

POSITION PAPER:

**THE SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO  
ON THE ROAD TO A SUSTAINABLE  
WORLD IN THE LIGHT  
OF INTEGRAL ECOLOGY**



SALESIANS  
DON BOSCO

**«Peace, justice and the  
protection of creation are  
three entirely related issue»**

(Pope Francis, Laudato Si' 92)

# 1. THE CURRENT SCENARIO: THE CLIMATE CRISIS

On 9 August 2021, the Sixth IPCC Report (*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*) - Working Group I (WGI) on **'New Knowledge and Climate Change'** on the scientific basis of climate change and advances with respect to the previous report was officially presented<sup>1</sup>. In March 2022, **Working Group 2's** contribution **to the Sixth IPCC Report** also came out, confirming what had already emerged.

New and more detailed observations, combined with increasingly refined climate models, have made it possible to deepen our understanding and quantification of the anthropogenic effect on the Earth's climate. All the most important indicators of the components of the climate system (atmosphere, oceans, ice) are changing at a speed never observed in the last centuries and millennia; in short, this is what has emerged: the increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases; the rise in the earth's temperature; the melting of glaciers and the rise in sea levels; the excessive consumption of resources that does not allow the earth to regenerate; the risk of the emergence of new diseases are just some of the crucial issues that can no longer be ignored. In particular:

- Human-induced climate change, including more frequent and intense extreme events, has caused losses and damage related to nature and people **beyond the natural variability of**

**climate.** The most vulnerable people and systems have been disproportionately affected. Human and ecosystem vulnerability travel together: 3.3 to 3.6 billion people live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change.

- Global warming, reaching +1.5°C in the short term, will cause an inevitable increase in **multiple risks to ecosystems and humans.**
- Beyond 2040 and depending on the level of global warming, **climate change will pose numerous threats to nature and humans.** The loss of biodiversity and the damage and transformation of ecosystems will continue to increase with every increase in global warming.
- The impacts and risks of climate change are becoming **increasingly complex and difficult to manage.**
- The progress made so far in planning, adaptation and implementation in all regions and sectors **is creating multiple benefits.** However, to be effective, strategies **must be long-term.**
- There are **feasible and effective adaptation options** that can reduce risks to people and nature. The feasibility of implementing short-term adaptation options varies between sectors and regions.
- **Integrated, multi-sectoral solutions** addressing social inequalities and cross-sectoral and risk-based responses will increase the feasibility and effectiveness of adaptation in multiple sectors.

<sup>1</sup> Each IPCC Report consists of three parts, each prepared by a specific Working Group (WG). WG I assesses new scientific knowledge that has emerged since the previous report; WG II assesses the impacts of climate change on the environment and society and the adaptation actions needed; WG III assesses climate change mitigation actions. Each WG produces an extensive report, accompanied by a Technical Summary highlighting the main points of the report and a brief Summary for Policy Makers for use by policy makers in UN-affiliated countries, in which all the information analysed in detail in the individual reports is

summarized according to essential points. Each WG is composed of an average of 200-250 scientists (*Lead Authors*) chosen at the suggestion of individual governments by the IPCC Bureau. The participation of individual scientists is voluntary and unpaid.



## 2. THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE CHURCH AND THE SPECIAL MESSAGE OF LAUDATO SI'

The Social Doctrine of the Church has always paid special attention to issues concerning integral human development, emphasising the human being in his totality and wholeness. In particular, in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis invites us to pause and consider what is happening to the Earth, our common home, and its inhabitants. Below are some key passages that inspire the congregation's journey:

### THE EARTH: OUR COMMON HOME

The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of all. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not do so, we burden our consciences with the weight of denying the existence of others. (LS95)

### THE CHANGE WE ARE WITNESSING

Today we are witnessing a continuous acceleration of changes in humanity and the planet, combined with a more intensified pace of life and work. Although change is part of the dynamics of complex systems, the speed with which human activity has developed today contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution. Change is something desirable, yet it becomes a source of anxiety when it causes harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity (LS18).

