



(ZENIT, Vatican City, September 8, 2016)

The importance of holistic ecology, the role of religions in the care of the environment and the fundamental value of dialogue were three of the key themes considered by Pope Francis in this morning's address to participants in a symposium organised by the Organisation of American States and the Buenos Aires Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, held in the Augustinianum Institute, Rome and entitled "America in dialogue: our common home".

The event focused on the study of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, dedicated to the importance of loving, respecting and protecting our common home, and the Pope commented on the relevance of supporting an integral ecology, in which respect for creatures enables us to recognise their inherent value, and which places the human being at the apex of creation.

"For example, an interesting thing would be if each one of you were to ask if your country, your city, your environment, your religion, your religious community, the schools, have incorporated this. I think that we are at kindergarten level in this. Or rather, to incorporate responsibility, not only as a subject but as awareness, as part of a holistic education".

"Religions have a very important role in this task of promoting care and respect for the environment. Faith in God leads us to recognise Him in His creation, which is the fruit of His love for us, and which requires us to care for and protect nature. For this reason, it is necessary for religions to promote genuine education, at all levels, that helps to disseminate a responsible and careful attitude towards the demands of care for our world, and in a special way, to protect, promote and defend human rights. ... Interfaith cooperation, based on the promotion of sincere and respectful dialogue, is fundamental ... and must be based on one's own identity and the mutual trust that arises when we are capable of recognising the other as a gift of God, and accepting that he or she has something to tell us. ... The believer is a defender of creation and life, and cannot remain silent or passive in the face of so many rights disregarded with impunity. Men and women of faith are called to defend life in all its stages: physical integrity and fundamental freedoms such as

freedom of conscience, of thought, of expression and of worship”.

“The world constantly watches us, believers, observing our attitude to our common home and towards human rights; it also requires us to collaborate with men and women of goodwill, who do not profess any religion, so as to offer effective responses to the scourges of our world, such as war and hunger, the poverty that afflicts millions of people, the environmental crisis, violence, corruption and moral degradation, the crisis of the family and of the economy, and above all the lack of hope. Today’s world suffers and is in need of our help. Do people realise that this is light years away from any form of proselytism?”

Francis underlined that sadly we often see the name of religion used to justify atrocities such as terrorism and to sow fear and violence; as a consequence, religions are frequently regarded as being to blame for the evils that surround us. Therefore, “it is necessary to condemn jointly and roundly these abominable actions, and to distance ourselves from anything that seeks to poison minds, to divide us and to harm our coexistence; it is necessary to show the positive values inherent in our religious traditions to make a strong contribution to hope”.

“This meeting takes places within the year dedicated to the Jubilee of mercy”, he remarked at the end of his address. “This has a universal value that applies both to those who believe and those who do not, since God’s merciful love knows no limits: neither of culture, nor race, nor language, nor religion; it embraces all those who suffer in body and in spirit. Similarly, God’s love envelops all creation; and we as believers have the responsibility to defend, care for and heal that which is in need. May this Jubilee Year be an opportunity for opening up further space for dialogue, to reach out to our brother who suffers, and to battle to ensure that everyone has a place in our common home and no-one is excluded. Every human being is the greatest gift that God can give”.