



# laetus in praesens

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## Papal Concern for Climate Change and Refugee Care

### A means of concealing criminal systemic negligence?

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Produced on [World Refugee Day](#) -- on the occasion of publication of reports on the world refugee crisis and an Environment Encyclical by Pope Francis

## Introduction

What is to be expected from the simultaneous publication of reports of UNHCR (*Global Trends Report: World at War*, 18 June 2015), of Amnesty International (*World leaders' neglect of refugees condemns millions to death and despair*, 15 June 2015), and of a Papal Encyclical on the Environment (*Laudato Si' on Care of Our Common Home*, 18 June 2015)?

Much emphasis is currently placed on the morality of a short-term solution of ensuring that current refugees are received by developed countries, notably those in Europe. Nothing is said of the expected numbers of refugees which can be predicted for the following years, or the decades thereafter. Considerable tensions are being engendered in developed countries as a result of this influx.

The Pope has emphasized a duty of care and the need for a transformation of hearts and minds to respond to the crisis. Prior to publication of the Encyclical, the consistency of that position was explored in an argument proposing that the Vatican issue passports to refugees and that refugees be settled in St Peter's Square, in Catholic institutions around Europe, and in Catholic families supportive of the Papal position on unconstrained population growth (*Issuance of Vatican Passports to Trans-Mediterranean Immigrants: a modest proposal worthy of the 21st Century?* 2015).

The following section summarizes the world refugee crisis in order to frame commentary on arguments of the Papal Encyclical in two subsequent sections.

## Summary of the world refugee crisis

Commentary on the UNHCR annual report (*Global Trends Report: World at War*, 18 June 2015) by UN High Commissioner for Refugees [Antonio Guterres](#) was summarized in points such as the following (*Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase*, UNHCR, 18 June 2015):

- Wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people than at any other time since records began to flee their homes and seek refuge and safety elsewhere, according to a new report from the UN refugee agency.
- Worldwide displacement was at the highest level ever recorded. It said **the number of people forcibly displaced at the end of 2014 had risen to a staggering 59.5 million compared to 51.2 million a year earlier and 37.5 million a decade ago.**
- Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. If this were the population of a country, it would be the world's 24th biggest.
- We are witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before
- Every day last year on average 42,500 people became refugees, asylum seekers, or internally displaced, a four-fold increase in just four years.
- It is terrifying that on the one hand there is more and more impunity for those starting conflicts, and on the other **there is seeming utter inability of the international community to work together to stop wars and build and preserve peace**

In the report released by Amnesty International (*The Global Refugee Crisis: a conspiracy of neglect*, 2015), the following points were made in a summary by [Salil Shetty](#) (*World leaders' neglect of refugees condemns millions to death and despair*, 15 June 2015):

- World leaders are condemning millions of refugees to an unbearable existence and thousands to death by failing to provide essential humanitarian protection, said Amnesty International as it published a new briefing in Beirut today, ahead of World Refugee Day on 20 June.
- We need a radical overhaul of policy and practice to create a coherent and comprehensive global strategy. A radical change is required in the way the world deals with refugees.
- We are witnessing the worst refugee crisis of our era, with millions of women, men and children struggling to survive amidst brutal wars, networks of people traffickers and governments who pursue selfish political interests instead of showing basic human compassion
- The refugee crisis is one of the defining challenges of the 21st century, but the response of the international community has been a shameful failure.

<b>Heated talks between EU leaders regarding Mediterranean migrants</b> <i>(The Guardian, 26 June 2015)</i>
The national leaders of Europe have engaged in one of their most bitter rows in years over how to respond to the influx of refugees from across the Mediterranean after they scrapped plans for a quota system to share out the resettlement. The meeting descended into name-calling and recrimination as the leaders fought over a modest scheme to share the intake of 60,000 Syrian and Eritrean asylum seekers between their countries over two years.
<b><i>No discussion of what happens with the influx thereafter</i></b>

## Commentary on the Environment Encyclical

The comments below relate to specific sections of the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis (*Laudato Si' on Care of Our Common Home*, 18 June 2015). **Emphasis has been added**, where appropriate.

To what extent is the Pope conscious that the reference "to each us" (in the following introductory article) should naturally include the leadership of the Catholic Church?

8. [Patriarch Bartholomew](#) [of the Eastern Orthodox Church] has spoken in particular of **the need for each of us to repent of the ways we have harmed the planet**, for "inasmuch as we all generate small ecological damage", we are called to acknowledge "our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation"... He has repeatedly stated this firmly and persuasively, **challenging us to acknowledge our sins against creation**: "For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life -- these are sins"....For **"to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God"**...

To what extent does the "change of humanity" (in the following article) require new thinking on the part of the leadership of the Catholic Church? To what extent should the emphasis of the Church on unrestrained reproduction under any circumstances constitute a crime against the world, a sin against ourselves, and a sin against God?

9. At the same time, Bartholomew has drawn attention to the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems, which require that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms. He asks us **to replace consumption with sacrifice**, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which "entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God's world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion"...

To what extent does the Church policy of unrestrained reproduction ensure unnecessary suffering -- a perversion of the form of sacrifice for which the Encyclical calls? To what extent does population increase constitute a major factor in increasing the collective level of consumption -- in questionable complicity with those seeking unchecked economic growth as a source of profitability?

The Encyclical introduces its discussion of the "roots" of the present situation as follows:

15. It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face. I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows. I will then consider some principles drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition which can render our commitment to the environment more coherent. **I will then attempt to get to the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes....**

Despite its quest for the "deepest causes", the Encyclical explicitly sets aside as irrelevant and misguided any concern with reduction of

the birth rate:

50. Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, **some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate**. At times, developing countries face forms of international pressure which make economic assistance contingent on certain policies of "reproductive health". Yet "while it is true that an unequal distribution of the population and of available resources creates obstacles to development and a sustainable use of the environment, it must nonetheless be recognized that **demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development**".... **To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues**. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption.

There is no recognition that global and national governance is extremely problematic, notably with respect to inequalities, imbalances and distribution of resources to the most needy. Under such circumstances **it might be assumed, as in the case of any family, that it would be prudent to avoid encouraging any increase in the number of mouths to be fed when the future source of that food is far from evident**. Failure to do so is to increase the probability of suffering, starvation and premature mortality.

Again it might be asked to what extent the following article applies in particular to the Catholic Church itself. Indeed, should we not pause and consider this?

101. It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis. A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us. **Should we not pause and consider this?...**

In failing to address the ever increasing pressures on global governance -- exacerbated in every sector by unrestrained population growth -- the following concluding article is correct in ways which are not the intention of the Encyclical.

109. ...**We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures**, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth.

## Systemic inadequacies of the Environment Encyclical

The Encyclical is most valuable as a further instance of fruitless blame-gaming. It is an exercise in avoiding recognition of the "deepest roots" of the current crisis in systemic terms, most notably with regard to the feasibility of remedial action in strategic terms, purportedly informed by the best of scientific analysis in a joint report from the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (*Climate Change and The Common Good: a statement of the problem and the demand for transformative solutions*, 2015). It could however be considered as intellectually dishonest, especially in positioning the Catholic Church as lacking any complicity whatsoever in sustaining the pattern of suffering for so long, and into the foreseeable future, as may be variously argued.

The systemic weaknesses in the argument can be clustered as follows (with **relevant literature in the documents cited**):

1. **Denial of any need for constraint on increasing human population:** The Encyclical is very clear on this matter: "**demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development**". Any alternative focus is specifically framed as "**refusing to face the issues**". From a systemic perspective, the counter-argument can be presented:
  - By asking whether there is any argument by the Catholic Church which would recommend against the global population being doubled, multiplied tenfold, or perhaps even a hundred-fold? There is no such argument or suggested constraint. The point can be explored through an *argumentum a contrario*, as presented separately (*Enabling Fruitful Multiplication of Global Population: eliciting massive social consensus by unconstrained reframing of strategic priorities*, 2015). The tragedy is that any such presentation is typically taken as supportive of such increase
  - By asking whether the Catholic Church has any understanding of "when enough is enough", as separately explored (*Is There Never Enough? Religious doublespeak on population and poverty*, 2013). The question can be understood as associating overpopulation with the Encyclical's condemnation of overconsumption in that a feature of consumption is that "enough is never enough". This may be evident for those faced with the challenge of obesity -- namely the lack of a "stop" function inhibiting further consumption of food. That lack of constraint is systemically equivalent to that of increasing family size.
  - By exploring the issue as a thought experiment regarding use of resources on a lifeboat, with the fundamental ethical and existential issues that then come to the fore (*Resource Insights from Plus or Minus 12 People on a Liferaft: thought experiment to highlight global dilemmas in a comprehensible context*, 2014)
2. **Recognition of what may be missing from systemic presentation of the arguments for alternative priorities:** The Encyclical is very clear in its exclusion of any such possibility in an argument presented as a necessarily comprehensive approach to the global challenges of the environment from the highest authority. The possibility of blindspots can be variously explored:
  - By considering how a global strategic plan could be elaborated in relation to a hypothetical blindspot, systematically designed out of any scientific or theological debate, as discussed separately (*Lipoproblems: Developing a Strategy Omitting a Key Problem -- the systemic challenge of climate change and resource issues*, 2009)

- By exploring the role of the necessarily missing perspectives in the challenge of articulating a multidimensional perspective within the limitations of conventional modes of presentation and comprehension, as discussed separately (*Is the World View of a Holy Father Necessarily Full of Holes? Mysterious theological black holes engendering global crises*, 2014).
  - By recognizing the contradiction in terms in the "planar" implications of a "global" plan, namely as the intellectual inheritance of a "flat Earth" perspective now embodied in metaphorical geometry (*Adhering to God's Plan in a Global Society: serious problems framed by the Pope from a transfinite perspective*, 2014). The Encyclical argues that: **Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan** (Art. 164). As with "plan", there is a danger to the assumption implicit in simple geometrical metaphors, especially in associating any "global" strategy with conventional understanding of a sphere as suggestive of integral oneness and of commonality. This is highlighted by the challenge in practice of navigating around the "globe" (*Global Psychosocial Implication in the Pentagramma Mirificum: clues from spherical geometry to "getting around" and circumnavigating imaginatively*, 2015). The Encyclical's extensive section on *Lines of Approach and Action* may therefore reinforce unfortunate forms of "linearity" when comprehension of "curvature" is vital and the challenging alternation of light and dark is only too evident
  - By recognizing the extent to which the purported identification of "root problems" may be distorted in ways at variance with the quality of thinking normally associated with the best of science and theology, as may be variously explored (*Vigorous Application of Derivative Thinking to Derivative Problems: transcending bewailing, hand-wringing and emotional blackmail*, 2013; *Scientific Gerrymandering of Boundaries of Overpopulation Debate*, 2012).
3. **Recognition of the extent to which the Catholic Church is part of the system rather than transcending it:** The Encyclical implies a high degree of innocence on the part of the Pope and the Catholic authorities, conceived as being primarily and fundamentally part of the solution -- rather than as being systemically embedded as part of the problem. Even though no claim is made that the Encyclical is produced under the authority of **papal infallibility**, it follows that the world is expected to learn from a degree of unblemished insight and the transcendent leadership it implies, despite the neglected possibility of fallibility. The inadequacy of this assumption may be challenged as undermining credibility -- especially given Catholic reiteration of the precautionary slogan that all humans are necessarily sinners:
- By considering the manner in which those framing the "root problems", or the strategic solutions, present themselves as dissociated from the problem in adopting a role of officiant in what can be seen as an engagement between problem and solution, as discussed separately (*Marrying Strategic White Holes with Problematic Black Holes: questionable role of officiants in the engagement process and nuptial arrangements*, 2015)
  - By considering, the historical "track record" of the implication of the Catholic Church in problematic behaviour fundamentally at variance with values it claims to uphold as being eternal. An extensive summary is offered by *Wikipedia* in terms of *Criticism of the Catholic Church*, whether accepted or contested.
    - This is most evident in its role in torture, remarkably framed by the elaboration by the **Dominican Order** of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487), later rendered as *The Hammer of the Witches* -- consistent with a particular pattern of discrimination against women. Some of its techniques featured in the procedures of the Inquisition, and remain an inspiration to interrogators of modern times (as with **water torture** and **waterboarding**)
    - Most recently the behaviour of Catholic authorities with respect to complicity in a pattern of cover-ups of **sexual abuse by the clergy** has been highlighted by investigations of the United Nations (*Catholic church leaders prepare for grilling by UN human rights panel*, *The Guardian*, 5 May 2014; *Vatican tries to draw line under clerical sex abuse scandals at UN hearing*, *The Guardian*, 5 May 2014; *UN Committee Against Torture criticises Vatican handling of sex abuse*, *The Guardian*, 22 May 2014; *Committee against Torture, Concluding observations on the initial report of the Holy See*, 17 June 2014).
    - There is little sense from the arguments presented by the Encyclical regarding consumption and inequality that the Catholic Church has long exemplified both issues. Although the current Pope has been acclaimed as a champion of the poor through the modesty of his personal behaviour (in contrast to that of his predecessors), he is confronted by a degree of inertia exemplified by the recent scandal of Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst (*Catholics incensed as German bishop of Limburg builds palace fit for a pope*, *The Guardian*, 10 October 2013). In Germany, for example, the accumulation of such disproportionate wealth is rendered possible by the "church tax" imposed on all taxpayers. Historically this follows initiatives such as the **sale of indulgences**.
  - By considering the long-standing controversial policy of the Catholic Church with regard to the **unequal treatment of women**. This could be recognized as calling into question the purported objectivity of the Encyclical with regard to issues of inequality in the world. The "logic" of that policy with regard to women, strongly justified in theological terms and exemplified by the governance of the Catholic Church, could be considered as systemically analogous to dubious "policies" through which economic inequality is justified everywhere. Using urban slang, rather than the niceties of euphemism, this suggests the sense in which that thinking enables the rich to "screw" the poor abusively, males to "screw" females abusively (with the resulting unwanted children), and the clergy to "screw" members of their flock (whether financially or literally).
4. **Recognition of the fundamental indifference to suffering enabled by the Catholic Church:** The suffering in the world -- as currently exemplified by the refugee crisis and the levels of poverty and violence exacerbating it -- is central to Catholic theology and its founding mythology. It is of course to the Catholic Church that its faithful turn as a consequence of the experience of suffering -- or the prospect of it in the world hereafter. There is a dubious sense in which the Catholic Church could not survive without suffering -- much as armies and arms manufacturers could not survive without wars. Hence the significance dubiously associated with *Ecclesia Militans* and **just war theory**. The attitude of the Church to suffering is therefore highly complex. On the one hand it is much to be regretted, but on the other hand it is seen as the primary experience for existential learning of the most

fundamental kind. As such, it is to be welcomed, even enabled through torture in order to "save a soul". There is therefore a degree of hypocrisy to the argument of the Encyclical with regard to the suffering it highlights. This can be variously explored:

- By considering the discourse reinforced by the Encyclical as exemplifying **doublespeak** of the most dubious nature (*Indifference to the Suffering of Others: occupying the moral and ethical high ground through doublespeak*, 2013)
- By considering a dubious degree of commitment to "sacrifice", notably in common with other Abrahamic religions (*Systemic Reliance of World Religions on Human Sacrifice: covert use of fatal conflict to ensure vital resource management*, 2014). The need for sacrifice is highlighted in the Encyclical -- in a period curiously characterized by commitment to extreme personal sacrifice by suicide bombers in quest of the martyrdom so valued previously in Catholic mythology (effectively implying a need for a "just martyrdom theory").

