SISTER MOTHER EARTH

Franciscan Roots of the *Laudato Sí’*
SISTER MOTHER EARTH

FRANCISCAN ROOTS OF THE LAUDATO SI'

MARTÍN CARBAJO NÚÑEZ
*Laudato Si’,* my Lord, for my parents Martín and Ascensión, who taught me to enjoy family life & to care for the common house; and for the brothers of my Franciscan Province of Santiago, who have expanded the horizons of my first family home.
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Abbreviations

**Biblical books**

1Cor 1 Corinthians  
2Cor 2 Corinthians  
Hag Haggai  
Rev Revelation or Apocalypse  
Col Colossians  
Eph Ephesians  
Ez Ezekiel  
Gn Genesis  
Acts Acts of the Apostles  
Is Isaiah  
Jb Job  
Jer Jeremiah  
Jn John  
Lk Luke  
Lv Leviticus  
Mk Mark  
Mt Matthew  
Hos Hosea  
Prov Proverbs  
Rm Romans  
Ps Psalms  
Wis Wisdom

**Magisterium sources**

AL FRANCIS, Exhortation *Amoris Letitia*  
AParens PAUL VI, Letter *Alma parens*  
CA JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Centesimus annus*
CCC  Catechism of the Catholic Church
CSDC  PCJP, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
CIC  Code of Canon Law
CV  BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Caritas in veritate
DC  BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Deus caritas est
CST  Social Doctrine of the Church
DV  SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution Dei Verbum
DZ  DENZINGER, Enchiridion symbolorum
EA  JOHN PAUL II, Exhortation Ecclesia in America
EG  FRANCIS, Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium
EN  PAUL VI, Exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi
EV  JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Evangelium Vitae
FR  JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Fides et ratio
GS  SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution Gaudium et spes
LE  JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Laborem exercens
LF  FRANCIS, Encyclical Lumen fidei
LG  SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution Lumen gentium
LS  FRANCIS, Encyclical Laudato Si’
OA  PAUL VI, Letter Octogesima adveniens
MD  JOHN PAUL II, Letter Mulieris dignitatem
NA  SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration Nostra aetate
PCID  Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue
PCJP  Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace
PP  PAUL VI, Encyclical Populorum progressio
PT  JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Pacem in terris
RM  JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Redemptoris misio
SRS  JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Sollicitudo rei socialis
SCa  BENEDICT XVI, Exhortation Sacramentum caritatis
VS  JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Veritatis splendor
WCD  World Communication Day
WDP  World Day of Peace
Writings of St. Francis

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<td>The Canticle of the Creatures</td>
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<td>A Letter a Brother Anthony of Padua</td>
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<td>A Letter to a Minister</td>
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<td>CtO</td>
<td>A Letter to the Entire Order</td>
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<td>PrsG</td>
<td>The Praises of God</td>
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<td>The Office of the Passion</td>
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<td>ER</td>
<td>The Earlier Rule (<em>Regula non bullata</em>)</td>
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<td>2MP</td>
<td>The Mirror of Perfection. Larger Version</td>
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<td>Don</td>
<td>BONAVENTURE, Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti</td>
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<td>BONAVENTURE, Collationes in Hexaëmeron</td>
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<td>JACQUES DE VITRY, Historia Occidentalis</td>
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<td>GSFS</td>
<td>General Secretariate for Formation and Studies</td>
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<td>BONAVENTURE, De mysterio SS. Trinitatis</td>
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**Bibliographical and common**

a. Articulus  
AAS Acta Apostolicae Sedis  
ASS Acta Sanctae Sedis  
Bac Biblioteca de autores cristianos  
c. chapter  
Cfr. Confer, see, compare  
a/m. Aforesmencioned  
CST Catholic Social Teaching  
d. Distintco, distinctiones  
ed. Editor, publisher, coordinator, coordinators, editorial
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<tr>
<td>Edb</td>
<td>Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>Ibid.</td>
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<td>Id.</td>
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<td>impr.</td>
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<td>p.</td>
<td>Pars, page, pages</td>
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<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Migne, Patrologia graeca</td>
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<td>Migne, Patrologia latina</td>
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<td>prol.</td>
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<td>q.</td>
<td>Quaestio, quaestiones</td>
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<td>Reb</td>
<td>Revista eclesiástica Brasileira</td>
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<td>THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologiae</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
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Prologue

On May 24, 2015, the solemnity of Pentecost, Pope Francis signed the encyclical *Laudato Si’* on care for the common home. Once published, the Ministers General of the Franciscan Families wrote a letter to the Holy Father thanking him for it and acknowledging that the encyclical brings to light the current relevance of the Franciscan charism regarding the respect for any form of life. Whoever loves God takes care of all his creatures.

