now we are conscious of the failings of humanity; we are conscious of the need for what the gospel calls "metanoia",^[6] not just sorrow for the abuse of creation, not just a change of heart, but a change of life and how we live our lives.^[7]

A very solid scientific consensus^[8] tells us that human activity has brought the earth to a crisis point and that action is needed that is both urgent and deep rooted, particularly due to CO₂ emissions. Governments have a responsibility to work together, and with haste, to reduce emissions to a safe level. Governments also need to be concerned about adopting an economic model that no longer embraces consumption and waste, nor neglects the welfare of poorer nations.

But this is not just an issue that we can leave to government to deal with. The COVID pandemic required us to undergo a complete change in our way of life in order to defeat the virus. Likewise, a radical and sustained change in our lifestyle is required if the abuse of our planet is to stop and the damage be reversed.

The environmental crisis raises questions about how we live, how we work, how we holiday, how we travel, how the goods we purchase are manufactured and transported to us.

This is an issue of both environmental and social justice.^[9] It is not only that we must stop polluting the atmosphere, we need to recognise the right of all humanity to the world's resources.^[10] The Christian message, that we are all part of one human family and that we share a common home, means that our earth's resources must be shared and used for the benefit of all and are not to be claimed as the exclusive property of any people or nation in whose territory these resources happen to be located.^[11]

Not just as individuals but also as a Church we must discern what changes we have to make to the way of life we have taken for granted but which we now recognise to be unsustainable. The dioceses of Scotland are in the process of divesting from fossil fuel investments. The Bishops' Conference is aiming for carbon neutrality for its agencies, as are the dioceses in as sustainable and timely a way as possible.

We applaud the Catholic schools who have signed up to be *Laudato Si' Schools* and we encourage our parishes to join the *Eco-Congregation* initiative and to examine what practical measures can be undertaken at a local level.

All these efforts are a start, but much more is required if we are to undo the harm caused by generations of neglect and abuse. Scientists tell us that time is limited. All of us must, therefore, work with a sense of urgency to discern what needs to be done and to make the changes required.

God has honoured us by giving humanity the task of being a co-operator in the work of creation.^[12] In recent years we have seen in our brothers and sisters throughout the world a growing determination to change the destructive practices of the past. This gives us hope. Like the Creator we look at what God has created and see that it is very good. A sense of gratitude compels us to ensure that human activity enhances and builds up that creation.

That same gratitude prompts us to pray:

We praise you, Lord our God, for the gift of life.

We praise you, for the beauty and diversity of created things.

We praise you, for the rich resources of the earth and seas.

We praise you, for entrusting to humanity the care of our common home.

We praise you, for the opportunity to change our wasteful ways.

We praise you, for your boundless compassion and forgiveness.

We praise you, Lord our God, by our actions, in responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

We praise you, Lord our God, Father, Son, and Spirit.

Amen

^[1] Genesis 1: 31: "God saw all that he had made and indeed it was very good"

^[2] Ps 19: 1: "The heavens proclaim the glory of God"

Ps 148: 5: "Let them praise the name of the Lord"

Wisdom 1: 7: "The spirit of the Lord, indeed, fills the whole world"

Romans 1: 20 "Ever since God created the world his everlasting power and deity – however invisible – have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made"

^[3] St Francis of Assisi, Canticle of Creation: "Praised be, my Lord, for all your creation".

^[4] Genesis 2: 15: "To cultivate and take care of it"

^[5] Pope Francis: Laudato Si', 159. "The world we have received also belongs to those who follow us."

^[6] Matthew 3: 8

^[7] Pope John Paul II, Message for World Day of Peace 1990, 13: "Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its life style".

^[8] Pope Francis: Laudato Si', 23

^[9] Pope Francis: Laudato Si', 139. "We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental."

^[10] Gaudium et Spes, 69: "God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples".

Pope Francis: Laudato Si', 95. "The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all."

^[11] Pope Francis: Fratelli Tutti, 124. "Nowadays, a firm belief in the common destination of the earth's goods requires that this principle also be applied to nations, their territories and their resources."

^[12] Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus, 37: "[humanity's] role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation".