

## CRC MISSION

The Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. The mission of the CRC is to encourage its members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. The CRC supports its members in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for audacious ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.

September 2010

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"To those who would like to skip over this article because ecology is not the 'cause' that they personally defend, I would like to start off by saying this: *Laudato Si'* is an encyclical that defends the poor, dignity and life in all its forms." **Norman Lévesque**, Director of the Green Churches Network, gives an overview of some of the highlights of *Laudato Si'*.

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## News briefs

### 2016 CRC General Assembly

The next General Assembly of the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) will be held from **May 26 through 29, 2016**. The chosen theme is: *The Mission of Congregational Leadership: Discerning Hope amid the Challenges*. The guest speaker will be Simon-Pierre Arnold, OSB.

### New Member of the CRC Staff Team

Apraham Niziblian has recently joined the CRC staff team as CRC's Associate Director for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), position held until recently by Joyce Murray, CSJ.

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### Joint CCCB-CRC Letter

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) and the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC), along with representatives of secular institutions and new religious movements, have prepared a message to mark the Year of Consecrated Life. It was issued jointly by the President of the CCCB and the President of the CRC in the form of an open letter entitled: *Celebrating and Giving Thanks for the Gift of Consecrated Life – Letter to All the Members of the Church for the Year of Consecrated Life*. To obtain printed copies, please contact CCCB Publications. Here are the details: [publi@cecc.ca](mailto:publi@cecc.ca) – Tel.: (1-800) 769-1147.

Link to the electronic version:

[http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/184-905\\_en.pdf](http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/184-905_en.pdf)

### Refugee Crisis

Development and Peace has mobilized—together with Aid to the Church in Need Canada (ACN) and the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA)—to meet the unprecedented and constantly growing refugee crisis. “Funds collected through this appeal will go towards humanitarian aid for Syrians living through the suffering of war and those who have fled to other countries.” Donations will be matched by the Canadian government until December 31, 2015. This fundraising campaign is supported by the CCCB. You will find more information on the organization's website at: <https://www.devpo.org/en>.

### World Day of Migrants and Refugees for 2016

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for the next World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which will be celebrated on January 17, 2016, is: *“Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy.”*



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## Laudato Si'

# and Vowed Religious

Since its publication on the Feast of Pentecost 2015, the Church has been reflecting on the Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, subtitled "On Care for Our Common Home." Harkening back to Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* promulgated in 1963, the encyclical is addressed to all persons of good will and calls for a dialogue "with every person living on the planet." (*Laudato Si'*, 3)

### Impacts on Vowed Religious

For Francis, the stakes could not be higher. The very existence of life on the earth is imperiled by environmental degradation and our callous disregard for the ecological implications of our economical system. Still, as he reaches out to a global audience on questions of such import, one can reasonably ask how his teaching impacts vowed religious in a particular way.

Consecrated persons in North America are of course subject to the same post-modern economic and cultural forces as everyone else: an obsession with technology and superficiality in relationships; a wasteful and compulsive consumerism; a rampant individualism coupled with a privatized spirituality. Consciously or subconsciously, our lives can incar-

nate such disvalues that we find ourselves more and more distant from an integral ecology and from the poor and marginalized, even in our own cities.

### Prophetic Witness in the Area of Ecology

In his now famous conversation with major superiors of men, Pope Francis has called on all religious to be prophetic in their vocation. (Antonio Spadaro. "Wake up the world." November 29, 2013) I would suggest that how we achieve a prophetic witness in the area of ecology and environmental practice is a valuable subject for our common reflection and action.

Religious often live and serve on the periphery; in places where the environment is often degraded; in urban slums and places lacking safe drinking water or public spaces. The international character of many of our communities means that we have an awareness of the particular challenges of life in the developing world, where economic exploitation is often rampant. In the first instance, we need to bring that awareness of life at the margins to the forefront within our own communities and then to the broader society.

Quoting the Bolivian bishops' conference, Pope Francis reminds us of a simple and obvious truth: "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest." (*Laudato Si'*, 48) As well, given their special relationship to the environment, aboriginal communities are to be principal dialogue partners with industry in projects affecting the land and water. And always, a preferential option for the poor should include concrete action to protect the environment.