The spirit of Francis of Assisi hovers constantly over this encyclical, as a breath that impregnates it with impressive simplicity. The immense and the distant are filled with closeness; poverty is lived among the riches of creation. God puts nature in our hands, not to dominate it, but to care for it. Cosmic fraternity is a gift and, at the same time, a task that we have received from the Most High. We are called to live joyfully as brothers and sisters of all creatures, and to proclaim together the greatness and goodness of our common Father.

Some centuries ago, Francis of Assisi composed the Canticle of the Creatures; Pope Francis has recalled it and put it again in the limelight. The Pope invites all to the joyful duty of coming closer to creation and building peace, overcoming the ethical challenges of our globalized world. This is also the purpose of the pages we are introducing with this foreword.

It is not the first time that Professor Martín Carbajo Núñez writes about current ethical issues, especially those related to the social, political, economic, and communications fields. However, a more specific study on ecological issues, from a Franciscan perspective, was clearly missing. The encyclical *Laudato Si’* has offered him a great opportunity and he has done well in taking hold of it.

We agree with the author in affirming that Francis of Assisi is an inspiring model for a true ecology. His example is an encouraging
invitation to take care of the common home and to overcome other interested and contradictory ways of understanding ecology. A continuous effort is needed in order to properly formulate the truth about nature. To this end, it is necessary to avoid certain experimentalism, which deepens the furrow of relativism, and hinders the growth of a true intellectual and moral reflection. We must overcome a partial ecology, fragmented and self-centered, to embrace an integral and complete one, which has human's well-being as its first and most important objective and, at the same time, allows people to be the true protagonists of their own development.

The reader will find here this line of integral ecology, which is, at the same time, intellectual, moral and transcendent. Intellectual: with the unquestionable honesty of reason and thought. Moral: assuming the responsibilities that derive from reasonable principles, natural rights and conscience-appealing rules. Transcendent: expanding the horizons of knowledge and assuming its intrinsic principles in the light of a mature and reasoned faith. The goal is integration, instead of division and fragmentation. In fact, ecology cannot be reduced to a multidisciplinary academic study. It must also be a vital attitude of respect and care for the common home, where all creatures, together with human beings, celebrate their undeniable unity while enjoying the presence of the Trinitarian God.

The Franciscan vision of the author is clear and evident. It would have been a big surprise for us if this vision were not present, because we know well professor Carbajo's formation, his broadminded ideas, and his dedication to illustrate the relevance of the Franciscan Tradition in addressing today's major social challenges. He knows well that any serious reflection on the care for the common home must take into account St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan School.

Let's now have a look at the last years of St. Francis. Death and endless life are already close. He knows very well that God the Father does not abandon his children and that his Goodness shines in all his creatures, especially in human beings. These are years to sing and to make the last will. It is then that Francis composes the Canticle of Brother Sun, which is a beautiful and admirable choral work. The praise of the creatures puts the music and the life of St. Francis the booklet. A wonderful symphonic poem emerges, in which
the beauty of creation is harmoniously interwoven with the noble sentiments of the Minstrel of God. This canticle is a parable of his life, narrated under the influence of divine grace, and sung by all the creatures in the universe.

Since ecology is an attempt to reconcile humans with nature, the environmentalists would do well in assuming the attitudes of their heavenly patron St. Francis, who so deeply perceived the sacredness of creation.

John Paul II said that today the “ecological question”¹ is an urgent responsibility and an unavoidable exercise of charity. In fact, the concern for ecological issues belongs to the core of Christian faith and to the mission of the Church, and so it must never be considered as alien to Christianity. The Church is called to foster the universal reconciliation “through Him and for Him.” (Col 1:16) She teaches that man is the brother and caretaker of all creatures, not his absolute and capricious master, and so he must protect the natural and social environment, without abusing of nature or putting it in danger.

Nobody can be surprised at knowing that Francis of Assisi is the universal patron of ecologists. Certainly, Professor Martin Carbajo has found no difficulty in illustrating the merits of the Poverello for such a deserved title. It is enough to remember the exemplarity of his life, his continuous praise, his contemplation of beauty, and his efforts at building the universal fraternity.

