

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

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/>

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.