### Opting for the Poor is Essential

The central thesis of the encyclical shows Pope Francis' clearest expression of the relationship between the common good, the environment and our option for the poor:

In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world's goods, but, as I mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, it demands before all else an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor in the light of our deepest convictions as believers. We need only look around us to see that, today, this option is in fact an ethical imperative essential for effectively attaining the common good. (*Laudato Si'*, 158)

In building up the common good, the measure of any public policy must be its effect on society's most poor and marginalized citizens.

### Conversion of Heart and Ecological Spirituality

I found the sixth chapter on ecological education and spirituality particularly inspiring. Here Francis draws from our Christian heritage to call for a conversion of heart rooted in a contemporary ecological spirituality: from Benedict of Nursia, the value and dignity of a balance between work and prayer "ora et labora;" from Francis of Assisi, a Trinitarian cosmology that explores our deep relationship with all living things; from John of the Cross, a mystical consciousness that all created things reveal God; from Thérèse of Lisieux, an invitation to practice the "little way of love," sowing peace and friendship in the smallest gesture.

Francis then considers the relationship between the sacramental character of creation and the Church's understanding of the sacraments. Quoting Pope Benedict, he describes how mystical theology reaches its apex in the Eucharist, by which: "[C]reation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself." (*Laudato Si'*, 236; see Benedict XVI. Homily for the Mass of Corpus Domini [15 June 2006])

### Invited to Enter into a Dialogue

The encyclical constitutes an invitation for vowed religious to respectfully and courageously enter into a dialogue with other persons of good will. The fruits of scientific research and contributions from varied faith traditions can move our pluralistic society toward a consensus on the urgent need for action. The common good will be enhanced as religious give voice to the poor and marginalized. Finally, by their actions, they will offer a prophetic witness on the value of interpersonal communion and an ecologically sensitive relationship with all creation.

Timothy Scott, CSB  
Executive Director of the CRC





# *Laudato Si'* Much More than an Encyclical on Ecology

To those who would like to skip over this article because ecology is not the “cause” that they personally defend, I would like to start off by saying this: *Laudato Si'* is an encyclical that defends the poor, dignity and life in all its forms.

This 200-page letter could have been entitled: Introduction to Integral Ecology. It serves as an intersection for many of the causes championed by religious communities here in Canada, including:

- Respect for the end of life (ref. euthanasia);
- Respect for the beginning of life (ref. abortion);
- Defense of the poor;
- Denunciation of the economical system;
- Community participation (ref. individualism);
- Voluntary simplicity (ref. overconsumption);
- And, of course, respect for ecological balance!

## Praising the Lord and Caring for Our Common Home

First, a word about the first sentence: “‘Laudato Si’, mi Signore’—‘Praise be to you, my Lord,’” sang St. Francis of Assisi. Indeed, this expression recurs eight times in the Poverello’s Canticle of the Creatures. Pope Francis places praise for God the Creator as the first attitude of a Christian ecology, a logical follow-up to our wonderment before nature. It is not the fear of loss of resources that motivates people to protect the environment, but rather the recognition that the natural environment is the Creation of a benevolent God. This nature is so beautiful that it inspires an attitude of praise. And from this song of praise will flow the desire to protect it.

Next, a word about the subtitle “On Care for Our Common Home.” In my opinion, the choice of the term “common home” to describe the environment is an excellent choice by the Pope because it evokes a sense of belonging to our home and the concept of interdependence among the inhabitants of that home. It is not deified (a goddess Gaia or Mother Earth to whom we should pray). Conversely, it is not without intrinsic value, such as the current economy would dare to formulate it, since it only sees the environment as a collection of resources that are of value only when they are developed.

The Pope reminds us that “In talking with his disciples, Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God’s eyes: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God (Lk 12:6).” (*Laudato Si'*, 96)

## Three New (or Almost New) Ideas

### 1. Loving Creation and the Creatures

Contrary to the statements of other popes, Pope Francis did not just ask to “be careful,” or just to “respect,” but rather to love the creatures and to live fraternally with them, in communion with them, like St. Francis of Assisi lived with them. Jesus said that the Father takes care of every creature. Hence, love for Creation is part of our faith. (*Laudato Si'*, 4, 56, 179, 211, 213, 240)

## 2. Human Beings Do Not Possess the Earth, God Is the Proprietor

Our society of excessive consumption encourages possession, but the only rightful owner is God. If we “possess” the land, it is only for the purpose of managing it for the common good. (*Laudato Si'*, 67, 77, 83)

## 3. The Ultimate Purpose of Other Creatures Is Not to Be Found in Us

In other words, the creatures were not created for us, but they were created by God and for God. The other creatures are there, regardless of our existence. Chapters 38–40 of the Book of Job are an eloquent teaching on the humility to adopt. Even if we have the capacity to rule over other creatures (e.g., sheep, chickens, etc.), the Lord wants us to do it “in his image and likeness,” while favouring life. (*Laudato Si'*, 83)

## Four Canadian Concerns

### 1. Exploitation of Fossil Fuels

It is no secret to anyone that the Canadian government has invested embarrassing subsidies to companies processing the oil sands, whereas the challenges of climate change require a transition to cleaner energies.