The encyclical Laudato Si’ acknowledges the legitimacy of those interventions on nature that are aimed at obtaining necessary resources, provided that they are responsibly carried out, looking for the common good, and respecting the beauty, purpose, utility, and function of all living creatures. It is not an easy task. In fact, the encyclical, while being an enthusiastic hymn of praise to the Creator, is also an urgent call to take care of the common home.

The ecological problem is very complex and cannot be limited to the protection of natural areas nor to the promotion of a better relationship with the environment. Political and economic interests, ideologies, and the longing for opulence are obstacles that prevent people from giving priority to the common good, to the defense of human rights, and to the preservation of nature.

The environmental issue has become an urgent call to our responsibility. In order to properly face it, we must reinforce universal solidarity and promote the integral development in all its human, cultural, educational, and social dimensions. Certainly, it cannot be reduced to an increase of the GDP. The well-being of men and women depends not only on material goods, but, above all, on the attainment of an integral, complete, and mature personality, (SRS 26) in full harmony with nature.

The interest in ecology is not limited to the adventure of some militants and activists, who strive to bring about their own projects. A real school is needed, with the most appropriate pedagogy, so that everyone can understand and properly deal with the ecological issues, overcoming some of today’s best known contradictions. For example, today we protect and care for animals, while, quite unconsciously, we let humans be eliminated. We make many efforts at maintaining and increasing a good quality of life and, at the same time, we are forgetting or limiting the necessary conditions for people’s full development, such as freedom, the rights to be born, to live and die with dignity. Besides, we look for a healthier and more breathable environment, but, at the same time, there is an increase of violence, extortion, social unrest, destruction of the family, and violation of fundamental rights. There is also a decline in personal and social values, in ethical principles, and in references to transcendence.

It is not strange that the author of this book emphasizes the ambiguity of the current way of understanding ecology, environmental ethics, and sustainability. Professor Carbajo points out the present need for a deep and well-balance reflection, open to everybody’s participation, in order to unveil new horizons of hope. To this end, he proposes St. Francis and the Franciscan Tradition as significant sources of inspiration.

Francis of Assisi contemplates the invisible God who, in his creatures, becomes close, visible and recognizable. The Canticle of Brother Sun is an enthusiastic expression of admiration and gratitude to the Creator. It asserts that all creatures form a large fraternity, sustained and vivified by the Trinitarian God. In fact, all of them are a tangible manifestation of the Supreme Lord and should be recognized and loved as brothers and sisters, since they are sons and daughters of the only Father.
The whole universe invites us to praise and contemplate God and to establish loving relationships among us. In Christ, all creation has become a wonderful fraternity and a temple of the Eternal Word, who has made his dwelling among us. (Jn 1:14) This is how Brother Francis understands it and sings it in his Canticle of Brother Sun, which is a very enthusiastic hymn to creation. This Canticle will suffice to understand the importance of St. Francis in the history of ecology. Reading it, we understand the reason why St. Francis has been recognized as a model of the care and love for creation. All creatures lead him to God and, with them, he praises and dialogues with the Lord Most High.

The words of this foreword have been written as a paraphrase, in theological language, of the Canticle of the Creatures, with the aim of highlighting St. Francis’ cosmic brotherhood. His canticle is like a convocation of all creation to the praises of God for all his gifts: for life, fraternity, forgiveness, even for Sister Death. The creation is sacred because God is in it.

Francis loved nature because he loved God. Sir Brother Sun is beautiful and radiant because it “bears a likeness of You, Most High One;” the moon, the water, the wind, the serene and cloudy weather are sisters and brothers, because God is the one who has made them clear, precious, and beautiful. Francis praises God in all creatures. It is perfectly understandable the reason why St. John Paul II proclaimed him the patron Saint of ecologists.

Franciscan contemplation does not exempt us from our responsibilities in this world; rather it compels us to be more committed to them. We need to live and act this love and responsibility in all spheres: in the public and private realms, in poverty and in abundance, with the animals and with sister water... If everything speaks of God, we must praise his name in all. The awareness of the challenges and evils that plague our world should lead us to a more responsible commitment: where there is hatred, we have to bring love; where there is bitterness, we must make visible the sweet radiance of the Supreme Goodness.

Arguments, paths, and Franciscan ways to get closer to God. Instead of remaining stuck to philosophical arguments or apologetic discourses, we need to be seduced by the splendor of truth (bonitatis
splendor), by the fascination of God’s love, which has been poured out in the entire creation and particularly in the human being.

