

The Invisible Legacy of St. Josemaría Escrivá for Sustainable Living. Reasons, Attitudes and Virtues for the Care of Our Common Home

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1. Introduction

In 1971, in a letter addressed to Manuel Gómez Padrós, then mayor of Barbastro, St. Josemaría Escrivá expressed his concern about the industrial growth of his hometown due to its possible negative impact on the environment.^[1] This shows that St. Josemaría was not indifferent to environmental problems. However many recent cultural and social changes have opened up a gap between the life and writings of the founder of Opus Dei and the concept of sustainability as we know it today.

St. Josemaría died in 1975, when ecological and environmental concerns had just begun to surface. During the decade of the 70s, the first news stories about environmental problems began to be highlighted, the first ecological movements and parties arose, and the first United Nations World Summit on the Human Environment took place, in Stockholm in 1972. Naturally, concepts such as “sustainability” or “sustainable development” don’t appear in his writings, terms that were first given prominence in 1987 with the publication of the so-called Brundtland Report.^[2]

This article seeks to establish a bridge between St. Josemaría’s teachings and the attitudes and virtues that make it possible to foster today a culture of integral sustainable living, as Pope Francis has taken up in his encyclical *Laudato si’* (LS). After briefly defining what sustainable development means and offering the most recent keys to grasp how this concept is understood by the Church’s Magisterium, this study will look at the invisible legacy of Escrivá de Balaguer for sustainable living through, in the words of Pope Francis, the “adequate motivations”^[3] and “solid virtues”^[4] that make ecological commitment possible. First of all, the study argues that, by seeing the world as a divine creation, St. Josemaría offers the deepest reason for a passionate love for everything it contains. This leads to a sincere concern for contemporary problems, and spurs us to love and value every human person with a universal heart. Moreover, the article shows that, in his writings and in the witness of his own life, we see his concern and care for people and the environment that could be described as an “ecology” of daily life. In encouraging, for example, a temperate lifestyle and solidarity between generations, St. Josemaría highlights practical virtues that foster, together with care for people and the environment, the development of the “ecological spirituality” that Pope Francis invites us to take up in the encyclical LS.

Concern for sustainable development

The term “sustainable development” began to spread with the publication in 1987 of *Our Common Future*, better known as the Brundtland Report. There this concept is

defined as human development that meets the present generation's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.^[5] This Report seeks to reconcile economic and social development with the conservation of natural resources. In contrast, measures that enrich some at the expense of impoverishing others, or that generate short-term economic growth at the cost of damaging or polluting the environment, are not considered sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development implies the equitable distribution of natural resources and a vision of international and intergenerational justice that fosters integral human development. Thus any opposition between human development and conservation of the environment is overcome.

Subsequent United Nations summits refer to "Environment and Development" (Rio de Janeiro Conference, 1992) and "Sustainable Development" (Johannesburg, 2002). In September 2015, the United Nations made public the 2030 Agenda with Sustainable Development Goals, which includes major challenges for humanity such as the disappearance of famine and the mitigation of climate change.

A few months before the publication of the 2030 Agenda, on May 24, 2015, Pope Francis issued the encyclical *Laudato si'. On Care for Our Common Home*. The United Nations, taking advantage of a trip by the Holy Father to Cuba and the United States, invited the Pope to the public release of the 2030 Agenda at the organization's headquarters in New York. Both documents, although they diverge in several aspects,^[6] share an integral vision of sustainability and ecology that encompasses the social, environmental and economic dimension.^[7] This concept of integral sustainable development is the one that will be considered throughout this article.

Sustainable development in the recent Magisterium

Pope Francis is not the first pontiff to speak and write about integral ecology and sustainable living. His predecessors address this issue in relation to the theology of creation and the Social Doctrine of the Church in encyclicals^[8] and messages. Both the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997)^[9] and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004)^[10] take up these earlier teachings.

St. John Paul II first used the expression "conversion" in reference to ecology in his message for the 1990 World Day of Peace: *Peace with God the Creator. Peace with all Creation*.^[11] There he advocates for a stronger ecological sensitivity, points to the moral character of the environmental crisis and calls for an authentic conversion in mankind's thinking and behavior. To be peacemakers, the Pontiff said, requires taking responsibility for our world, recognizing the reality of sin and the need for conversion: asking for forgiveness and changing our behavior.^[12] Twenty years after this clear message, his successor Benedict XVI dedicated his message for the World Day of Peace to the moral duty of fostering sustainable development.^[13] Recent popes use the theological term "conversion" in this context because it requires a radical change that involves our relationship with God and all of creation.^[14]

In LS, Pope Francis devotes an entire chapter to highlighting the “human roots of the ecological crisis” (LS, 101-132). Supported by scientific data, he argues that the ecological effects of climate change, the decline of biodiversity and other environmental problems, are a consequence of the current model of consumption and an unrestricted technological dominance over the material world. Therefore the solution requires not only scientific and technical measures, but fundamentally a change of values. A new vision is needed to view our planet as the common home of all mankind. This common home, Pope Francis says, is good because it is created by God and has been entrusted to the care of human beings. This transformed outlook requires, in many cases, an ecological conversion that involves the acquisition of solid virtues, which make it possible to go beyond merely an awareness of ecological problems to actions that will help resolve them and ensure sustainable behavior.