“We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas—needs to be progressively replaced without delay.” (*Laudato Si'*, 165)



### 2. Mining

The majority of multinational mining companies are headquartered in Canada. Why? Because this is where the laws are the weakest, giving free rein to polluting and unjust practices against surrounding populations. This colonial attitude has huge impacts on the populations of the Global South wherever there is mining.

The Development and Peace 2013 fall education campaign<sup>4</sup> was eloquent on this subject. “A true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.” (*Laudato Si'*, 51)

### 3. Relations with First Nations

In the words of an indigenous leader talking about the arrival of settlers, their “immigration system wasn't perfected yet.” Thus, the arrogant attitude of the European descendants is only just starting to be chipped away.

Let us hope that future projects involving hydroelectric plants, mines and oil pipelines crossing their ancestral territories will be carried out in dialogue and respect.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.devp.org/sites/www.devp.org/files/documents/materials/devpeace\\_fall2013\\_action\\_card.pdf](http://www.devp.org/sites/www.devp.org/files/documents/materials/devpeace_fall2013_action_card.pdf)

“In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed.” (*Laudato Si'*, 146)

#### 4. Slowdown in Growth

Canada is a G8 country, hence a country whose inhabitants are far richer than the global average, imposing a large demand in resources. To reduce the impact on the environment, we must find a way to live well, with less. This means that, in the end, we will buy less. Those obsessed with growth will have to resign themselves to that situation.

“We need to grow in the conviction that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development.” (*Laudato Si'*, 191)



### Hear the Cry and Hope for Change

Although Leonardo Boff is not quoted directly, one of his most famous phrases can be found evoked in the encyclical, viz.: “Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor.” Environmental degradation affects the poor more seriously (they cannot adapt to it). When one studies the causes of poverty, one often finds hidden said causes an unjust wealth-distribution system and it is that very same system that is degrading the environment. Pope Francis says that there is not one social crisis and a separate environmental crisis, but rather that it is all one and the same crisis. The poor and the earth find themselves voiceless and they need defense. (*Laudato Si'*, 2, 70, 117, 139)

Given the magnitude of the ecological crisis, before the oppressive power that is destroying nature, some become discouraged. The Pope encourages us by reminding that every action makes a difference and that every prophetic voice is added to the others to bring about change. Let us remind ourselves that change is possible and that our participation is necessary. We are bearers of hope and we act every day. (*Laudato Si'*, 13, 17, 163, 202, 208, 211, 217, 219)

### For Further Reflection...

This summary is brief, but I hope it will encourage you to read the Encyclical. If you want to delve more deeply into the matter, I suggest you consult the resources offered by the *Green Churches Network*, which also provides a link to go read it on the internet. And don't forget that convents, monasteries and religious houses can join the network.

[www.egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/](http://www.egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/)

Norman Lévesque  
Director of the Green Churches Network



# Laudato Si'

## and the Vow of Poverty

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis takes stock of the attitudes and mentalities harmful to the environment, our "common home." (*Laudato Si'*, 13)

Among these harmful attitudes and mentalities, he mentions in particular a culture of impulsive and wasteful consumption. The Pope notes that, in countries where such a culture prevails, there is also a tendency towards self-interest, self-centeredness, where people care little or not at all about the harm they can cause to the environment and to future generations. What matters to them is increasing their profits and satisfying their hearts' desire for instant gratification with all available goods. The Pope writes:

Men and women of our postmodern world run the risk of rampant individualism, and many problems of society are connected with today's self-centred culture of instant gratification. (*Laudato Si'*, 162)

He adds:

When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. (*Laudato Si'*, 204)

In this context, the reality of the "common good" is forgotten. We no longer seek what is beneficial, in the long term, for the whole of humanity and for all the plant and animal species.