5. **Recognition of the failure to consider the feasibility of remedial action in response to strategic challenges:** The Encyclical fails completely to consider the challenges of remedial action in the light of the ineffectual strategies of the past. This could be seen as a prime example of what the Encyclical deprecates as **"refusing to face the issues"** which it prefers to associate with any preoccupation with overpopulation. The focus is rather on blaming those who fail to act according to pious precepts which have been ignored to a significant degree throughout history. In this sense the Encyclical is completely unrealistic and can only exacerbate the suffering of the ever increasing numbers of people it effectively seeks to ensure.

The Encyclical can be seen as a pattern of "oughts", "shoulds", "obligations" and "duties" -- an articulation of what is desirable from the perspective of the Catholic Church in its mission of care for humanity on behalf of the divine. It argues with respect to the environment, for example, that: **Enforceable international agreements are urgently needed... What is needed, in effect, is an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of so-called "global commons"... What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis.** (Art. 173-174, 197). Indeed.

This pattern can be seen as consistent with that elaborated by religions over centuries, reflected to a degree in some philosophies and political ideologies, and notably evident in the resolutions of international gatherings, especially those of the United Nations. It is somehow assumed that "appeals" and "injunctions", whether divinely inspired or otherwise, are now sufficient as a catalyst for any strategic initiative other than further exercises in mere tokenism -- of which the **United Nations Climate Change Conference** (Paris, 2015) may well prove to be another example, as with the event which preceded it (*Insights for the Future from the Change of Climate in Copenhagen*, 2010).

What is extraordinary, despite having explicitly drawn on the best of science (and presumably theology) is the **total lack of attention to the challenges to governance in practice in the light of those currently experienced at the local, national and global levels** (and increasingly within the family). This may be explored:

- By considering the challenges to remedial action, notably as separately explored (*Recognizing the Psychosocial Boundaries of Remedial Action: constraints on ensuring a safe operating space for humanity*, 2009; *Collective Learning from Calls for Global Action*, 1981)
- By configuring the challenges to elicit understanding of the nature of the failure to engage effectively with them (*Mind Map of Global Civilizational Collapse: why nothing is happening in response to global challenges*, 2011; *Convergence of 30 Disabling Global Trends: mapping the social climate change engendering a perfect storm*, 2012; *Exploring the Hidden Mysteries of Oxfam's Doughnut: recognizing the systemic negligence of an Earth Summit*, 2012).

6. **Recognition of the curious status of the "international community" as the emerging focus of remedial global governance:** The reference explicitly and implicitly made to the failures of the so-called "international community" (in response to the refugee crisis, inequality, overconsumption and climate change) merit careful consideration. The "international community" is, increasingly cited as though it existed, and is capable of pressure and initiatives in relation to other collective entities -- even beyond those of the United Nations. As noted by *Wikipedia*, the term is typically used to imply the existence of a common point of view towards strategic issues in a period in which such consensus is questionable, as separately explored (*The Consensus Delusion*, 2011). However the Encyclical argues that: **A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries** (Art. 164)

Appeals are increasingly addressed to that international community. Its failure to act in response to them may well be deplored by those in need, as evident in the above-cited report of Amnesty International (*The Global Refugee Crisis: a conspiracy of neglect* (June 2015):

The refugee crisis is one of the defining challenges of the 21st century, but the response of the international community has been a shameful failure. We need a radical overhaul of policy and practice to create a coherent and comprehensive global strategy.... The international community has failed to provide [refugees], or the humanitarian agencies supporting refugees with sufficient resources... The current refugee crisis will not be solved unless the international community recognizes that it is a global problem that requires states to significantly step up international cooperation

Curiously the international community does not "exist". It has no legal basis, if that is the primary criterion -- whether or not *de facto* existence can be claimed or assumed. There is no "concrete proof" of its existence which could be accepted in a conventional legal process or through application of any conventional scientific method. Deplored the failure to act of a "non-existent" entity then merits careful thought. Whether framed in terms of a **duty to rescue**, or as a failure to provide assistance to a

person in need, the capacity to indict the international community for [crimes against humanity](#) through some sort of [class action suit](#) is clearly extremely limited (Christa Rottensteiner, *The Denial of Humanitarian Assistance as a Crime under International Law, International Review of the Red Cross*, 835, September 1999). In legal terms any action by a "non-existent" international community might then be considered comparable with an [Act of God](#), recalling an exploration of the possibility of legal action against his religious representatives (*The Man Who Sued God*, 2001).

There is great irony to the fact that current controversy regarding arguments with respect to the existence of God can be understood to be as questionable as those with respect to the existence of the "United States" or "Israel" -- whether framed in scientific, legal, historical or theological terms (John V. Whitbeck, *The State of Palestine Exists, The Huffington Post*, 1 September 2013). As a focus for hope, belief in the existence of the international community, and its capacity to act, increasingly resembles belief in God (however deprecated), as promoted by the Catholic Church -- now so complicit in violent conflict.