Thus Pope Francis argues that commitment to sustainable living goes beyond legal regulations, since it requires “adequate motivations” and “solid virtues.”^[15] To encourage behavior that furthers sustainable development, citizen recommendations, incentives or the possibilities of choosing (for example, in the purchase of food or energy consumption) are insufficient. People need deeper reasons for why and how to care for the planet. Otherwise, the choice is limited to the usual criteria of the quality/price ratio, without knowing or caring whether this entails a disproportionate energy expenditure, the exploitation of human labor or the depletion of natural resources.

Today many people behave with a concern for sustainable living because they are convinced that they must take care of the planet and avoid, to the best of their ability, anything that involves more greenhouse gas emissions or an irresponsible use of natural resources. These people, in practice, live austere, because they seek to consume as little as possible, and also generously, because they are concerned that other people in the future or in other parts of the planet can continue to benefit from that resource or not be negatively affected by its use. However, the Pope warns, there are also people who, although they have good reasons to act in a sustainable way because of a concern about the environment, find it hard to put these reasons into practice since they are immersed in an environment that encourages unlimited consumption.^[16] They lack the virtues that would enable them to put these values into practice in their daily lives. Moreover, the Pope warns that it is naïve to think that environmental problems would be solved with greater access to birth control, when the root of the problem – an out-of-control consumerism – is not being addressed.^[17]

A culture of sustainable living implies that citizens understand how natural systems work, understand the interrelationships between human beings and nature, have good reasons to behave sustainably, and actually act sustainably because they are virtuous.

Today people of many religions are encouraging this culture of sustainable living. Christianity offers deep theological reasons for sustainable behavior since it teaches that the world is good because it has been created^[18] and is entrusted to human beings for its stewardship.^[19] In turn, the Church’s social doctrine reminds everyone of the absolute value of each human person^[20] and the universal destination of goods.^[21]

St. Josemaría's legacy for sustainable living

As of this date, two authors, Guillaume Derville^[22] and Rafael Hernández,^[23] have written about the tie between the teachings and life of St. Josemaría and the ecological issue. Regarding the publication of LS, Guillaume Derville^[24] suggested that, in reading the encyclical, one can detect many points in common with St. Josemaría's teachings, although expressed in other words. Among others, the author highlights the following points: "the importance of the dogma of creation, also for the moral and spiritual life; the value of the world; the awareness of God's closeness at all times; respect for material realities; care for creatures, including small things."^[25]

The passionate love for the world that comes from faith in the world being created and entrusted by God to the care of human beings can be the deep motivation^[26] to which Francis alludes for sustainable living. Love for the created world thus becomes the theological reason that leads us to care for the planet as our common home and for all the people who inhabit it. Moreover, virtues such as Christian poverty and a charity lived with a universal heart that St. Josemaría preached and exemplified are habits needed to confront consumerism through a simple and eco-sustainable lifestyle.^[27]

2. Motivation for integral sustainable development: a passionate love for the world

World, nature and creation

In St. Josemaría's writings we find a passionate love for the world and for all created realities. He frequently uses the term "world" to refer to culture, to the human contribution to the improvement of society^[28] and of the planet in general, and always from a positive perspective.^[29] Following Christ's example, the driving force of human actions needs to be love, as he makes explicit in this quote: "The Christian is moved by the Charity of God, which has been manifested to us in Christ and which teaches us to love all mankind and the whole of creation."^[30]

Moreover, his love for creation led him to value and enjoy all created realities. St. Josemaría contemplates the whole cosmos, particularly at Mass, seeing how all creation gives glory to God: "When I celebrate Mass with just one person to serve it, the people are also present there. I feel that all Catholics, all believers are present there, and also those who do not believe. All God's creatures are present: the earth and the sky and the sea, and the animals and plants – the whole of creation giving glory to the Lord."^[31]

Pope Francis also describes the Eucharist as an act of cosmic love in which heaven and earth are united. Through the bread and wine, "fruit of the earth and of man's labor,"^[32] the world created by God "returns to him in happy and full adoration."^[33] Likewise Benedict XVI develops this dimension of the Eucharist as a cosmic liturgy.^[34] St. Josemaría, after celebrating Holy Mass, prayed and recommended that others recite the hymn *Trium puerorum*, in which God is blessed and given glory in union with all creation. Derville emphasizes this act of piety: "After celebrating the Eucharist, the founder of Opus Dei loved to recite a hymn taken from the Book of Daniel (ch. 3) linked to the *Laudate* psalm (Ps 150), the *Trium puerorum* or *Benedicite*, whose use goes back at least to the third century. It invites the whole of creation to bless the Lord. Our eyes are raised

towards the sun, the moon, the stars; we see the immense expanse of the seas and the mountain heights, encountering cold and heat, light and darkness; we contemplate the mineral and vegetable world, dwell on the different animal species, and culminate with man.”^[35]

