



CANADIAN
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IS CONNECTED!**

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EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED! EVERYTHING IS GIVEN! EVERYTHING IS FRAGILE!

Timothy Scott, CSB

Those of us who attended the 32nd General Assembly of the Canadian Religious Conference in May 2018 had the privilege of hearing Professor Elena Lasida offer a brilliant and captivating reflection on Pope Francis' recent encyclical *Laudato Si'*.¹ Her presentation identified three key concepts that when taken together, capture the essence of the papal teaching: everything is connected; everything is given; everything is fragile.

Precarious State of the Environment

The theme of fragility is particularly evident in the Holy Father's reflection on the environment. He notes that a grim sign of the times is the perilous condition of our soil, air, and water: "We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair." (LS 61) In discussing the tyranny of unregulated economic policies, he writes: "...whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market." (LS 56; citing *Evangelii Gaudium* 56)

Pope Francis distinguishes how the choice of language causes us to look at the environment in very different ways: "Nature is usually seen as a system that can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all..." (LS 76) From all is *fragile*, Pope Francis brings us to all is *given*.

Seeing in a Different Light

In reflecting on the "given-ness" of all things, he suggests that we can understand human society differently. On issues as varied as social institutions like the family, the human body in its masculinity and femininity, and the integral development of the human person, a person of faith understands these elements as God-given realities within which we are called to develop and flourish.

A Network of Connexions

The final and most developed theme of the encyclical concerns the connectedness of all things. The universe is structured by connections: "Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation." (LS 138) Echoing St. Francis, the Holy Father explores how all creation is relational (LS 42), while underscoring the link between ecology and anthropology: "The health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life." (LS 142)

There is a great cost to ignoring these realities. Young people suffer from a false and melancholic connectedness engendered by social media. (LS 47) Disrespect for our common home has particular consequences for the poor and challenges us to be in relation with them. "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." (LS 158) Human solidarity and ecology are closely inter-related, for we are called: "...to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." (LS 49)

In Communion with the Creator

The ultimate source of our human longing for connectedness lies in our God who created us and who is perfect relationality. We desire to share in the Trinity's relational dynamism and discover it mirrored in the world. "The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures." (LG 240) Though her reflection on Pope Francis' eco-theology, theological anthropology, and eschatology, Elena Lasida is challenging us to discover in *Laudato Si'* a way forward in caring for our common home. ■

¹ An on-line version of her talk in English is available on the CRC website at: <https://www.crc-canada.org/en/2018-general-assembly/> and in French at: <https://www.crc-canada.org/assemblee-generale-2018/>

**EVERYTHING
IS CONNECTED!**

*So, What Are We
Waiting For?*

Brother Louis Cinq-Mars, Capuchin

A few weeks ago, I derived a good deal of pleasure from watching the documentary film *Qu'est-ce qu'on attend?* (“What are we waiting for?”). Filmed in 2015, this documentary highlights the eco-responsible activities of the residents of the small town of Ungersheim (2,200 inhabitants) in Alsace. Nearly 10 years previously, they had decided to embrace a lifestyle aimed at reducing their ecological footprint to a minimum. Everything was connected to that: agriculture, housing, transport, economic life, citizen democracy, mutual aid and long-term vision.

Everything is connected! That is the refrain running through and punctuating the encyclical *Laudato Si'* offered by Pope Francis in 2015. According to Elena Lasida, Doctor of Social and Economic Sciences and mission head at Justice and Peace France, this expression is one of the encyclical's three pillars. The other pillars are *Everything is given!* and *Everything is fragile!* By affirming that everything is connected, the Pope thus gives priority to the relational dimension in the reflection developed by *Laudato Si'* and reiterates that all created reality carries the image of the Trinitarian and relational God.

The Real Challenge

The foundation of the encyclical is clearly a relational and communion anthropology. For those of us living in a culture that uses or manipulates relationships (including human relationships) by placing them at the service of immediate satisfaction or profit, this is a counter-cultural statement; relationship becomes the purpose or goal, the criterion of judgment for our actions and our results. Confronted with the global economic system — in which the goal is profit and where relationships are nothing but means to an end — this is a real challenge.