These problems are closely linked to a throwaway culture, which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish (LS22).



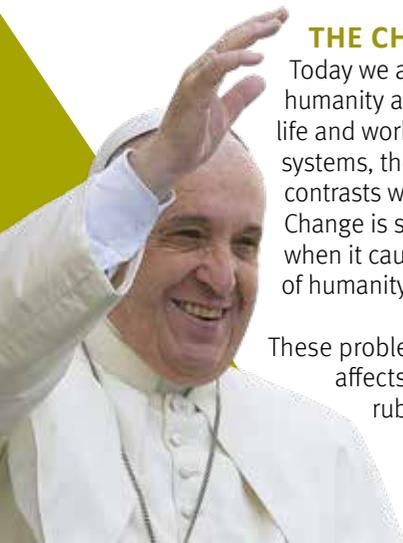
Climate change is a global problem with serious implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the major challenges facing humanity today. (LS25)

### THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HUMAN DEGRADATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to the causes that are related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society particularly affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. (LS48). A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach (LS49). There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology, and we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships.

### AN ECOLOGICAL CULTURE

Ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution, environmental decay and the depletion of natural reserves. There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm (LS111).



### 3. REFERENCE TO THE 2030 AGENDA AND THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT (2015)

Worth mentioning is also the international community's commitment to the 2030 Agenda, launched by the United Nations in 2015 to share their commitment to ensuring a better present and future for our Planet and the people who inhabit it.

The Global Agenda defines 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030, divided into 169 Targets. The 2030 Agenda expresses a clear judgement on the unsustainability of the current development model, not only on an environmental level, but also on an economic and social one, thus definitively overcoming the idea that sustainability is only an environmental issue and affirming an integrated vision of the different dimensions of development.

The priorities of the 2030 Agenda are: eliminating hunger and poverty in all its forms; ensuring dignity and equality of **people**; protecting the **planet's** natural resources and climate for future generations; ensuring **prosperous and full lives** in harmony with nature; promoting **peaceful, just and inclusive societies**; and implementing the Agenda through strong **partnerships**.

Finally, it is important to mention that in 2015, in addition to the 2030 Agenda and the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the International Climate Conference in Paris (COP 21) took place, following which the Paris Agreement on the Fight against Climate Change, the first legally binding and universal global climate agreement in history, was adopted. Key elements of the Paris Agreement are: to keep the global temperature increase below 2 degrees Celsius with respect to pre-industrial levels; to continue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius with respect to pre-industrial levels; developed countries will mobilise at least 100 billion per year by 2020 to provide support to emerging countries; every five years, starting in 2023, countries will reconsider plans and contributions.



## 4. THE RESPONSE OF THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION

### THE CHAPTER ASSEMBLY WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE ENTIRE SALESIAN WORLD

Referring back to the documents mentioned above, as well as to the direct and field experience of the Salesians and their collaborators in many countries of the world affected by the consequences of climate change and social inequalities, the Salesian Congregation, during the **General Chapter 28** (2020) has followed precise guidelines and decisions to move towards building a more sustainable world.

The chapter assembly with representatives from all over the Salesian world recognised that the focus on a sustainable future is a cultural conversion, not a fad, and like any conversion it needs to be forcefully called by its new name. The life of humanity is at stake.

Pope Francis stressed that we must avoid a ‘climate emergency’ that risks ‘perpetrating a brutal act of injustice towards the poor and future generations [...] Our commitment to an integral human ecology stems from a conviction of faith for which ‘everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others. We cannot separate the care of the environment from the social life of human beings. Therefore, ecology must be integral, human. And, consequently, we are invited to an ecological conversion that concerns not only the economy and politics, but also social life, relationships, affectivity and spirituality. [...]