Although Christian teaching is clear about the value of created realities such as air, water, earth and all living beings (every living being, every ecosystem, and inanimate realities are in themselves an intrinsic good, regardless of their usefulness to human beings), in the West and as a result of modernity, a distancing has occurred between the human person and the natural world, as if man and woman were not part of nature.^[36] The emphasis has been placed on these created realities as natural resources, without considering that, independently of their instrumental value, they are good in themselves and give glory to God.^[37]

Linked to this lack of a systemic vision of nature in which human beings are an intrinsic part is the perception of creation as static and alien, as a “stage” for a play with which we have no real and close interaction. This vision makes it impossible for us to view the planet as the common home of all men and women.

This vision has often spread among Christians out of fear of falling into pantheism, or into a biocentric vision^[38] in which all living beings have the same value: the natural world is the setting in which human beings develop, but not a reality of which they are a part. St. Josemaría, in contrast, liked to remind people of the theological consequences of the incarnation of Christ, which precludes a “spiritualistic” vision of the world. “There is nothing that can be alien to the zeal of Christ. It cannot be said that there are realities – good, noble, and even indifferent – that are exclusively profane, once the Word of God has made his dwelling among the children of men, has hungered and thirsted, has worked with his hands, has known friendship and obedience, has experienced pain and death . . . For the world is good; it was Adam’s sin that broke the divine harmony of creation, but God the Father sent his only-begotten Son to restore that peace. So that we, made children by adoption, might free creation from disorder, and reconcile all things to God.”^[39]

Loving the world, and loving it passionately because we know that all created realities are good and that God the Creator has entrusted them to human beings for their care (cf. *Gen* 1:26-30), leads to recognizing and respecting their intrinsic value. Loving the world implies, in the context of a climate and ecological crisis, being aware that we live in an environment with limited resources, many of them depleted, which must meet our needs now and in the future. Therefore Christians, as responsible citizens, must care for natural resources both because we discover their ontological value and because we understand their value as common goods for all men and women, both present and future.

In St. Josemaría’s teachings on creation we can see a universal and at the same time responsible vision of the use of natural resources that has taken shape throughout his life in different ways.

Example of a circular economy

The first centers dedicated to the formation of the vocations coming to Opus Dei were

Molinoviejo and Los Rosales, both near Madrid. In post-war Spain and with very few economic and human resources, their management is a clear example of what today is often called a “circular economy.”

The circular economy is a new economic focus that has sprung up in response to the environmental deterioration caused by the linear economy. The linear economy assumes that resources can continue to be extracted from the planet forever, as if they were unlimited. The evidence of the depletion of resources such as fossil fuels ^[40] and the consequences of their consumption in provoking climate change, ^[41] together with excess of waste materials and problems this causes, have led to a new concern for the recycling of resources. We are moving from a linear economy based on the continuous extraction of resources, consumption of products and generation of waste products, to a circular economy, based on minimizing the extraction of resources (with the awareness that they are scarce) and a mode of production that generates minimum waste.

In 1945, St. Josemaría asked Encarnita Ortega and Paula Gómez to start a farm on the grounds of the Los Rosales estate with the intention of supplying the centers of the Work in Madrid. Both were inexperienced in this work, but their trust in St. Josemaría and their generosity led them to take on this new task. The farm had rabbits, pigs and chickens, fruit trees, a vegetable garden and a greenhouse. ^[42]

This model, initiated in Los Rosales, was replicated in other centers such as Molinoviejo, in Segovia. At a time of economic scarcity in the Spanish post-war period, food rich in proteins and vitamins was obtained and the waste material produced in the kitchen was used as fodder for the farm animals. St. Josemaría encouraged this initiative, with the vision of making the best use of resources and providing for the Work’s faithful and those who take part in its apostolic activities.

Discernment in everyday life

But how do we apply the principles of a circular economy in everyday life? It is not always easy, because often we fail to perceive the interconnections between what we consume individually or collectively in energy, goods and services, food and lodging ^[43] and the social consequences and ecological deterioration they entail. Francis insists in several places in LS that everything is interconnected. ^[44] Globalization enables people to use products such as clothing, electronic devices, etc., in places far from where the raw materials were extracted and processed, which makes it difficult to be aware of the traceability of the product and its true social and environmental impact. We fail to perceive the interdependence between environmental and social problems, and also, more worryingly, between these problems and our own personal behavior. This lack of transparency or visibility can hinder making informed decisions, but it does not excuse overlooking the ethical repercussions of our actions. As both Benedict XVI and Francis remind us, buying products is a moral act. ^[45] “Many will say that they are unaware of performing immoral actions, because constant distraction robs us of the courage to notice the reality of a limited and finite world” ^[46].