7. **Recognition of the consequences of the pattern of categorical denial by the Catholic Church:** Such denial has become evident with respect to evidence that there have been systematic abuses within the Catholic Church which have been avoided and covered up. These merit systemic analysis in their own right to determine the extent to which the Church authorities are vulnerable to forms of error which they so readily detect in others. Case studies might include:
  - the policies and behaviour of the [Inquisition](#) which, if justifiable then, should be continued to this day
  - the policies of [gender inequality](#) justifying the discrimination against women worldwide
  - the scientific objectivity of the Church as exemplified by the [Galileo Affair](#) (the actions of the Inquisition, the banning of the books of Copernicus, and the 400-year delay in proposing only a degree of vindication)
  - the consequence of categorical denial in reinforcing problematic relations between Christian denominations (including the Eastern Orthodox Churches) and other faiths -- and despite claims to be offering the primary leadership in interfaith dialogue. The tokenism and lack of creativity in this respect can be recognized as being a root modality exacerbating faith-based conflict in the past and at the present time -- with its associated suffering and fatality.
  - the possibility of error by the Catholic Church in relation to unconstrained birth rate and global overpopulation. Clearly if there can be a susceptibility to error on some issues, there is a degree of probability of error on other issues. Ironically the current massive migration of refugees across the Mediterranean could even be explored as a case of strategic [blowback](#), namely an unforeseen systemic response to its population policies. This could be understood as analogous to the process recognized in the case of American global strategy, as variously discussed ([Chalmers Johnson, \*Blowback: the costs and consequences of American Empire\*, 2004](#); [William Rivers Pitt, \*The True History of Blowback in One Sentence\*, TruthOut, 23 October 2014](#); [Mary Anne Weaver, \*Blowback\*, The Atlantic, May 1996](#)).
8. **Recognition of the failure to enable appropriate dialogue on controversial issues:** The Encyclical is introduced by the appeal: *I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.* (Art. 14). It includes many articles on dialogue in a special chapter (Arts. 164-201). These are framed as *Lines of Approach and Action* with the comment: *Although the contemplation of this reality in itself has already shown the need for a change of direction and other courses of action, now we shall try to outline the major paths of dialogue which can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us* (Art. 163).

Whilst the Catholic Church is necessarily free in a global society to assert particular views, notably as overriding those of other methodologies or claimed as divinely inspired by other religions, it is irresponsible in failing to enable more appropriate forms of debate to highlight patterns of agreement and disagreement in the complex dynamic between such world views in their mutual denial.

The Encyclical specifically notes: **On many concrete questions... honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views** (Art. 61). It can however only be considered an instance of doublespeak that meaningful debate regarding the increasing population has been assiduously (if not deviously) inhibited through Church diplomacy, notably since the [International Conference on Population and Development](#) (Cairo, 1994). The Catholic Church has played a leading role in endangering projects and careers addressing this issue, as explored separately (*Overpopulation Debate as a Psychosocial Hazard: development of safety guidelines from handling other hazardous materials*, 2009).

It is characteristic that rapidly evolving techniques of [concept mapping](#), [argument mapping](#), and [semantic mapping](#) (enhanced by the increasingly familiar visualization possibilities) are not employed by the Catholic Church to position its understanding within a global knowledge ecosystem readily comprehensible to all -- especially those threatened by conflict and suffering, or subject to particular discrimination by the Church (as in the case of women). For example, the 246 Articles of the Encyclical and the 172 references (many of them hyperlinks) call for a complementary presentation as a [flow diagram](#) lending itself to exploration as the map of a dynamic system which would enable integrative comprehension. Of some relevance, for example, is the process whereby **all** papal encyclicals were reviewed for content relevant to the profiles in the databases of the [Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential](#) -- whose networks continue to be the subject of multiple visualization experiments.

9. **Recognition of manipulative use of a short-term focus as a justifiable distraction from longer-term implications:** The condition of the world's refugees in the short-term is clearly both a major humanitarian concern and a major challenge to governance. The credibility of proposals in the pipeline is however severely undermined by the manner in which personal tragedy is used as a cynical device for emotional blackmail in the quest for resources by UNICEF, UNHCR, and other aid agencies -- strongly reinforced by arguments of the Catholic Church, as exemplified by the Encyclical. None of these bodies has any

motivation or provision for consideration of the evolution of the crisis in the longer-term. The numbers will in all probability increase in the decades to come. Short-term solutions are unlikely to be acceptable or sustainable in the longer term -- despite the belief promoted by the Encyclical.

The mindset is evident in relation to other disasters (*Disastrous Floods as Indicators of Systemic Risk Neglect: implications for authoritative response to future surprises*, 2011; *Anticipating Future Strategic Triple Whammies: in the light of earthquake-tsunami-nuclear misconceptions*, 2011).

Crudely put, the Catholic Church is committed to "pumping" ever more potential sufferers into the system on the assumption that this will increase the pressure on the "international community" to act otherwise and provide relief -- in conformity with the precepts of the Catholic Church (and preferably with its guidance). The strategy is effectively complicit with other religions committed to competitive reproduction in defence of their particular faiths. This is in contrast with the Encyclical's recognition of the need for far-sightedness: **Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation** (Art. 36)

The consequence of this systemic negligence is likely to be ever increasing indifference to the suffering of others, as is already evident in the rise of nationalism, xenophobia, indifference to the homeless, and to beggars in the streets. The greater the degree of emotional blackmail deployed through the media, the greater the degree of **psychic numbing** and indifference with respect to the personal tragedies presented via the media. Compassion may turn out to be a non-renewable resource, despite assumptions to the contrary. The point is tragically illustrated by the indifference to the **mass extinction of species**, mainly due to human activity. According to *Wikipedia*, although 875 extinctions occurring between 1500 and 2009 have been documented, the vast majority are undocumented. Some 130,000 animal species may have gone extinct without humans even being aware of it. The present rate of extinction of all species may be up to 140,000 per year.