In economics, Elena Lasida reminds us that decisions must involve the entire community; they cannot be reserved to just a few initiates. She invites us to become the artisans of an economy of communion, for example by using part of our financial resources to support projects whose purpose is communion and the creation of relationships (in micro-credit, for example)?¹

¹ For example, during the summer of 2018, my community chose to invest a few thousand dollars in a community garden project on our property. The 30 units were quickly used.

The ecological crisis is not a crisis like the others [...] It is an economic, political, social and spiritual issue.



A Global Approach Needed

The ecological crisis is not a crisis like the others, but a crisis that now enables us to wonder in a global way about our way of being in the world, that is to say, our economic model, our way of living together, our international relations, our lifestyles, our conception of the future, and our reason for living. It is a crisis that allows us to understand the other crises and to regain a true posture in creation. It is an economic, political, social and spiritual issue.

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach

to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature,” writes Pope Francis.

Taking Risks with the Other

Everything is connected! Creatures, including human beings, are linked together to form systems, which are in turn interconnected to one another. There is a connection between nature and the human, between the environment and the human and between all the dimensions of life: institutions, culture, politics, economy, etc. This statement may seem somewhat banal to us, but in reality it is a cultural revolution that leads us to establish links of **interdependence** between ourselves as well as with all that is given and fragile. It leads us to reject links of independence, of appropriation, or of sometimes-violent submission.²

Becoming aware of the bonds of interdependence that unite us exposes the illusion of absolute autonomy and puts an end to the partitions that separate and isolate us from one another. The Bible, recalls Elena Lasida, introduces the notion of covenant or alliance, which is always linked to co-responsibility. In the covenant, each partner agrees to take risks with the other and to assume success as well as failure.

Finding Innovative and Unprecedented Solutions

Laudato Si' draws up a global vision of the world and questions the very foundation of our being-in-the-world. The ecological crisis does not appear as merely a problem of managing natural resources. It questions the meaning of our individual and collective life and we do not need to wait to begin sketching out a “new imagination for a good life,” to use the expression of Elena Lasida.

At a time when we are facing natural disasters, famines, wars, the greatest number of displaced people since the end of the Second World War and an increasingly scandalous gap between the rich and the masses of poor, we must, more than ever, work together to find innovative and even unprecedented solutions. To do this, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* offers us three solid pillars: Everything is connected! Everything is given! Everything is fragile! ■

² See in particular LS 16, 70, 91, 92, 117, 120, 138, 142 and 240.

EVERYTHING IS GIVEN!

From Gratitude to Vigilance

Gisèle Turcot, SBC

The second cornerstone or pillar of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* can be stated as follows: "Everything is given."¹ This radical, integral gift implies gratitude and communion with all living beings; it invites enthusiasm and creativity. These three elements are found in the singing of many psalms, especially Psalm 104.

In this psalm, the psalmist places in the mouth of the praying person a hymn to the creator God who takes the figure of the gardener and the caretaker. He gives and waters the earth (v. 5), gives water to the beasts of the field, the mountains (vv.11-13), all while imposing limits on the water of the seas (v. 6). His work is profound and consistent: He makes the meadows grow for the flocks and the prairies for the farmer's bread (v. 14).

Enchanted by the work of such a gardener, the psalmist exclaims: "Send out your breath and life begins," (v. 30) as if he felt a light breeze wafting through the universe. He then makes this enthusiastic commitment: "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being." (v. 33) But, he immediately senses the danger, the power of destruction that the recipients of these gifts might use to achieve their ends; so he concludes his praise with a dreadful decree: "Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more!" (v. 35).

¹ Elena LASIDA, Talk at the CRC General Assembly, Montreal, May 25, 2018.



Making a Shift to Better See and Feel

The very title of Pope Francis' encyclical focuses on praise for creation, all the more so since it demonstrates its fragility. Beyond the necessary adjustments towards a global ecological transition that must be sought, it is a spiritual challenge and even a call for *ecological conversion*. In other words, where the psalmist wanted to drive out the evildoers, the Christian consciousness of "everything is fragile" is prophetic language in dialogue with our contemporaries.