The circular economy in Los Rosales and Molinoviejo shows that (although their protagonists, Encarnita Ortega and Paula Gómez, among others, were surely not aware that they were promoting sustainability or the circular economy) they were aware that resources were limited and that people had to be cared for. The creativity and innovation of St. Josemaría and these first women of the Work contributed to the creation of a home environment based on taking maximum advantage of resources and recycling, which many of those who benefited from their efforts probably failed to notice.

From the universal to the particular

Global warming and other environmental problems are often invisible and complex. This can lead us to think that the small actions we personally can take to alleviate them are irrelevant. We naively think that technology will find the solution, when in fact the root of the problems is not technical but ethical.

St. Josemaría had an optimistic vision of the world^[47] based on an awareness of our divine filiation that leads to the effort to transform the world from within, restoring harmony to creation can confronting contemporary problems. “The specific way in which the laity contribute to the holiness and apostolate of the Church is through free and responsible action within temporal structures, bringing there the leaven of the Christian message. The witness of Christian life, the word that enlightens in the name of God, and responsible action, to serve others by contributing to the resolution of common problems, are as many manifestations of that presence with which ordinary Christians fulfill their divine mission.”^[48]

In LS Francis invites us to acquire a new vision of the world, more integral and systemic, in which ecology is related to care for the environment and for people and which leads us to seek “other ways of understanding the economy and progress.”^[49] Ardent love for the world can help to ensure that natural goods such as water, food and energy have a universal destination, using them in a sustainable way. The ethical commitment to sustainability is based, according to Francis (and in accord with the Church’s social teaching) on the vision of God as Creator (cf. *Gen* 1) and of the human person as created in his image (cf. *Gen* 1:27), with the express vocation to be custodians of creation (cf. *Gen* 1:26-30), which God has created good and as the place for our sanctification.

In summary, the passionate love for the world preached and lived by St. Josemaría, together with the absolute value of each person, is part of the theology of creation and can be the “deep motivations” Pope Francis alludes to as needed for caring for our common home.

Sustainable behavior requires, as Francis insists, an ecological conversion,^[50] a profound change in our way of looking at the world and behaving. This conversion implies a whole array of intertwined attitudes and moral virtues that enable us to move from the conviction that we have to take care of the planet to the deeds needed to do so.

3. Virtues and attitudes for an ecological spirituality

Habits that lead to transcending oneself

As mentioned above, St. Josemaría, without ever speaking explicitly about sustainability or ecology, lived and preached virtues such as Christian poverty and industriousness, and transmitted attitudes of caring for others and working generously, with a concern for the future and the good of others, which make up what could be called an ecological spirituality or an eco-sustainable lifestyle.

“Awareness of the seriousness of the cultural and ecological crisis needs to be translated into new habits,”^[51] Francis insists. For “the urgent challenge of protecting our common home includes the concern to unite the whole human family in the pursuit of sustainable and integral development.”^[52]

These “new habits” to which the Pope refers depend on the ability to transcend oneself, to not be centered simply on one’s own personal benefit, and to act, even if it involves only many small details, with a concern for the good of others. All Christians should practice an “ecological morality,” not only by striving to avoid having a negative impact on the environment through the destruction or contamination of large ecosystems (forests, rivers or oceans), but also by modifying one’s own lifestyle in order to behave in a sustainable manner. Any person, in his or her daily activity through energy consumption, purchase and consumption of food, goods and services, has an impact on the environment. And if we truly love creation and other people, we should do what we can to make that impact as small as possible. The serious consequences of global warming and its impact on the increase in poverty should spur every citizen to consider how he or she can have the minimum negative impact and the maximum care for creation, which means taking care of natural resources so that they reach everyone both now and in the future. Thus even if there are apparently no great economic, environmental or social effects, there is a change in each person: the “conversion” both John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew pointed to.

“We should not think that these efforts will not change the world. These actions spread a good in society that always produces fruits beyond what can be seen, because they provoke a good in the heart of this earth that always tends to spread, sometimes invisibly.”^[53]

St. Josemaría’s use of material goods

“As far as I am concerned, one of the signs that we’re aware of being lords of the earth and God’s faithful administrators is the care we take of the things we use: keeping them in good condition, making them last and getting the best out of them so that they serve their purpose for as long a time as possible and don’t go to waste. In the centers of Opus Dei you will find the decoration simple, attractive and, above all, clean, because poverty in a home is not to be confused with bad taste or with dirt.”^[54]

St. Josemaría encourages attitudes and virtues that lead to caring for creation, material objects and people through small daily actions. These attitudes of care are shown in material details, such as in the way centers of Opus Dei are furnished and maintained. St. Josemaría worked with a vision of the future. For example, he was not conditioned by the scarcity of resources or by the needs of the moment. Rather he encouraged the construction

of buildings such as the centers of study in Rome, with the concern that they last for many years.