With this in mind, the proposed chapter resolution states: *“Together with Pope Francis, we recognise the evidence provided by science that the*

*acceleration of climate change resulting from human activity is real. Air pollution, water pollution, improper waste disposal, loss of biodiversity and other environmental issues that have a negative impact on human life are increasing. Unsustainable production and consumption are pushing our world and its ecosystems beyond their limits, undermining their ability to provide vital resources and actions for life, development and regeneration”.*

### THE INTEGRAL ECOLOGY SECTION WITHIN THE SALESIAN YOUTH MINISTRY

In accepting the proposals of General Chapter 28, the Salesian Congregation has begun its journey along this path, introducing the **area of Integral Ecology in the Youth Ministry Sector** of the headquarters. The person in charge of this has the role of assisting the Rector Major and his Council to animate, coordinate and create a global ecological awareness in all the provinces and the different areas of the Salesian mission, and to develop policies at all levels of the Congregation to strengthen our commitment to care for our common home.

In this regard, the Salesians consider that **the general objective of the area of Integral Ecology within the Youth Ministry Sector** is to contribute to the achievement of a more just and sustainable world, spreading a culture of care and peace, through the promotion of the integral ecology perspective as an approach to human development. In particular, it aims to:

- Promote commitment and advocacy on integral ecology, in coordination with the planning of the Youth Ministry Sector, so that the call to action of “Laudato Si” may become part of our educative and pastoral action with young people.
- Raise the awareness of the provinces on the educational challenge and integral ecology, and strengthen local efforts towards ecological conversion, aspects that have to do with necessary actions of change, according to the Pope’s instructions.
- Accompany at a regional and provincial level, the actions, good practices and study and reflection initiatives in favour of the protection of creation, which make the contribution of the Congregation in these fields operational.

### INTEGRAL ECOLOGY IN THE FORMULATION OF THE SALESIAN EDUCATIVE AND PASTORAL PLAN (SEPP)

At this moment in history, characterised by great uncertainty about the future, general precariousness, an increase in local conflicts, growing poverty and inequality, and in which we are experiencing the pandemic and climate change, it is necessary to become aware of the complexity of the situation and offer educators **correct information and educational tools that can guide young people to make the right choices**, with the right awareness of the complex context in which they live. The aim is to offer young people Hope, which comes from knowing that they are on the right path to live a worthy life and to build a better world and future with their own hands.

Integral ecology offers **Salesian educators, and therefore young people, the keys** to reading the world in its complexity and wholeness, in its interconnections, which affect us personally. The vision of Integral Ecology can help educators to form informed young people and responsible citizens.

Integral Ecology can be a key to understanding all Salesian educative and pastoral activity. **Through the SEPP it is possible to put into practice the teachings of the Church and the Pope’s appeals** to work together to build a more just and sustainable way starting from the situation we are living in. We offer here a few ideas for applying the integral vision to the four dimensions of the SEPP:

- 1. The dimension of education to the faith:** every pastoral plan sees to guiding young people towards an encounter with Jesus Christ and transforming their lives in the light of the Gospel.
- 2. The educational and cultural dimension:** encountering young people where they are at, encouraging the development of all their human resources and opening them up to the meaning of life.
- 3. The dimension of group and social experience:** making possible a developing experience of being in a group to the point where young people discover the Church as a communion of believers in Christ, so they can develop an intense sense of belonging to the Church.
- 4. The vocational dimension:** it accompanies the discovery of the individual’s vocation and life plan in view of a commitment to transforming the world according to God’s plan.

So how and in what parts of the SEPP can Integral Ecology be introduced?





## A. Dimension of Education to the Faith:

It is central to a person's education, although among young people and even adults this dimension is often neglected or even ignored. Recovering the dimension of faith is not easy in a society that pushes in the opposite direction. However, it is precisely in this spiritual 'void' that it is possible to recover the dimension of the **contemplation of Creation**, which helps us to recover our relationship with Creation - which the human being is a part of-, with other human beings, and therefore also our relationship with God. This can happen in different ways and through different means.