10. **Recognition of the lack of requisite complexity with regard to cognitive engagement with the environment in a knowledge-based society:** The final chapter of the Encyclical devotes many Articles to *Education and Spirituality*, notably clustered into sections on *Towards a New Lifestyle*, *Educating for the Covenant between Humanity and the Environment*, and *Ecological Conversion*. These highlight some cognitive issues phasing necessarily into those framed by a sense of spirituality and personal experience.

The shorthand framing of Environment Encyclical is misleading in that its acclaimed relevance to the strategic issue of "climate change" obscures the manner in which the "environment" for humanity increasingly implies a complex mix of nature and information. Through these "reality" is now experienced as an externality, but matched in various ways by the internalized realities within which people may dwell -- whether or not this experience may be "enhanced" by virtual reality or psychotropic substances. Through the obligation to address the Catholic faithful, the Encyclical unfortunately conflated aspects of this experience with a particular understanding of spirituality and subjectivity -- to the exclusion of others valued by many.

In this sense the Encyclical lost the opportunity to generalize "environment" to include its meaning in a knowledge-based society through which engagement with the natural environment is increasingly framed and articulated -- as with cultural frameworks in the past. Arguably however, this is implicit to a degree in its use of terms like "covenant" and "conversion". However other terms are valued by other belief systems in this respect, as noted separately (*Psychology of Sustainability: embodying cyclic environmental processes*, 2002). The implications of the interplay between external and internal environments is as yet far from being recognized or understood. Degrees of active cognitive participation are envisaged, potentially consistent with some of the language of the Encyclical.

The greater opportunity lost is the manner in which "environment" generalized in this way is a challenge to conventional understandings of belief -- as these may be partially recognized and reinforced by the contrasting theological frameworks that continue to drive so many conflicts. In this sense "belief" is fundamental to the credibility of any remedial strategies for the condition of the "environment", and to confidence in the forms of governance from which they may emerge. In a context of increasing information overload the nature of belief and credibility is intimately related to comprehension of the complexities of that environment, as may be variously explored (*Comprehension of Requisite Variety for Sustainable Psychosocial Dynamics*, 2006; *Investing Attention Essential to Viable Growth*, 2014). Of particular concern is how to sustain an "environment" for contrasting beliefs -- upheld or deprecated by groups potentially drawn into conflict in defence of them, or to eliminate what they perceive as erroneous.

This cognitive engagement with complexity can be framed and facilitated by the subtleties of mathematics -- as the science of relationships *par excellence*. However the challenge of enabling credibility and sustaining belief calls for the insights of contrasting disciplines. With respect to the faith-based conflicts of the world, the Encyclical could have indicated that the more comprehensive dialogue for which it appealed would need to offer more sophisticated means of bridging between belief systems and world views. Given that at their more fundamental levels, religious insight is intimately associated with number, the interplay between mathematics and theology merits exploration, as separately argued (*Mathematical Theology: Future Science of Confidence in Belief -- Self-reflexive Global Reframing to Enable Faith-based Governance*, 2011).

## Strategic crimes against humanity?

**Systemic negligence: elephants in the human living room:** The subtitle of this commentary asked the question as to whether the Encyclical was a convenient means of concealing criminal systemic negligence. The argument draws attention to inadequacies in its systemic preoccupation with the environment. Clearly the focus on climate change and refugees invites approval from sectors to which the Catholic Church would wish to appeal to a greater degree. It is less evident whether it is only incidentally that this appeal will serve to conceal its systemic inadequacies.

The focus here on a systemic perspective is appropriate for an Environment Encyclical in which frequent reference is made to "system" and "ecosystem". The question is how the adequacy of that perspective is to be assessed in systemic terms. The points above highlight indications of its inadequacy which presumably would be contested -- whether or not they are a reason for caution in any appreciation of the framework proposed. More specifically the issue is whether these are an indication of negligence, whether deliberate or inadvertent. Using the classic metaphor, is there an unacknowledged **elephant in the room** (as framed by the Encyclical) to which attention should be drawn, as argued separately (*Climate Change and the Elephant in the Living Room: in quest of an endangered species*, 2008).

In his commentary on the Encyclical, [John Vidal](#), suggests that there are two such elephants:

But for all the papal encyclical's reliance on peer-reviewed science and state of the art environmental analysis, there is only one brief mention by Pope Francis of the massive population growth that has overwhelmed many countries in the past 50 years as a direct result of Catholic teaching. And there are just 11 mentions of women. These **two whopping elephants** in the Basilica of St Peter throw some doubt on whether the encyclical is really a radical analysis of the state of the world intended to speak to everyone, as Francis has said he wants it to be, or is aimed at the upper echelons of a divided church in need of fresh teachings.

The Vatican has never fully grasped that women are the world's greatest asset for development and environmental protection, or that having 90 million extra mouths a year to feed, almost all in the world's poorer countries, inevitably puts nature and poor countries' resources under immense extra pressure (*Pope's climate change encyclical glosses over role of population growth*, *The Guardian*, 19 June 2015).