Undergoing a conversion, the speaker was telling us, is to accept "moving or making a shift for the life of the other." That is no small thing! Giving up the security of having a well-defined and recognized place. Risking moving forward towards the unknown, since it is no longer a question of repairing what has been broken but rather the reinventing with others.

Yet who will
hear the cry of
the poor?



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Let us focus for a moment on this call to make a shift. Virtually all we, women and men religious in Canada, first lived it in the field of community works: competent and generous lay people took over the vast majority of the works we had created; they sometimes transform them well beyond our expectations. We have thus changed our place at the table, offloading certain leadership tasks in order to walk with others. In doing so, we have discovered other ways of thinking, of seeing and of acting.

We entered into this change or shift by necessity and by conviction. By necessity when the lack of personnel made us move towards institutional succession and partnerships, but also by conviction, awakened and driven by the environmental protection movement for which the younger generations are carrying the torch. Those men and women who were already working in the name of justice and peace now include the letter “E” in their priorities and even in their logo (for example: the Ecumenical Justice and Peace Network in Quebec is now called the Ecumenical Justice, Ecology and Peace Network or ROJEP).

Seeing the Planet from the Standpoint of the Poor

The great characteristic of Pope Francis’ encyclical is to make us see the urgency of protecting the planet from the perspectives of the lives of the poor and those who are in the periphery.

For nearly half a century, scientists and environmentalists have been carrying the cry of the planet in danger in all forums, however the political commitment of our governments remains very timid; it is sometimes even contraindicated. The voice of various citizen movements is not yet strong and unanimous enough to influence decisions, because — among other reasons — a change in lifestyle is at stake, in both individual and collective terms.

Yet who will hear the cry of the poor? It is true that the poor are not the only ones who are suffering from climate disruptions, from the mountains of garbage that result from our consumption levels, however they are the first and the most numerous to bear the consequences.

Re-enchanting the World

The founding charisms of our apostolic institutes were almost always in response to a lack, to a sort of poverty that challenges us today to once again pick up and heed the cry of the poor. Religious communities are already leading the way by encouraging and supporting initiatives and experiences that the 2018 Canadian Religious Conference is being invited to pick up.

As we know, listening deeply to the call for ecological conversion also involves a change of outlook, which involves combining understanding and compassion. Isn’t it time to revisit *the preferential option for the poor*, a legacy of liberation theology that arose in the Global South and took shape 50 years ago at the Medellín Conference? Let us be borne by this Breath that is leading us towards the unexpected to ‘re-enchant’ the world. ■



EVERYTHING IS FRAGILE...

Yet Look! New Life!

Mary-Ellen Francoeur, sos

Our May Assembly, with keynote speaker Elena Lasida, was energizing as it instilled hope and an openness to possibilities despite every limitation, setback or obstacle. In fact, the presence of both fragility and limitation draw out creativity and new life. Life will always find a way to be creative and generative.

In our lived experience as religious, we are already entering into this energy. It was reassuring to be affirmed, strengthened on the journey and to hear each other's stories of both fragility and creativity.

We all can relate very powerfully to the realities of aging, decrease in numbers and the resulting need to let go of the buildings and spaces that have long been part of our lives. We are facing our sadness and grief together, and in moving through this time, finding the new vision of what we can leave to the world, the Earth, and future generations. Some of us are continuing to welcome courageous persons who seek to enter our communities. Inspired by the spirit they experience with us, they are ready to step into an unknown future of religious life.

Interdependence, a Need and a Gift

In all of this, we feel "in our bones" the reality of moving from a place of independence to a place that is at first a need and then a surprising gift: interdependence. In this year's Assembly, I could hear echoes of the previous Assembly. In the past, religious communities have often been able to function as their own entities with capable personnel and resources, proud to be following their own charism. The last two Assemblies have addressed a new reality.

It is fragility, now, which is making us realize that the Universe has always been a model of relationships amongst great diversity, collaborating very creatively for the sake of flourishing of life. We are learning from the Universe that we are stronger when we enter into a multitude of relationships, that we are enriched and strengthened by our various gifts; entering into dialogue and "taking risks together".