### 1. Development of the religious dimension:

- Prayer for Creation, with Creation and in Creation is a dimension to be rediscovered, along with all ecological spirituality.
- The creation of outdoor living chapels, or Laudato Si' gardens where the walls are made of trees, plants, flowers, and the ceiling is made of the sky, the floor is made of the earth, etc., is one of the very concrete ways to live ecological spirituality.

### 2. Accompanying the experience of faith:

- A new, renewed, experiential catechesis, immersed in nature, or focused on rediscovering God in all his creatures, as well as rediscovering the value of creation in the Word of God, can certainly offer a different vision, accompanied by a greater attractiveness for young people and also for adults, also creating more responsible behaviour. Catechesis can be rethought from a different perspective, one that calls to mind and deepens, for example, our understanding of Jesus' relationship with creation; that introduces direct experiences in contact with nature as part of the Christian growth process; that takes advantage of important seasons to launch concrete

proposals for commitment in defence of creation and for the construction of a culture of care.

- The definition and identification of 'ecological sins' is another aspect that can be explored, both in the context of catechesis and in the spiritual sphere in general.
- "Ecological Sins" can be identified by these elements:
  - Man's alienation not only from God, not only from one another and from the true self, but also from the whole of creation.
  - Destruction of the order and harmony desired by God
  - Misuse of God's gift to all humanity
  - With original sin, not only is the harmony between men destroyed, but "harmony with creation is broken, visible creation has become alien and hostile to man" CCC 400.
- The accompaniment of young people in such difficult times as the ones we are living in will make them feel less alone, and should aim to create a network between them, also through prayer and faith, as well as in practical action. The spiritual and physical diseases of our planet are connected in many ways; the external deserts are the reflection of the internal deserts. It is essential to bring young people together and be able to guide them on a renewed journey of faith that combines the intentions for the well-being of the planet, our common home, and the well-being of people, especially the poor.

### 3. Liturgy and celebrations:

- Preparation of outdoor masses and times of prayer, measures of concrete care for creation offered as prayer, celebrations dedicated to creation or permeated with elements of nature encourage young people's approach to God.

#### 4. Encouraging the encounter with God through paths that lead to inwardness:

- Contemplation and silence, as mentioned above, are elements that can greatly favour the encounter with Jesus, along with meditation, reflection on passages from Sacred Scripture, etc.
- The practice of being recollected, of silence, of meditation also help to solve inner problems and to rediscover true values.

#### 5. Experiences of service and apostolic commitment:

- For the construction of a more just society, it is important to involve young people in concrete activities on behalf of the poor as well as nature; in other words, listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, according to what the Pope invites us to do in Laudato Si'. There are many ideas for further study, personal and community commitments can extend in all directions. According to the context it is situated in, the people it is made up of and the mission it is given, each community will find the path of service that most suits its nature.

### B. Educational-cultural dimension:

#### 1. Helping young people build a strong cultural identity:

- From the perspective of integral ecology, it is important to strengthen cultural identities, so that they are not lost in the homologations that now exist in all areas. The loss of cultural identity is similar to the loss of biodiversity, it creates an imbalance, which gives rise to other imbalances. It is therefore necessary to convey the message of the importance of diversity, its specific nature, its cultural wealth, and the need to protect and protect cultures at the risk of extinction. This holds true in every context, but especially in countries where there are indigenous

cultures, greatly compromised by the current productive, economic and cultural systems themselves, and where Salesian presences are in any case relevant and important.

#### 2. Encouraging ethical discernment:

- The environmental crisis is primarily an ethical crisis, a crisis of values. Recovering the values and virtues of the Gospel will also help solve the environmental problems. It is important to identify existing connections, analyse individual and community behaviour, and direct them if necessary towards the right values.