Our admired author finish this book with a splendid chapter on the reconciliation and reconstruction of the cosmic family. It could not be otherwise, since Francis of Assisi lived and longed for it.

Carlos Amigo Vallejo
Cardinal Archbishop Emeritus of Seville
Introduction

The reader will find in this book a Franciscan vision of ecology which, in many respects, seems to have inspired the encyclical *Laudato Si’*. From its very title, the encyclical presents Francis of Assisi as a model of integral ecology and as an example of the type of fraternal relationships that are necessary to overcome the current social and environmental crisis. The Jubilee of Mercy has further emphasized this cordial approach to global ethical challenges.

Following the line indicated by Pope Francis, the book presents an integral vision of ecology and, from this point of view, analyzes today’s global ethical challenges, putting them in relation with the experience of Francis of Assisi and with the philosophical-theological reflection of the Franciscan Tradition. Rather than looking back nostalgically to the past, the book invites the reader to find inspiration in St. Francis and in his followers to properly live our present and open it to a future of hope. The relevance of the Franciscan tradition in this field is widely recognized. Lynn White has been one of the authors who most harshly accused the Judeo-Christian religion of having caused the ecological crisis, but he has been also the one who more enthusiastically proposed Francis of Assisi as a model for ecologists.

The book consists of four chapters and in each of them will be organized around four themes: freedom, gratuitousness, fraternity, and the common good. The author considers that these are the four great principles of the Franciscan ethical reflection.

In the light of the encyclical *Laudato Si’*, the first chapter identifies and analyzes the most worrying ethical challenges in our globalized

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2 In the body of the text, the quotations of the encyclical *Laudato Si’* will be indicated with just the numbers in brackets.
world. The chapter begins with a brief presentation of the main currents of environmental ethics that, from very different positions, try to deal with the problem of sustainability. After emphasizing the specificity of the Christian perspective, the following sections analyze the causes of the current socio-environmental crisis, underlining the need to overcome the technocratic paradigm, which analyzes and dissects, but is unable to arrive at a comprehensive and inclusive vision. Because of this fragmentary and efficientist conception, the relations in the common home deteriorate, no one looks others in the eye, and things are reduced to disposable objects.

In the second chapter, Francis of Assisi is presented as a model of integral ecology and inspirer of a consistent way of addressing the current socio-environmental crisis. It is noted that, at the time of St. Francis, the vision of the cosmos was very different to ours and there was not the type of environmental degradation that daunts us today. Although recognizing these differences of epoch and mentality, it is still clear that Francis’ vital attitude has nothing to do with the strong anthropocentrism that, in later times, has considered nature as pure neutral matter and so has justified our modelling it at will, following no other criteria than our egotistical interests.

Francis also surpasses the position of those who present human beings as administrators of creation, but do not consider them fully integrated in it. Man would have the moral obligation of taking care of something that he does not feel as his own. He has assumed this task and does it mainly because God holds him responsible for that, but he keeps considering it as a heteronomous obligation that does not come out from his inner self. He sees himself as a steward, in charge of taking care of other people’s property, or as a tenant, who merely complies with his agreements and responsibilities.

Francis goes much further. He does not feel himself as an absolute lord or as a butler, but as a brother. He loves all creatures because he recognizes himself as part of them, united to them with close ties of familiarity. The common home is his house; those who inhabit it are his brothers and sisters. There is no need to encourage him to behave properly: he does it spontaneously and joyfully, with all his heart. This ecology of kinship is much more profound and effective than the one based on mere management.
The third chapter studies how the Franciscan Tradition has formulated, in philosophical and theological terms, the intuitions of its founder. The limitations of the present work compel us to focus our study on Scotus and Bonaventure, its two most significant representatives. This school, usually named “voluntarism,” affirms that creation is the result of a loving and free will. All beings are good because they have been loved, called by name, freely chosen among many possible ones. They have also been inserted in a network of relationships in which each one is important and meaningful to the whole.

Instead of the excessive abstraction of Western philosophy, the Franciscans give primacy to the singular, to the concrete and individualized, thus recovering the capacity of contemplating with wonder the mystery of each being and perceiving it as unique and unrepeatable. All creatures, even the most insignificant, reflect the Trinitarian God and therefore have a value in themselves that must be discovered and respected. We all are brothers and sisters, children of the same Father and born in the same home. Instead of selfish interest, the Franciscans invite all to “being-with” (inter-esse), fraternally.

