**Chapter One**

**What is happening to our Common Home?**

*“Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (#49)*

The environment is a common good that belongs to all of us. All of humanity share a common home. But studies indicate that “most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases … released mainly as a result of human activity.” (#23)

Pope Francis writes that climate change is “one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.” Five times Pope Francis names a “throwaway culture” as a root cause of the ecological crisis. We face pollution and waste, scarcity of water, loss of biodiversity, decline in the quality of life and breakdown of society, extreme consumerism and global inequality, and weak international responses.

A true “ecological debt” (#51) exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to “the disproportionate use of natural resources.” Great attention must be given to “the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable” (#52).

Like his predecessor, Saint John Paul II, Francis calls us to a “global ecological conversion”: “We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair.

Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems.” (#61)

**Questions**:

**Chapter Two**

**The Gospel of Creation**

*“Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river, and mother earth." (#92)*

Science and religion can enter into an "intense dialogue fruitful for both,” on the environment. Indeed, the word “creation” has a broader meaning than “nature.” It is God’s loving plan in which “every creature has its own value and significance,” and humans are “linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family.”

The light of our faith, the wisdom of the Biblical narratives, and the mystery of the universe invite us into a loving “communion” with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself, yet these relationships, once harmonious, have been broken by sin. We need to join our concern for the environment with a “sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.” (#91)

Every ecological approach needs to take into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. The natural environment is “a collective good” and “the responsibility of everyone.” We break the commandment “Thou shall not kill” when “twenty percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive.”(#95)

**Questions:**

**Chapter Three**

**The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis**

*“The fact is that ‘contemporary man has not been trained to use power well,’ because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.” (#105)*

What are the human roots of the ecological crisis? “A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us.” (#101) We need a “culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint,” especially in regards to technology and the place of human beings in God’s plan for creation.

Technology has brought wonderful achievements to the world, but when used unwisely it has created deadly arsenals of war and contributed to climate change. “Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used.” (#104) We need to “slow down and look at reality in a different way,” so that we can “appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made” and “recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur.” (#114)

In a similar way, modern belief in the significance of humans over all other species devalues creation to a raw material and promotes technology over all else. “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.” (#117)

**Questions:**

**Chapter Four**

**Integral Ecology**

*“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”… “We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.” (#160)*

Ecology is the relationship of living organisms and the environment: “Everything is closely interrelated.” All of creation is a web of life that includes “human and social dimensions.” By “environment,” we mean the relationship existing between nature and society. We ourselves are a part of nature. The social and environmental crises are intertwined:

“Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.” (#139) This is integral ecology.

Analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the “analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.” This suggests the need for a “social” and “economic ecology” which includes protecting the environment.

Together with our natural heritage, we also should value our cultural heritage, with “special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions,” (#146) and provide for common areas, housing and transportation in a way that promotes “the common good.”

The global nature of the crisis requires “solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters,” (#158) as well as solidarity with future generations, “since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.” (#159)

**Questions:**

**Chapter Five:**

**Lines of Approach and Action**

*“Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan. Yet the same ingenuity which has brought about enormous technological progress has so far proved incapable of finding effective ways of dealing with grave environmental and social problems worldwide. A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries.” (#164)*

There are five major paths of dialogue to counter the ecological crisis. (1) Interdependence means “one world with a common plan.” (#164) A global economy based on fossil fuels must be replaced without delay by renewable energy. We urgently need a “true world political authority” to protect the environment. (2) National and local policies need to promote best practices, “modify consumption, and ”develop“ an economy of waste disposal and recycling, ”promote “renewable energy,” “small producers” and preserve local ecosystems.” (#180) (3) Affected communities need “a special place at the table.” (#183) Decision-making needs transparency and dialogue to access the environmental impact of ventures and projects during the planning process. (#190) (4) Politics and economy need to join together, rather than blaming each other, to serve human life. We need to reject the notion that “problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals.” (5) Religion and science need to help each other.

Religion offers ethical and spiritual resources that science lacks when explaining reality. “The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good.” (#201)

**Questions:**

**Chapter Six:**

**Ecological Education and Spirituality**

*“In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change.” (#218)*

Many things have to change, but it is “we human beings above all who need to change.” and to remember “our common origin,” “our mutual belonging,” and “a future to be shared with everyone.” (#202) People tend to feel free only because they are free to consume. This breeds selfishness and greed, a disregard for the common good and increasing inequality that leads to social unrest and mutual destruction. But there is hope! Ecological education calls us to “a new ecological sensitivity” and “ecological conversion,” characterized by a “generous spirit.” (#209) Like St. Francis, our “encounter with Jesus Christ” becomes evident on our “relationship with the world.” “Our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue.” (#217) The Christian life calls us to “a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle.” (#222) Love, “overflowing with small gestures of mutual care,” sets before us the ideal of “a civilization of love.” “We need one another,” and “we have a shared responsibility for others and for the world.” (#229) God offers light and strength “beyond the sun.” With God, we can care for our common home.

**Questions:**