### Seeking Primarily the "Common Good"

In response, Pope Francis proposes an "ecological conversion" (*Laudato Si'*, 219), which of course requires the practice of "ecological virtues." (*Laudato Si'*, 88) This conversion implies that individuals and companies put the search for the "common good" at the centre of their concerns. (*Laudato Si'*, 158-159) This makes individuals less centred on



themselves and opens them up to solidarity, not only with the various types of poor people and endangered species, but also with future generations. The concept of common good is central to the environmental approach of the Bishop of Rome.

### Learning to Be Satisfied With Little

Learning to be satisfied with little is at the heart of "ecological conversion." Francis urges us to opt courageously for moderation in consumption and for simplicity. This may seem paradoxical, but it has the conviction that "less is more." (*Laudato Si'*, 222) The Pope explains by saying that people who cease to focus on the pleasures of consumption actually open themselves up to other, greater types of enjoyment, which lead to happiness. He writes:

Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things.

The Pope believes that "those who enjoy more and live better each moment" (*Laudato Si'*, 223) are those that can be satisfied with little and appreciate the little things. This leads him to these luminous affirmations:

Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer. (*Laudato Si'*, 223)

## The Importance of Community Networks

The Sovereign Pontiff is well aware that the path he is proposing is not obvious, it doesn't happen by itself. It is a demanding road that goes against the "throwaway culture" (*Laudato Si'*, 22) prevailing in many societies. He therefore considers that this change of mentality cannot be experienced without the support of a community. He thinks that belonging to a community network is essential:

[S]elf-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today. Isolated individuals can lose their ability [...] and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness. [...] Social problems must be addressed by community networks. (*Laudato Si'*, 219)

## Ecological Conversion and the Vow of Poverty

Although he doesn't speak of it anywhere in his encyclical, doesn't ecological conversion strongly resemble what living the vow of poverty gives to us? How can one not think of the Rule of St. Augustine that has inspired so many Institutes? Indeed, for Augustine, the religious in good spiritual health is the one whose needs are minimal and who knows how to be content with little. He wrote: "For it is better to suffer a little want than to have too much." (Rule III, 5)

But, whatever the rule of our Institute and its precise formulations, those of us in religious life are all invited, by our vow of poverty, to adopt a moderate lifestyle and choose to restrain ourselves in terms of consumption.



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In addition, our vow of poverty calls on us to pool our assets and our income. Normally, the practice of this vow should turn us towards others; it should halt our self-centeredness and lead us to seek the common good. And because we share the objects of everyday use among ourselves, we do not need to buy several copies of something that can be lent. In that way, we decrease our consumption.

When we look at it closely, we discover that religious life with its vow of poverty provides us with formidable tools for committing ourselves to the ecological conversion put forward by the Pope. In addition, our community and our Institute provide us with the community networks that Francis considers so important to keep us on this path.

## An Invitation to Bear Witness

Don't the current environmental situation and the publication of this encyclical constitute an opportunity for religious life? Isn't this an occasion to enrich and renew the meaning of our vow of poverty? Could this be seen as a way to take care of our common home and bear witness to an environmentally responsible (eco-responsible) lifestyle?

*Michel Proulx, o. praem.*

Member of the Theological Commission of the CRC

# *Laudato Si'* The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis



It was on the day of the Solemnity of Pentecost in 2015 that our Pope Francis delivered to us his long-awaited encyclical on integral ecology. True to his usual methodology, he first invited us to look at what is happening in our common home: problems of pollution, climate change, water; loss of biodiversity; deterioration in the quality of life; social degradation; global inequality; the weak responses to these disturbing phenomena. (Ch. 1)

Secondly, he guided us in a dual analysis of the causes of the situation in which we find ourselves, one analysis theological (Ch. 2), the other more scientific. (Ch. 3 and 4) Finally, he pointed us towards some important approaches for correcting the situation, approaches that involve various dialogues to be undertaken (Ch. 5) and a suggestion for an ecological education and spirituality. (Ch. 6)

Every chapter of *Laudato Si'* offers us several opportunities for deeper reflection. We are going to focus our attention here on Chapter 3, which attempts to identify the human roots of the ecological crisis we are experiencing. "It would hardly be helpful," says Francis, "to describe symptoms" (Ch. 1) "without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis" (*Laudato Si'*, 101). He will attempt to pinpoint these human roots by identifying "the dominant technocratic paradigm" of our society, and "the crisis of modern anthropocentrism."