At the same time, he was concerned that the centers not be cold, soulless or ownerless places, but homes in which the residents and the people who come there would feel at ease. He had the same attitude regarding the meals provided; he encouraged varied, healthy menus, and at the same time a concern for making the most of leftover food. He also stressed the importance of having a well-thought-out schedule, with time for rest and concern for one's health.

This ecology of everyday life led him to take care of the objects he made use of, discovering the transcendence of small actions: "Let us specify some signs of true poverty in our Work: a) not having anything as our own; b) not having anything superfluous; c) not complaining when what is necessary is lacking; d) when it comes to choosing, choosing the poorest, the least agreeable; e) not mistreating anything we use, neither in our Centers, nor in the places where we work, nor in any place we happen to be; f) making good use of time."^[55]

Francis reflects on the difficulty of maintaining sustainable behavior in a consumerist society where happiness is often tied to one's purchasing power.^[56] Christian poverty and temperance, therefore, are directly related to care for our common home and sustainable living. "This is the way we should behave in this world: as our Lord did. I could sum up my advice very briefly as follows: we ought to go about in clean clothes, with a clean appearance and, most important of all, with a clean soul. It is worth noting that even our Lord, who preached such marvelous detachment from worldly goods, at the same time went to great lengths not to waste them. After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, whereby he had so generously satisfied the hunger of over five thousand men, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the fragments that are left over, lest they be wasted. They therefore gathered them up; and they filled twelve baskets.' If you reflect carefully on this whole scene, you will learn never to be mean or miserly, but rather how to be good administrators of the talents and the material resources God has given you."^[57]

The joint message for the protection of creation written by Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew and the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, stresses that the concept of prudent and generous stewardship of material goods has its origin in the Gospel and that many saints have practiced this in an exemplary way. Personal and collective stewardship of what God has entrusted to human responsibility must be "a vital starting point" for integral sustainable living.^[58]

The article by Derville cited above also shows the convergence between LS and the life and preaching of St. Josemaría, in the effort to be good stewards of resources and to avoid waste.^[59]

Care in "little things"

In St. Josemaría, the Christian life is seen in the context of ordinary daily life, discovering God and serving society by putting love and care into "little things."^[60] This secular attitude is for him a sign of "unity of life."

LS also speaks about the importance of small daily actions for the benefit of the environment, thus caring for the earth as our common home. Francis suggests some very specific deeds: “avoid using plastic and paper materials, reduce water consumption, separate waste, cook only what you can reasonably eat, treat other living beings with care, use public transportation or share a car with several people, plant trees, turn off unnecessary lights.”^[61]

To the extent that we better understand what integral sustainable living entails and are aware, as the Pope insists, that everything is interconnected, we will discover the importance of these small actions. Thus it is not indifferent to the care of the planet to employ single-use materials (such as plates or cutlery) or energy from fossil fuels. Taking care of the things we use also means choosing those that have less ecological impact, not only for the benefit of the environment, but also because by doing so we are “transcending” ourselves and thinking about others. “The basic attitude of self-transcendence, breaking through isolated consciousness and self-referentiality, is the root that makes all care for others and the environment possible, and that brings about the moral reaction to consider the impact of every action and every personal decision outside oneself. When we are able to overcome individualism, an alternative lifestyle can truly be developed and a major change in society becomes possible.”^[62]

The spirituality of Opus Dei encourages care for little things, which leads to rising above oneself, not thinking only about our own benefit. The faithful of the Prelature strive to do so without realizing, in many cases, that with this attitude they are developing sustainable behavior and embodying what could be called an “ecological spirituality.”

Ethical commitment in one's profession

Passionate love for the world and the direct or indirect encouragement of attitudes and virtues for integral sustainable living can be viewed as an “ecological spirituality”^[63] that is an invisible legacy of St. Josemaría. In LS Francis stresses the moral duty to behave in a sustainable way, taking care of creation and of each person, using natural goods in a responsible way. At the beginning of the encyclical, the Pope states that for Christians “nothing in this world is indifferent to us.”^[64] St. Josemaría invites us to sanctify our work, contributing not only to our own sanctity but also to improving society. Every citizen, but especially Christians who have a call to holiness in the middle of the world, should contribute through their own professional work to reconciling creation with the Creator.^[65]