#### 3. Promoting a culture inspired by Christian humanism:

- Fostering a vision of the world and mankind based on an integral vision, from the "everything is connected" of Laudato Si', which therefore brings together environmental, social, economic, cultural, human, daily life aspects... to offer a complete vision of human development, highlighting the true values that should be promoted, in contrast to the culture of relativism, hedonism and pragmatism. Integral ecology - in the wake of the Gospel - helps us to foster a culture of solidarity and care for the poor, the most vulnerable and most excluded; to care for the outskirts of the world and the existential outskirts.

#### 4. Working for human development and professional competence so that young people can fit into the working world as well-qualified citizens:

- In the field of technical and vocational training, making room for new ecological professional figures, who can combine the right to work with the right to health of the workers and the





community, fair earnings with the protection of the environment and the planet, etc. New training courses can be introduced in renewable energies, sustainable agriculture, new activities to support the creation of ethical companies, social cooperatives, but also adapting traditional courses to ensure they have less impact on the environment... These are just a few examples of activities which have already been initiated in some Salesian schools.

### C. Dimension of group and social experience

One of the most important pedagogical insights of Salesian Youth Ministry is to be found in social experience. The group dimension is very important today, especially for young people who have suffered greatly from the consequences of isolation due to the pandemic.

- Recovering an ecological dimension also means recovering the importance of the group: the concepts which Pope Francis has repeated several times, “No one is saved alone” and “We are all in the same boat” make us realise that even in the care for the common home it is essential to work together. Everyone’s contribution is essential, but it risks getting lost in the ocean if there is no awareness of other people’s actions. The actions of contemplation, reflection and action for the common home achieve their full meaning if they are accomplished together, as a community.

- The ongoing formation of Laudato Si’ animators through the Laudato Si’ Movement<sup>1</sup> present all over the world can represent a great opportunity for groups that arise in Salesian environments. The specific nature the LSM can offer adds to and combines perfectly with Don Bosco’s preventive system, while integrating and enriching it.
- Being part of society and the Church: Integral ecology fosters and encourages active participation in the life of society, being an active part of civil life and the Church community; it also goes well with the Salesian Youth Movement and is a subject that fits any age group. Integral ecology can be considered an issue that runs through all parish groups, associations, and realities of the Church. It is not exclusive, rather it is very open and inclusive. It does not overrule, but rather integrates. It knows no age or gender limits; on the contrary it tends to unite and foster the synodal process.

### D. Vocational dimension

The first three dimensions converge on this one, the ultimate horizon for the Salesian youth ministry.

<sup>1</sup> The Laudato Si’ Movement is at the service of Catholic families around the world to transform Pope Francis’ encyclical letter Laudato Si’ into actions for climate and ecological justice. The efforts to build the basic movement of the Laudato Si’ benefit from the combined gifts of nearly 800 member organisations and thousands of basic members help bring the Laudato Si’ message to life. <https://laudatosimovement.org/>



- Animation and commitment to integral ecology can also be the expression of a vocation: personal, social, ecclesial and community commitment can involve dimensions capable of engaging the entire existence of people, in their personal, family and professional life.
- The call to integral ecology can take place in various ways and fields; the first step involves personal ecological conversion, which implies a sincere desire to change one's approach to life, and encourages one to involve the surrounding community in this process. The second phase, if it develops in suitable contexts, can witness the external projection of personal commitment, first of all towards the family environment one lives in, and whenever possible even towards a more outer circle.
- It is not uncommon, in fact, for those who have had an ecological conversion to be able to convey it to the workplace as well. Take, for example, schools and all educational institutions: there are many teachers and educators who are committed in this respect, as well as people involved in associations, cooperatives, farms, craftsmanship, the production of biological and ecological products, the restaurant industry, etc. It is important to understand that this type of calling is also part of people's life plan, that Creation is also an instrument through which God calls us and that each one of us can be called to be co-creators with God. There is a

greater chance that this will occur in the years to come. It is essential to consider this vocational opportunity and prepare to accompany and support those who think they are called to undertake this journey.

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