As succinctly stated by [Lawrence M. Krauss](#) with regard to the Encyclical:

It's beautifully presented and sounds good in principle. However, his biblical analysis leads to **the false conclusion that contraception and population control are not appropriate strategies to help a planet with limited resources...** A population of 10 billion by 2050 will likely be unsustainable at a level in which all humans have adequate food, water, medicine and security. Moreover, as this pope should particularly appreciate, the environmental problems that overpopulation creates *also* disproportionately afflict those in poor countries, where access to birth control and abortion is often limited... The problem with basing a public policy framework on outmoded ideas that predate modern science and medicine is that one inevitably proposes bad policies. (*Ideology Subsumes Empiricism in Pope's Climate Encyclical*, *Scientific American*, 18 June 2015)

**Inhibition of dialogue:** Would systemic inadequacies result in the Encyclical being framed as naive, even if it clearly demonstrates a degree of responsiveness to current issues? More questionable is whether the manner in which the Catholic Church is positioned by the Encyclical implies that many have lessons to learn from the authority it claims for its insights. In its call for new dialogue amongst all parties, will many then see the Encyclical as having already ignored perspectives that they represent and value? How would the proposed dialogue create room for such perspectives -- especially if there is already an elephant there?

The challenge is how to enable dialogue with those holding contrasting views -- a challenge the Encyclical fails to address in seeking a consensus which may not only be illusory (as conventionally understood) but may well also be inappropriate in systemic terms (in the light of higher orders of cybernetics). Ironically the self-reflexivity of the latter may be highly relevant to the spiritual insights which the Encyclical promotes through the language of theology. There is a further irony in that the preoccupation with "climate change" can be explored as a valuable metaphor for the "change of climate" of discourse promoted by the Encyclical (*Climate of Change Misrepresented as Climate Change: insights from metaphorical confusion*, 2008).

It could be readily assumed (and denied) that the Holy See is currently deploying its resources to ensure that minimal mention is made of overpopulation at the forthcoming [United Nations Climate Change Conference](#) (Paris, 2015). This perhaps be in exchange for the support provided by the Environment Encyclical -- thus potentially making a mockery of that event, as before (*United Nations Overpopulation Denial Conference: exploring the underside of climate change*, 2009).

If the call for change by the Encyclical implies various forms of current entrapment by all, the modalities within which the Catholic Church is itself trapped merit consideration in the light of the adage of policy scientist [Geoffrey Vickers](#): *A trap is a function of the nature of the trapped* (*Freedom in a rocking boat: changing values in an unstable society*, 1972). It is in that sense that the Encyclical merits consideration in the light of the adage of [Gregory Bateson](#): *We are our own metaphor* (1972).

**Denial of error:** A fruitful preparation for any such dialogue, even a criterion for participation, would be the capacity to recognize any collective tendency to error (*Guidelines for Critical Dialogue between Worldviews*, 2006). To what historical errors can the Church now admit, or do some still claim that it is necessarily error-free in systemic terms?

Does the Church consider itself to be necessarily doubt-free with nothing of relevance unknown in relation to the current environmental crisis -- and despite the unknowns admitted by climate scientists, for example? The question is of relevance given the famed recognition of the **known unknowns** by [Donald Rumsfeld](#), as a key representative of a regime whose possible crimes against humanity are the subject of [ongoing legal processes](#) (*Unknown Undoing: challenge of incomprehensibility of systemic neglect*, 2008).

Could the spirit of the famed papal *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), focused on those in society at large, be reversed in a healthy exercise in recognizing errors made within the Church? This would be consistent with the *Requirement to embrace error*, as articulated by Donald N. Michael:

More bluntly, future-responsive societal learning makes it necessary for individuals and organizations to embrace error. It is the only way to ensure a shared self-consciousness about limited theory on the nature of social dynamics, about limited data for testing theory, and hence about our limited ability to control our situation well enough to be successful more often than not (*Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn*, 1997)

For a Church reputed for its promotion of *confession* by others to its agents, it is curious that the Church itself has no process for confessing to error. As such it may well constitute a metaphor for humanity in its destruction of its own environment. Institutions are not renowned for their confessions to error -- even when faced with the collapse of the civilization they have enabled. The Church, as is the tendency of humanity, does not admit to error. It deploys its considerable resources to dissociating itself from error, and to blaming others for any unfortunate consequences.

**Moral authority?** Should the Pope be recognized as the highest moral authority of the world? As argued by Damian Carrington (*Will Pope Francis's encyclical become his 'miracle' that saved the planet?* *The Guardian*, 18 June 2015):

... the moral force the pope brings to bear may kindle that most fragile necessity: political will... The pope provides the clearest and loudest moral case yet for action now, firmly rooted in justice for the world's poor... This moral leadership is important, says climate economist Lord Nick Stern, because of "the failure of many heads of state and government around the world to show political leadership"... The woman charged with delivering the global climate deal, the UN's Christiana Figueres is in no doubt of the encyclical's importance: "It will have a major impact. It will speak to the moral imperative of addressing climate change in a timely fashion in order to protect the most vulnerable".

How are such assumptions to be reconciled with the moral implications of the Church's neglected "elephants"? Or with current consideration by the United Nations of the implications of the Catholic Church in crimes against humanity in the case of sexual abuse by clergy (*The Catholic church is guilty of crimes against humanity*, *The Observer*, 29 August 2010; *International Criminal Court declines to pursue 'crimes against humanity' case against Vatican*, *National Catholic Reporter*, 18 June 2013; Dermot Groome, *The Church Abuse Scandal: were crimes against humanity committed?* *Penn State Law*, 2011)? Again, the Church deploys its resources to ensure that any evidence is framed in relation to incidents and individuals, rather than systemically, whilst being complicit systemically in their cover-up and denial.