In the face of contemporary crises, especially the climate crisis, we can't give in to the temptation to isolate oneself, to flee or remain on the sidelines, as though the world were not our own, the common home of all of us. Christians must be involved in resolving contemporary problems, and the current ecological crisis is an opportunity to care for the planet as our common home, in collaboration with so many people of good will. “Let us not want to leave the world. Let us not want to shorten the days, even when they are very long for us; even when we see that those who could be doing so are not purifying the waters, but contribute to polluting the rivers, to releasing noxious substances into the midst

of the immense seas, which cannot free themselves from all that evil . . . This, my children, is what I ask of the Lord many times in your name and mine. That this world that He has made, and that we men are defiling, may return to what it was when it came from his hands: beautiful, without corruption, an antechamber to Paradise.”^[66]

Forward-looking

The climate crisis is a call for personal and collective responsibility. This is not only a matter of political decisions, although it has in fact led many governments to declare a state of climate emergency.^[67] Many different religions and interreligious groups have also drawn up plans to care for the climate: “We commit ourselves to act, to change our habits, choices, and the way we see the world . . . to conserve the limited resources of our common home, planet Earth, and to conserve the climatic conditions on which life depends.”^[68]

The sixth report on the climate crisis published in April 2022 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),^[69] states that, although anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, if countries comply with the agreements reached at the climate summits, the increase in global temperature could be slowed down and not reach an average increase of 2 degrees Celsius. Global warming is causing rising sea levels, acidification of the oceans, more intense and frequent tropical storms, hurricanes and droughts, with the resulting destruction of ecosystems and increased human misery. Half of the planet’s life is at “high risk” due to the climate crisis, affecting the poorest countries the most, which are the least responsible for global warming. The severity of the climate crisis, compounded by the Covid-19 health crisis, has shown us that all human beings are vulnerable and interdependent. These crises require us to think about the common good^[70] with a vision for the future.

Pope Francis has promoted various initiatives of the Holy See and, as head of state, has shown interest in participating in the climate summit of the countries adhering to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP26^[71] (Glasgow, November 1-12, 2021)^[72]. He wants to show his support for governments taking urgent action to curb global warming and achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

Conclusion

St. Josemaría’s teachings contain an explicit vision of the world and of all created material realities as something good, because the world “has come from God’s hands, because it is his creation, because Yahweh looked at it and saw that it was good.”^[73] And this positive vision leads to loving the world passionately and committing oneself to its improvement. The world as creation together with the duty to guard it with “wisdom and love.”^[74] and the recognition that each person possesses absolute value and is the subject of fundamental rights, constitutes the theological foundation or supernatural reason for caring for the world as our common home.

Moreover, in the spirituality of Opus Dei, in the customs and ways of doing things that its faithful live, we find a spiritual legacy of St. Josemaría regarding care and concern for people, as well as the conservation of material goods. As this article has shown, these attitudes are in accord with Pope Francis’s concern to develop a “culture of care.”^[75] In

daily life, this is manifested in care for people, houses, the material goods we use, the environment, and even meal menus. It also includes what St. Josemaría called “little things,” that is, small details that may seem insignificant, but that manifest care and concern for others, rising above indifference. All these acts could be described as promoting a simple, sustainable and healthy life.

The passionate and committed love for the world, together with St. Josemaría’s attitude of care and ways of doing things, are, in my opinion, like an invisible spiritual legacy, in accord with the “ecological pedagogy”^[76] that Pope Francis proposes to develop in order to generate a new ecological culture. But this challenge is not easy, because it entails convincing an individualistic and materialistic society of the need for care,^[77] solidarity and temperance.

A change of mentality is required for an ecological conversion to take place, and this implies a new outlook, a more systemic vision that takes into account the interdependencies between one’s own behavior and the rest of the planet. It means knowing how to look at reality as a divine creation, and therefore as a gift. In short, this new way of viewing the world implies working to acquire a more planetary, respectful and grateful vision.

This conversion is not limited to a new vision, but also requires virtuous behavior. A behavior in which every decision (how to eat, travel, dress and consume energy) takes into account that we are consuming a part of the common home of all of us, and that therefore it is our responsibility to always keep in mind that resources must be available for everyone now and also for future generations. This behavior, which in terms of sustainability would qualify as actions aimed at reducing the ecological footprint, in terms of Christian asceticism is called temperance and solidarity. It involves considering the impact of one’s actions on the planet or common home, and therefore gives importance to daily habits, such as avoiding the use of plastic, reducing waste and, in case of producing it, recycling it,^[78] reducing greenhouse gas emissions, etc. These acts are a training in virtue, since they help to take care of creation.

The ethical commitment to sustainable living accords perfectly with the spiritual legacy of St. Josemaría for the care of our common home. At this time of systemic crisis – both ecological and economic – the Magisterium of Pope Francis, in continuity with his predecessors, reminds us that “there will be no new relationship with nature without a new human being. There is no ecology without an adequate anthropology.”^[79] This new anthropology desired by the Pope is based on knowing ourselves to be sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of the whole human family,^[80] in a world we are called to *love passionately* and to care for as the *common home* of all.