## The Dominant Technocratic Paradigm

There is no doubt that science and technology are "wonderful products of a God-given human creativity." The Encyclical does not vacillate: "How can we not feel gratitude and appreciation for this progress, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications?" (*Laudato Si'*, 102) "Yet it must also be recognized that nuclear energy, biotechnology, information technology, knowledge of our DNA, and many other abilities which we have acquired, have given us tremendous power." (*Laudato Si'*, 104)

Be careful, it is not a question of believing "that every increase in power means an increase of 'progress' itself." (*Laudato Si'*, 105) Technology has fascinated human beings to the point where one can speak about the emergence of a technocracy, that is to say, the advent of a world in which technology reigns.

But, Francis reminds us, a "science which would offer solutions to the great issues would necessarily have to take into account the data generated by other fields of knowledge, including philosophy and social ethics." (*Laudato Si'*, 110) But, he adds, "this is a difficult habit to acquire today" because "life gradually becomes a surrender to situations conditioned by technology, itself viewed as the principal key to the meaning of existence." (*Laudato Si'*, 110)

## A Distinctive Way of Looking

When, therefore, we speak about an ecological culture, we are not just thinking about responding to the problems of environmental decay, depletion of natural resources and pollution, but we are aiming at “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm.” (*Laudato Si'*, 111)

The reflection on the domination of the technocratic paradigm ends with the following clarification: “Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur.” (*Laudato Si'*, 114)

## Modern Anthropocentrism

“Modernity,” says Francis, “has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism.” He says that we have to ask ourselves about the way we understand the dominion of man over creation. And he answers, with the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (Tagaytay 1993): “Instead, our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.” (*Laudato Si'*, 116)

## “Everything is Connected”

A certain phrase is repeated many times over the course of this encyclical, as a kind of mantra: “Everything is connected.” “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities [...] it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself.” (*Laudato Si'*, 117) In the society in which we live, we often see that “a technocracy which sees no intrinsic value in lesser beings coexists with the other extreme, which sees no special value in human beings.” (*Laudato Si'*, 118)

Francis says further that if “the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships.” Do not think, adds our father and brother Francis, that to have a correct relationship with the created world, you need to “weaken the social dimension of [human beings’] openness to others, much less [their] transcendent dimension.” (*Laudato Si'*, 119)

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis had said that practical relativism ‘was’ even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism. (EG 80; *Laudato Si'* 122) If we allow the technocratic paradigm and unlimited human power to prevail, can we be surprised at “the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests”? Here, Francis sets out a long list of situations that illustrate this practical relativism. (*Laudato Si'*, 123)



## The Workplace

Still with the objective of better situating humankind within the whole of creation, he examines the workplace (*Laudato Si'*, 124–129) and the possibilities and limits of research in biological technologies (*Laudato Si'*, 130–136). Do not talk about integral ecology, Francis tells us, if you do not take into account the value of labour. Think about the responsibility that Genesis gives us:

- Protect creation but also work the land so that it produces more. (*Laudato Si'*, 124)
- Work is a necessity; it is part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment. (*Laudato Si'*, 128)
- Yes, of course, we can help the poor by giving them money, but it is so much more important to help them to “have a dignified life through work.” (*Laudato Si'*, 128)
- But to be able to offer employment, it is imperative to promote an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity (*Laudato Si'*, 129)

And if you think about research and biological innovation, remember that even though “human intervention on plants and animals is permissible when it pertains to the necessities of human life,” the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2419) teaches that “experimentation on animals is morally acceptable only ‘if it remains within reasonable limits [and] contributes to caring for or saving human lives.’” (*Laudato Si'*, 130)

## Technology and Ethics

Of course, “human activity cannot be suppressed,” nor can we stop “those who possess particular gifts for the advancement of science and technology.” However, “we need constantly to rethink the goals, effects, overall context and ethical limits of this human activity.” (*Laudato Si'*, 131)

There is also the question of organisms whose genome has been modified by genetic engineering. What judgment can we make “about genetic modification (GM), whether vegetable or animal, medical or agricultural”? One feels here that Pope Francis is being very nuanced, avoiding a general judgment, as these developments include various processes. “In nature, however,” he points out, “this process is slow and cannot be compared to the fast pace induced by contemporary technological advances.” (*Laudato Si'*, 133)



