

## The Pope's Revolution. The Implications of *Laudato si'*.

### *How do we Respond? - Globally, Locally and Personally*

One of my favourite Australian novels is *The Getting of Wisdom* (Henry Handle Richardson, 1910). In working for renewal and reform of our Church and our world, we need to seek and to 'Get Wisdom' through discernment. Pope Francis uses the famous See, Judge Act discernment Method of Cardinal Cardijn, immortalised through the YCW, to structure his encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015).

Francis has a beautiful Introduction, geared perhaps to 'butter us up', strengthen us, for the 'Seeing', 'Judging' and 'Acting' that lies ahead in Chapters 1-6.

The Pope opens by introducing his namesake, 13<sup>th</sup> century Italian saint, Francis of Assisi, who was in love with Creation, living as he did in the heart of beautiful Umbria close to Assisi and Perugia. Francis loved everyone and everything God made - the birds, the lepers, and the Sultans of this world ...all were embraced in his arms. He is presented as the model of the eco-spirituality we Catholics are called to practise. Like this favourite saint, we are called to repentance, conversion, sacred 'mindfulness' of creation, reverence for Mother Earth, for all her living species, and for our human sisters and brothers, especially God's favourites, the poor. The Pope wants us to take special note ...the poor always suffer the most from ecological devastation.

SEEING: In Chapters 1, 2 and 3 we SEE the realities of our situation as part of the Earth Community. We have in fact as a species been spitting upon our Mother the Earth turning her into what Pope Francis terms, 'an immense pile of filth'. (LS, 21). We have been living in a period of 'rapidification' the Pope says, (LS, 18) where greed and 'progress' so called have led to a 'throw-away' culture, where a single cup of coffee is housed in a throw away vessel; daily there are billions of them piling up. Climate change is 'melting our ice caps and affecting the carbon cycle' (LS 24).

In the Introduction and then in Chapter 2 we also SEE what our sacred tradition offers us as insight: In Romans 1, St Paul reminds us that 'God's eternal power and divinity have been made known through God's works since the creation of the world'. We are called to love all that God has made. The Pope tells us that this will require a conversion of heart, mind and will.

In Chapter 3 we SEE clearly that the earth's devastation is directly the result of human blindness and carelessness in exploiting the earth's gifts and failing to share them with all. No room here for climate denial, excuses or passing the buck.

JUDGING: The encyclical calls to JUDGE that humans and societies must change. This involves recognition of and repentance for our personal and societal profligacy, our sheer neglect of the gifts of nature. The Pope says we need to realise that our cultures have succumbed to the myth of unlimited economic growth (para. 106), and to be aware that 'certain powerful groups condition our lifestyles' in their own interests, making decisions in a 'purely instrumental way' (107), so that we become subjects under the 'lordship' of the 'technocratic paradigm'(108).

Action is needed on an Industrial scale: Having SEEN something of the global situation and JUDGED that situation in the light of faith and science, we need now to move to decision and action.

ACTING: In Chapter 4 Francis calls us to begin to make the connections, join the dots, through an 'integral ecology' that addresses the complexities of both the natural world and its threatened systems and the social arrangements that make up our wasteful, careless cultures. The fossil fuels that burn in Australia or in China keep our spacious homes, vast commercial towers, and factories going, churning out the consumer goods that are destined for the shop floors of Harvey Norman,

Spotlight or Bunnings, keeping our lifestyles humming along while devastating Mother Earth who feeds us ...feeds us with fresh air, clean water, rich soil and beauty to nourish our spirits. We know humanity is on borrowed time, and the Pope tells us that the 'globalisation of indifference' has caused our 'sister earth' and all the 'abandoned of our world' to cry out, pleading for another course' (LS,53).

Pope Francis calls us to respect, not only a sound theology of creation that recognises God as Creator and God's plan for creation, but also 'sound academic freedom', promoting research that can demonstrate how ecology works: we need to understand that the systems of nature not only sustain us humans but 'the whole harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system' (LS 140). The Pope tells us that these systems are vital in 'dispersing carbon dioxide, purifying water, controlling diseases and epidemics, forming soil, breaking down waste...' He calls us all (not just Catholics, but the whole of humanity) to 'sustainable living' that takes account of and respects these processes of nature and does not ignore them. This requires an 'economic ecology' and a new 'humanism' that can bring together the 'different fields of knowledge' in the service of a more 'integral vision' (LS 141).

In my own life as a Catholic educator, a major commitment has always been to work with teachers in bring together the various 'subjects taught' in a holistic, 'Catholic' approach to curriculum. This vision is expressed through the Catholic Social Teachings that now extend to include *Laudato Si* as the latest jewel in the crown, building on and further integrating all the previous, anthropocentric Catholic Social Teaching encyclicals since 1891. This shared faith vision, the Catholic worldview, has the potential to connect and apply the human and natural sciences, the humanities and the arts and technical education within the creative plan of God for the whole of creation. We *can* do it. Such an integrated education can inspire and motivate future architects and engineers to build sustainable cities, agricultural scientists to pioneer farming methods that are respectful of soil and water, health professionals to favour preventative and well as curative care, economists and accountants to calculate ecological as well as fiscal costs; leaders whose command of language and clear thinking can shape ecological vision and radical policy and action. Many young professionals are leading the way in these areas.