[1] Cf. Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei. The Divine Ways on Earth*, vol. III, Scepter, p. 434, footnote no. 79.

[2] In 1983, at the request of the then UN Secretary General Pérez de Cuellar, Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norwegian Prime Minister) organized and directed the World

Commission on Development and Environment. This commission produced the report *Our Common Future*, known as the *Brundtland Report*.

[3] Cf. Francis , Encyclical *Laudato si'*. *On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 211.

[4] Cf. Idem.

[5] World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, p. 67.

[6] In this Note, the Holy See expresses explicit reservations regarding 2 of the 169 actions proposed by the United Nations (specifically nos. 3.7 and 5.6) and offers, in light of a Christian anthropology, a broad argumentation on the proper interpretation of some concepts used in the Agenda. Cf. Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, *Note of the Holy See on the First Anniversary of the Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals* (25-IX-2016), in <https://www.caritasjaen.es/main-files/uploads/sites/23/2020/03/Nota-de-la-Santa-Sede-en-el-primer-aniversario-de-la-adopci3n-de-los-Objetivos-de-Desarrollo-Sostenible.pdf>

[7] Cf. United Nations, *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015.

[8] Cf. especially the encyclicals of St. John Paul II (*Redemptor hominis*, 1979, no. 8; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 1987, nos, 28, 30 and 37; *Centesimus annus*, 1991, nos, 36-39; *Evangelium vitae*, 1995, nos, 22, 44 and 98) as well as Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 2009, nos, 43-52.

[9] Especially in the article dedicated to the seventh commandment.

[10] Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, chap. 10: "Safeguarding the Environment," nos. 251-487.

[11] Cf. St. John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator. Peace with all Creation* , Message for the World Day of Peace 1990, December 8, 1989.

[12] In his Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace, John Paul II does not use the word "ecological" when referring to a conversion that implies a change of mentality and behavior, as he does on other occasions: "It is therefore necessary to encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe towards which it was heading. Man is no longer the 'minister' of the Creator. But, as an autonomous despot, he is realizing that he must finally stop before the abyss . . . what is at stake is not only a 'physical' ecology, attentive to safeguarding the habitat of the various living beings, but also a 'human' ecology, which makes the existence of creatures more dignified, protecting the radical good of life in all its manifestations and preparing for future generations an environment that is closer to the Creator's plan." John Paul II, General Audience, January 17, 2001.

[13] Cf. Benedict XVI, *If you want to promote peace, protect creation*, Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace, December 8, 2009.

[14] Conversion implies an inner change of heart shown in a change in lifestyle that foster sustainable living. Cf. John Paul II and Bartholomew I, Signing of the “Declaration of Venice”. Joint Declaration of the Holy Father John Paul II and His Holiness Bartholomew I, June 10, 2002.

[15] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si’. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 211.

[16] Cf. Ibid., no. 209.

[17] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si’. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 50.

[18] Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, nos. 26 and 113.

[19] Cf. Ibid., nos. 255-256, 460 and 462.

[20] Cf. Ibid., nos. 4 and 35-37.

[21] Cf. Ibid., nos. 466, 467, 482 and 484.

[22] Cf. Guillaume Derville, “Citizens on earth as in heaven? An approach to the encyclical *Laudato si’* and the message of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer”, *Romana*, 60 (2015).

[23] Cf. Rafael Hernández Urigüen, *Juego, ecología y trabajo. Tres temas teológicos desde las enseñanzas de san Josemaría Escrivá*, Eunsá, Pamplona, 2011, pp. 26-90.

[24] Cf. Guillaume Derville, “Citizens on earth as in heaven? An approach to the encyclical *Laudato si’* and the message of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer,” *Romana*, 60 (2015).

[25] Ibid..

[26] Cf. Francis, Enc. *Laudato si’. On Care for the Common Home* (24-V-2015), no. 211.

[27] Cf. Francis, *An Eco-Sustainable Way of Life* (1-IX-2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7CpB7qdCpc>.

[28] This approach is found in the homily delivered on the campus of the University of Navarre on October 8, 1967, entitled: “Passionately Loving the World.” Cf. St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 114a..

[29] This contrasts clearly with how the world is viewed in expressions such as “the world, the flesh and the devil,” viewing the world as a reality at the margin of God. Cf. José Luis Illanes, “Mundo” in César Izquierdo (ed.), *Diccionario de Teología*, Eunsá, Pamplona, pp. 714-719.

[30] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 59.

[31] St. Josemaría, *Love for the Church*, no. 44.

[32] Words from the Offertory of the Mass.

[33] Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 236.