The Vatican has consistently said that a pope cannot be held accountable for cases of abuse committed by others because priests are employees of individual dioceses around the world and not direct employees of the Vatican. It says the head of the church cannot be compared to the CEO of a company. (Philip Pullella, *Pope will have security, immunity by remaining in the Vatican*, *Reuters*, 15 February 2013)

This position can be explored as a form of *plausible deniability*. It contrasts most curiously with the widely reported interpretation by Joseph Kurtz, the president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in response to the Encyclical: *It is our marching orders for advocacy* (Suzanne Goldenburg, *US Catholics ready to follow Pope's 'marching orders' on climate change*, *The Guardian*, 18 June 2005). Kurtz added: *He is providing a framework and a moral call as a true moral leader to take seriously the urgency of this matter*. The chief executive of the World Resources Institute, interpreted the message as a call to action for world leaders ahead of the Paris climate talks: *The pope's message brings moral clarity that the world's leaders must come together to address this urgent human challenge*.

The Vatican position also contrasts with the capacity for *excommunication* provided by canon law -- seemingly not applied in the case of clerical sexual abuse, except as a threat to bishops who failed to cover up such abuse (Antony Barnett, *Vatican told bishops to cover up sex abuse*, *The Observer*, 17 August 2003). Consideration of the matter is complicated by a papal initiative immediately prior to release of the Encyclical (Elisabetta Povledo and Laurie Goodstein, *Pope Creates Tribunal for Bishop Negligence in Child Sexual Abuse Cases*, *The New York Times*, 10 June 2015). The tribunal is housed in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican office that polices adherence to church doctrine -- including that relating to birth control and gender inequality.

Moral authority is notably cultivated by the current pattern of *canonisation of popes* enabling their veneration as saints. The process requires a miracle, to which Carrington's comment refers. The process also requires presentation of a case by a canon lawyer, termed the *Devil's Advocate*, to argue the case against the sainthood of a candidate in order to uncover any character flaws or misrepresentation of evidence favoring canonisation of an individual.

In systemic terms, it is therefore curious that the Catholic Church has no internal process for questioning its collective moral authority with respect to strategies it promotes which enable the death and suffering of millions -- in the past, at present, and in the foreseeable future. Whereas it has had a judicial procedure, used by the Inquisition, involving individuals being "*put to the question*", the Church does not recognize any process whereby the assumed spiritual justification of its policies might be "put to the question" -- by a "Devil's Advocate".

Ironically, the process of putting to the question was a euphemism for *water torture* -- a torture to which humanity (and especially the poor) are to be subjected through rising sea levels. Curiously Church policy with regard to ever increasing population is thus being "put

to the question" -- but otherwise. The suffering and fatality will undoubtedly be dubiously reframed as an **Act of God** in defence of the unquestionable moral authority of the Church in its unquestioning obedience to the "marching orders" of the injunction: *Be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28)*.

**Criminal negligence?** How is systemic negligence to be acknowledged? Having effected it, can anyone seriously claim that "business-as-usual" would be affected by the death of millions of refugees?

**Rising sea levels**, as a consequence of climate change resulting from the increasing intensity of human activity, will be detrimental for three-quarters of the world's poor. Many will suffer. In a special report by the *New Scientist*, it is noted that:

Whatever we do now, the seas will rise at least 5 metres. Most of Florida and many other low-lying areas and cities around the world are doomed to go under... a rise of 20 metres will soon be unavoidable... much of the rise could happen within the first few centuries. (Michael Le Page, *Five Metres and Counting*, 13 June 2015)

There is thus the further question as to whether the Encyclical can be considered a reflection of criminal negligence -- now or in the implications of its selective recommendations, as may be interpreted by the future. The current crisis with regard to refugees (and more generally the poverty and violence exacerbating that crisis) focuses attention on **the historical responsibility of the Catholic Church in assiduously ensuring that ever more people are engendered within a system for which appropriate forms of governance have yet to be found**. This could indeed come to be recognized as a crime against humanity -- given the consequent suffering and fatality at this present time and in the foreseeable future. At what level of fatality would such recognition be appropriate? What is the concrete proof that would be required?

#### **Papal admission of sin -- or typical contradiction?**

*(Pope Francis says destroying the environment is a sin)*

In a message entitled *Show Mercy to our Common Home*, Pope Francis has called for urgent action to stop climate change and proposed that caring for the environment be added to traditional Christian works of mercy such as feeding the hungry and visiting the sick... The pontiff used the occasion to revive many of the powerful issues he highlighted a year ago in his provocative encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, and his latest message seems certain to rankle conservatives. Francis described man's destruction of the environment as a sin and accused mankind of turning the planet into a "polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation and filth". (*The Guardian*, 2 September 2016; *Pope Francis says neglecting the environment is a sin*, *CBC News*, 1 September 2016; *Pope calls global warming sin, says protecting creation is work of mercy*, *Crux*, 1 September 2016; *Pope Francis says care of environment a new 'work of mercy'*, *RNS*, 1 September 2016)

Missing from the pontiff's declaration is the nature of any complicity of the Catholic Church in promoting the unconstrained growth in the world's population (at any cost to the environment) under conditions of inability to govern the production and distribution of resources to those in need -- or to process appropriately the waste the population produces.

Is this a rare example of recognition by the Catholic Church of its own sinfulness -- in ensuring, by the most direct means possible, that the planet becomes a "polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation and filth"?



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