Taking into account the analysis done in the first three chapters, the fourth one presents some guidelines to address the current socio-environmental crisis and to establish the most appropriate religious, anthropological, and ethical foundation to address it. It does not intend to offer technical solutions, because the Franciscans respect the legitimate autonomy of the specialists in each area. As the Pope says, “the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But she is concerned to encourage an honest and open debate,” [188] in order to safeguard the person and the common good. Following this line, the fourth chapter tries to outline the ethical criteria that must guide the reconstruction of family relationships in the common home.

Our reflection is based on the conviction that the ecological crisis is a family crisis: human beings are breaking the ties that bind them to creatures, thus causing chaos and confusion. We need to restore those broken relationships to enjoy again our being brothers and sisters in the common home.
The human family “is the first and most important school” of fraternal relationships. There we learn “social virtues, such as respect for persons, gratuitousness, trust, responsibility, solidarity, cooperation,” tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It is also “the first and fundamental structure for «human ecology».” (CA 39) We need to put into practice the kind of fraternal and gracious relationships that we usually experience at home during childhood and that help us to discover the real face of our heavenly Father and the mystery of the Trinitarian “We.” The future of our big cosmic fraternity depends on it.

Before going any further, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of some terms that we are going to use. The Earth is our common home and everything is related in it. This affirmation, which the Pope repeats ten times in the encyclical Laudato Si’, implies that “the ecological” must not be reduced to “the green;” i.e., it should not be considered as something alien to social dynamics and human interaction.

We will also distinguish between the concepts of “creation” and “nature,” which are not equivalent. Francis of Assisi never uses the term “nature” in his writings. He prefers to use “creation,” because he sees everything from God. In fact, “nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood, and controlled,” whereas the Christian tradition uses “creation” to refer to the project of a personal and Trinitarian God, who acts out of love and everything has destined to the communion with Him. Creation is a gift, a reality “illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.”

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3 POPE FRANCIS, «Address to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See,» (Jan. 11, 2016) in OR 156/7 (Jan. 11/12, 2016) 4-5, here 4.
6 POPE FRANCIS, «Address…» (Jan. 11, 2016) p. 4.
Besides being of nature, the human being is also of culture. It is not easy to distinguish between these two terms, because “the definition of nature is always, at least, a construction of culture.”

The reformed theologian Paul Tillich affirms that creation is not only a factum, but a fieri, emphasizing its dynamic and evolutionary character, a process that man has to take care of as a responsible administrator. Hegel also considers that creation is not an actus that took place at a precise instant, but a dialectical and eternal process of the divine essence, because God needs the world in order to be himself. These and other scholars agree in saying that creation is not something static and immutable, but project, openness, a kingdom of freedom. In a Christian perspective, the human being is called to develop the potentialities of all that exists, but always in conformity with the divine plan. In the Liber naturae, man discovers the divine presence and, in turn, as capax Dei, catalyzes the cosmic yearning to be lovingly united with his Creator. (Rom 8:22-23)

Francis of Assisi excludes a temporal sequence or timeline in the creative act that could give rise to hierarchies. The creation is not something that God did once and for all, in a fixed and determined historical moment, having taken a rest from then onwards and not worrying any more about it. God creates and sustains in the eternal today, because time is only a human category. Everything that comes into existence is a present gift of his magnanimity: it exists because it is loved. No creature is superficial and we have to take care of all of them, recognizing that they also are taking care of us.

The divine command of cultivating and caring for the garden (Gn 2:15) is not something limited to the beginning of time, but a task that each one receives here and now. Instead of dominion, God invites us to contemplation, while he keeps walking in the garden with those who do not hide or run away from him.

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This book introduces us to the Franciscan vision of ecology which, in many respects, seems to have inspired the encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Assuring an integral and inclusive vision of ecology, the book analyzes today’s global ethical challenges, putting them in relation with the experience of Francis of Assisi and with the philosophical-theological reflection of the Franciscan Tradition. It emphasizes the need to overcome the current technocratic paradigm and the throwaway culture, which fosters the Well-Being over Well-Being and breaks the ties that bind us to creatures.

Francis of Assisi is a universal model for all those who seek to live in harmony with nature. Even Lynn White, who harshly accused the Judeo-Christian religion of having caused the ecological crisis, has been one who proposed Francis of Assisi as a referent for ecologists. The Franciscan school has formulated, in philosophical and theological terms, St. Francis’s Intuitions, laying the foundations of a fraternal and cordial ecology that surpasses both the strong anthropocentrism and the administration ecological model. We can no longer regard ourselves as dominators or stewards but as brothers, joyfully responsible for the common home.