[34] In *Laudato si'* this cosmic vision of the sacraments is developed, in line with Benedict XVI's words: "creation is oriented towards divinization, towards the holy wedding, towards unification with the Creator himself." Benedict XVI, Homily at the Mass of *Corpus Christi*, June 15, 2006.

[35] Guillaume Derville, "St. Josemaría y el amor a la creación", 18-VI-2015, published on the Opus Dei website: <https://opusdei.org/es/article/san-josemaria-y-el-amor-a-la-creacion/>

[36] The dualistic vision between human beings and nature does not come so much from Christianity as from Cartesian philosophy. Cf. Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, *René Descartes and the philosophical roots of the ecological crisis*, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, 2007.

[37] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for the Common Home* (May 24, 2015) no. 69, where Francis recalls the intrinsic goodness of every creature that gives glory to God, and warns of the danger of falling into a despotic anthropocentrism as a prevention of biocentrism.

[38] Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 463.

[39] St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 112.

[40] Cf. Shahriar Shafiee - Erkan Topal. "When will fossil fuel reserves be diminished?" *Energy policy* 37.1, pp. 181-189, 2009.

[41] Cf. IPCC, P.R. Shukla et al. (eds.), *Summary for Policymakers*. In: *Climate change and land: IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security and greenhouse gas flows in terrestrial ecosystems*, 2019.

[42] Cf. Mercedes Montero, "La formación de las primeras mujeres del Opus Dei (1945-1950)," in *Studia et Documenta*, review of the *Istituto Storico San Josemaria Escrivá*, 2020, pp. 119, 126, 127 and 141.

[43] These are the fractions of the ecological footprint or carbon footprint that measures the impact of individual and collective actions on the planet. Through the CO2 observatory of the Chair of Environmental Ethics of the University of Alcalá (Spain) you can calculate your own carbon footprint. The same calculator suggests changes for a more sustainable behavior: <https://huellaco2.org/tuhuella.php>

[44]. Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for the Common Home* (May 24, 2015), nos. 16, 117, 138, 220 and 240.

[45]. Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 206 and Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (September 29, 2009), no. 66.

[46]. Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 56.

[47] Cf. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 183.

[48] Cf. St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 59.

[49] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 16.

[50] Cf. Ibid., nos. 216-221.

[51] Ibid., no. 209.

[52] Ibid., no. 13.

[53] Ibid., no. 212.

[54] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 122.

[55] Javier Echevarría - Salvador Bernal. *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá. Entrevista con Salvador Bernal*. Rialp, Madrid, 2000, p. 319.

[56] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'. On Care for our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 203.

[57] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 121.

[58] Cf. Francis, Bartholomew I and Justin Welby. Joint Message for the Protection of Creation from the Holy Father Francis , His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch and Archbishop of Constantinople, and His Grace Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, (7-IX-2021). Available at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/es/bollettino/pubblico/2021/09/07/mens.html#>

[59] Cf. Guillaume Derville, "Citizens on earth as in heaven? An approach to the encyclical *Laudato si'* and the message of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer," *Romana*, 60 (2015).

[60] Cf. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 312.

[61] Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 211.

[62] Ibid., no. 208.

[63] Cf. Ibid., no. 202.

[64] Ibid., no. 3.

[65] Cf. Ibid., no. 218.

[66] *The Founder of Opus Dei. The Divine Ways on Earth*, vol. III, Scepter, p. 434. St. Josemaría used this image of contamination as a metaphor to refer to the contamination that sin produces in the life of the Church and in human society. He encouraged people not to ignore contemporary problems and to try to solve them, without falling into the temptation of wanting to withdraw from the world.

[67] For example, see Government of Spain: <https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/prensa/ultimas-noticias/el-gobierno-declara-la-emergencia-clim%C3%A1tica-/tcm:30-506550>.

[68] Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change, 2015. Available at: [idcc_spanish](https://www.idcc-spanish.org/) (interfaithdeclaration.org).

[69] Working Group III contribution to the IPCC sixth assessment report (AR6). *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change*. https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FinalDraft_FullReport.pdf

[70] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for the Common Home* (May 24, 2015) no. 201.

[71] Cf. <https://www.aciprensa.com/noticias/papa-Francis-co-visitara-escocia-en-noviembre-19725>

[72]. Cf. <https://ukcop26.org/>

[73] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 114.

[74] In his 1990 Message for Peace, St. John Paul II reminds us that the cooperation of man and woman in creation must be done in God's way, that is, with wisdom and love. Cfr: St. John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator. Peace with all Creation*, Message for the World Day of Peace 1990, December 8, 1989.

[75] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), nos. 10, 14, 64, 70, 179 and 201 and Francis, *Message for the World Day of Peace 2021: The Culture of Care as a Way of Peace*, December 8, 2020.

[76] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato Si'. On Care for our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 210.

[77] Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 216.

[78] Cf. Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'. On Care for Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015), no. 211.

[79] *Ibid.*, no. 118.

[80] Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (October 3, 2020).

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