In Chapter 5 the Pope speaks about the need for Global Action, supporting the attempts for 'enforceable' global treaties and agreements that put a brake on progress at any cost (LS, 173). As citizens and people of faith, we Catholics need to be lobbying our government with emails, phone calls and letters, visiting our local MP's to tell them how critical it is for Australia as a responsible global citizen not to shirk its international environmental obligations. The air we pollute here is blown by the Roaring Forties across the globe. The sunshine over our vast deserts can be harnessed to replace gas and coal. (LS 165). We need to monitor where our funds are invested and support ethical, clean and green investment, divesting from fossil fuels as the Pope states (LS, 193). The Vatican Bank and many Catholic organisations and religious orders are already fully 'divested'. The idea is so well accepted it is becoming mainstream thinking.

The Pope claims that economies respectful of earth's systems can succeed if science and ethics work hand in hand. Using the clearing of forests and the resulting desertification as an example, the Pope says, 'only when the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognised with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations, can those actions be considered ethical' (LS, 195). The Pope speaks of the need for politics and economics to 'be directed to the common good' and ourselves, as citizens needing to help governments to 'redefine our notion of progress' (LS 198).

During the pandemic, many private citizens have been reflecting deeply on what is really important to them. This is the time as we come out of COVID to require of governments a new and better approach to 'progress' as we face a different future and invest in building new infrastructure and systems. If our Bishops want to take real leadership, they need to be urging our governments to act now for the future security of God's gift, planet earth.

In the final Chapter 6, the Pope as pastor addresses the local, family and personal levels. He recommends an attitude of gratitude expressed in Grace before Meals, something very simple and easy to do, that can become habitual and is an ecological prayer par excellence. The Pope points out the difficulty for young people, brought up in the consumer society, to follow their desire for a clean and cherished earth. Increasingly post-COVID, the desire for a more minimalist lifestyle seems to be emerging. The Pope himself urges us to see the wisdom in the phrase, 'Less is more' (LS 222). We have learnt during this time that the Pope's words about altruism ring true for us: 'We are always capable of going out of ourselves towards the other. Unless we do this, other creatures will not be recognised for their true worth' and we will 'fail to be able to set limits on ourselves'. (LS, 208) Here we are speaking about good old-fashioned growth in virtue, self-restraint, love for others and self-sacrifice. 'Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment'. (LS, 208). The millions of young people organising to save the natural environment through the School Climate actions, or through the Global Catholic Climate Movement, are examples of how this is happening. The pope is their ally and admirer. Governments and our Church need to undergo the kind of 'conversion', the new way of 'seeing reality' that these movements so dramatically model.

A great strength of the encyclical is its emphasis on 'Integral Ecology' (Ch 4). This is an umbrella term for all aspects of ecological responsibility. The 'women' question needs to be seen as an integral aspect of the 'Social Ecology' the Pope is so committed to, women being the ones who suffer the most through the poverty that results from environmental degradation. Women often seem to be leading the environmental action. Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN Special Envoy for Climate Change, in her book *Climate Justice*, shares ecological projects from around the globe, giving women voices from South Africa, Uganda, Mississippi, Alaska, Sweden, Vietnam, Sydney, Canada and Costa Rica. Aote Tong, President of Kiribati, is included in the book as one of the world's most courageous voices for his people and other small Pacific nations catastrophically affected by climate change. Costa Rica's Christina Figueres, was instrumental in leading the drafting of the Paris Climate Agreement, a global leader from possibly the most ecologically committed and aware country on earth, Costa Rica, almost entirely supplied with energy from renewables, and a model of land management and sustainable practices. Figueres typifies the kind of leadership Pope Francis is calling for, and that we Australians need to demand of our own reluctant leaders.

On the daily level, the Pope calls for 'ecological education' if we are to have lasting change based on conviction- in the home, the parish, seminaries, schools, the media, and through catechesis. It calls for a 'conversion of heart'. How this shows itself is made real in Paragraph 111, where the Pope applauds such down-to-earth actions as the following:

*a person who could afford to spend and consume more regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes*

*avoiding the use of plastic and paper*

*reducing water consumption*

*separating refuse*  
*cooking only what can reasonably be consumed*  
*showing care for other living beings*  
*using public transport or car-pooling,*  
*planting*  
*turning off unnecessary lights*  
*reusing something instead of immediately discarding it*

Francis says, these actions, 'when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity'. (111)

At its recent online Convocation during the 2020 Season of Creation, Catholic Earthcare Australia (CAE), used the SEE, JUDGE, ACT methodology to explore across eight online sessions how the encyclical is influencing the world - spiritually, culturally, economically. The presentations are available on the CAE website, and are a clear call to action.

Much is happening globally in response to *Laudato Si*, and so much remains to be done. We are each called to do our part, in partnership with our most credible scientists, faith-leaders and thinkers, thereby responding to the deepest call of our humanity to be responsible members of the Earth Community, loving and caring for 'Our Common Home'.

(Trish Hindmarsh, Nov. 27, 2020 at the Concerned Catholics Canberra/Goulburn Online Meeting with Paul Collins).

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