Inventing New Ways Together

All of this takes on many expressions. There are increasing examples of several communities coming together to pool resources for the sake of the needs of the most marginalized. The dialogue taking place builds strong bonds and a realization of our shared call to live the Gospel in ever-new ways. The emerging visions and actions are exciting and hopeful. As Elena Lasida would say, 'there is no set map for proceeding; it must be invented together through dialogue.'

For those communities who are welcoming new members, they realize that they no longer have the personnel themselves to carry on the formation that is needed, so this new life must be nurtured in new ways. Novices are crossing the globe to join with other novices, either of their own international community or of a mixture of communities. They grow in a much broader sense of solidarity and world-perspective. Together they face questions and issues that are critically relevant to this time in history. At the same time, they sink into the deep treasure of the essence of religious commitment.

[...] we trust that unknown creative possibilities for life will unfold [...]



In Dying, the Unexpected Emerges

Some communities such as my own, are moving through a process of radical letting go, acknowledging that their institute will not continue into the future. Yet, in the midst of this grief, we have looked at the Story of the Universe and the teaching of the Gospel. In dying, there is the emergence of new life! Life continues in a new way. In the “flaring forth” of our particular spirit, our history, our lives of love, our service and contemplation, we trust that unknown creative possibilities for life will unfold, beyond what we could ever imagine. In our case, our founder called us to be women of daring and risk; she demonstrated how obstacles could be met and transformed creatively with faith in a provident God.

Communities such as mine are creating new relationships with larger communities in “Sponsorship Agreements” or Covenants. The larger community respects our integrity and identity, while promising a caring leadership and attention to our growing needs. It is a process, requiring ongoing dialogue and creative response to each moment. We are discovering that this risk in relationship is life-giving for all. Other communities are developing their own unique relationships and arrangements as they look to an unknown future with trust and faith.

Partnering with Laypersons

A very important way in which new life becomes possible is by partnering with laypersons and groups. This interdependence is proving to foster learning and growth for all. The laypersons are strengthened by the faith perspective of the religious and the religious are inspired by the dedication and resonance of the laypersons with their values and mission. The religious also benefit greatly from the expertise of the laypersons in areas unfamiliar to them. This partnership is permitting the values and mission of religious to continue long into the future.

While at the Assembly, I marvelled at the courage of many communities who, to realize their legacies to the larger civic community, are undertaking immense projects of building and real estate. Their fragility has opened up a surprising energy in religious who are beyond retirement age. They find themselves developing entirely new skills and speaking “languages” they never imagined speaking.

Fragility Pushes Us to Surrender

Finally, our experience of fragility is calling us to a new and more profoundly contemplative way of being. With limitation and even a sense of powerlessness, we surrender ourselves to a Divine Love in whom, as Paul says, we can accomplish more than we could ever imagine. ■

THE CRC AT A GLANCE

Mission Statement

Established in 1954, the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) is an association that brings together 240 leaders of Catholic congregations of religious men and women in Canada.

“The CRC is both a voice for and a service to leaders of religious institutes and societies of apostolic life. Our mission is to encourage our members to live fully their vocation in following Christ. We support them in their prophetic witness to justice and peace within society and the Church. The CRC looks for innovative ways of interpreting faith and life so as to embrace the new vision of the universe.”

Mission statement adopted in 2010

Theological Commission of the CRC

The Theological Commission was established by the Administrative Council of the CRC in September 1999 to deepen the meaning of consecrated life according to a theological approach that integrates the contributions made by human and social sciences. The Theological Commission proposes future directions that will inform consecrated life in a creative and prophetic way while taking into account the various charisms of the congregations.

CRC Publications

Published three times a year, the *CRC Bulletin* presents reflections on different aspects of consecrated life in relation to the orientations and objectives of the Canadian Religious Conference.

Issued monthly, the *CRC Newsletter* (formerly *Le Lien CRC Link*) provides information on the commitments and activities of the CRC, on the life of religious congregations, on the life of the Church and on community groups involved in social justice.