Another crucial question is asked at the end of Chapter 3: How is it that while “some ecological movements defend the integrity of the environment, rightly demanding that certain limits be imposed on scientific research, they sometimes fail to apply those same principles to human life”? All our thinking about this chapter of *Laudato Si'* leads us to conclude that “a technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power.” (*Laudato Si'*, 136)

## A Long Reflection Necessary

We are truly invited to undertake a reflection that will have to be long to do justice to the depth of questioning and possible solutions proposed by our Francis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

Lorraine Caza, *CND*

Member of the Theological Commission of the CRC

# Laudato Si'

## Values and Vision

When I first read *Laudato Si'*, I was brought back in memory to the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, and a student in my sixth-grade catechetics class. Students were invited to identify a tree to which they were attracted, or they felt represented them. He had chosen an apple tree, very plentiful in that area. He explained he had chosen it "because it's beautiful, and it can feed people." He valued the tree as a beautiful creation in its own right, and saw it in relationship to people. In that terse and intuitive statement he captured what is foundational in *Laudato Si'*.

Much of *Laudato Si'* is indeed about the beauty and value of creation and the interrelationships of nature, human life and the life of the earth community. It is also about the failure of contemporary culture to grasp these relationships and act accordingly, resulting in the ecological disasters and societal breakdowns we experience today. But it does not stop at naming; it offers a vision that points the way forward and must involve everyone. This article will highlight the foundational values in *Laudato Si'*, and outline the vision it presents for moving forward.

### Values

In this "appeal for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" (*Laudato Si'*, 14) several values are upheld as enhancing of the human spirit, society and the entire earth community. These are interspersed throughout the text, and some of them are raised in several places in the document. What follows is a summary of these values, with a sampling of related quotes from the text.

### The value of Creation

Some values articulated pertain to creation itself. The valuing of creation as beauty and the revelation of God is addressed at some length. In this context, the Canadian bishops are quoted: "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine." (*Laudato Si'*, 85)

The value inherent in each creature is also upheld: "...we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes." (*Laudato Si'*, 69) Additionally, respect for the balance of life on earth is also lifted up: "This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world..." (*Laudato Si'*, 68)

### The Value of the Human Person and Culture

Other values emphasized pertain to the human person and culture. The beauty and dignity of the human person in the ensemble of creation is highlighted in *Laudato Si'*, 65: "The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26)." This shows the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone. He (or she) is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving of himself (or herself) and entering into communion with other persons."<sup>1</sup>

The importance of meaningful work for human life is raised up: "Work should be the setting for [...] rich personal growth where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God." (*Laudato Si'*, 127)

<sup>1</sup> This is quoted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 357 .



The protection of cultural treasures is another value called to our attention: “Together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat. [...] Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense.” (*Laudato Si'*, 143)

## The Common Good Reiterated as Crucial

The common good, a time-honoured value in Catholic teaching, is reiterated as crucial for this time. “Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics.” (*Laudato Si'*, 156) The common good includes respect for the human person, the overall welfare of society, and “calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice.” (*Laudato Si'*, 157) This implies a particular concern for the most dispossessed and vulnerable.

## Vision

After canvassing the significant ecological, technological and societal issues of our time, *Laudato Si'* asserts: “...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.” (*Laudato Si'*, 61) The proposed way forward has two major aspects: ‘integral ecology’, the title of the fourth chapter, and dialogue at every level of society, elaborated in the fifth chapter.

‘Integral ecology’, the ecology fitting for our time, “...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.” (*Laudato Si'*, 49) “Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time, protecting nature.” (*Laudato Si'*, 139)

The recognition of the interdependence of the earth community “obliges us to think of one world with a common plan.” (*Laudato Si'*, 164) Consequently, dialogue and some form of regulation, an unpopular word to modern ears, are needed at all levels



of government, international, national and local. Political and economic sectors need to consider their decisions in light of their repercussions on human fulfillment.” What is needed “is a politics, which is far-sighted and capable of a new integral and interdisciplinary approach...,” and which will be able “to question the logic which underlies present-day culture.” (*Laudato Si'*, 197) Such a politics will require dialogue. All will have to do their part in living ‘the ecology of daily life’.

## Hope for the Apple Blossoms

While this path of dialogue will demand ‘patience, self-discipline and generosity’ (*Laudato Si'*, 201), we are reminded that our struggles and concern for the planet must never take away our hope and joy. (*Laudato Si'*, 244) What will I do now so that in 2065, there will still be apple blossoms to fill young spirits with beauty, and inspire them to feed people?

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