



CONCERNED CATHOLICS CANBERRA GOULBURN MEDIA RELEASE

The Pope's Revolution – what we need to hear

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Pope Francis has set out a fresh and inspiring path for the Church which should prompt Australia's Catholics to support environmental action as a central part of their faith.

Two leading Catholic thinkers spoke of the power of the "Pope's revolution" in his *Laudato si'* encyclical, at a recent national forum hosted by Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn.

Educationalist, Dr Patricia Hindmarsh and theologian and historian, Dr Paul Collins, delivered to the forum thought-provoking presentations of the earthly vision of *Laudato si'*, the chair of Concerned Catholics, Professor John Warhurst, said.

"This encyclical provides a powerful message not only as a contemporary spiritual guide for Catholics but also as a profound statement about the importance of the environment in our lives.

"It was presented by Pope Francis five years ago but has received nowhere near the attention it deserves from our church leaders despite its important implications for the Catholic faithful concerning a pivotal issue of today, climate change," Professor Warhurst said.

"The significance of *Laudato si'* and the lack of attention to it in Australian churches was why Concerned Catholics held the forum and we were very privileged to hear such high-quality contributions from Dr Hindmarsh and Dr Collins."

The Zoom forum was attended by more than 150 people from around Australia.

In her address, Dr Hindmarsh said Pope Francis in his encyclical is urging worldwide change to end environmental devastation. "No room here for climate denial, excuses or passing the buck."

"The Pope says we need to realise that our cultures have succumbed to the myth of unlimited economic growth", Dr Hindmarsh said.

"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'.

"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'."

Dr Hindmarsh said that 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”.

In his talk, Dr Collins, described *Laudato si’* as a “truly revolutionary encyclical”. Despite it being such a fundamentally important document, the majority of Australian bishops had shown little public interest in it. He called on lay Catholics to show leadership on this issue.

“The encyclical was revolutionary because it was much more than a theological, moral and spiritual reflection on ecological issues, but a challenging reflection on the whole structure of life, culture and morality in the contemporary world”, Dr Collins said.

“‘We are part of nature’: this is the message that runs right through the encyclical as Francis radically re-situates and re-roots humankind in the biological structure of the natural world.”

“Since Christian theology established the body/soul distinction almost 1750 years ago, the church had been anthropocentric”, Dr Collins said.

“It has promoted the notion of the priority of spirit over matter and human dominance over nature with the idea that we humans somehow constitute the ultimate meaning of the natural world, that the earth exists for us, to be used at will by us.

“Pope Francis radically questioned anthropocentric human dominance over nature and he reintegrated humankind back into the biological matrix from which we first emerged by emphasising the intimate inter-connectedness of all reality.

Dr Collins said he did have difficulties with some of the points of the encyclical including the Pope’s questioning of the dangers of overpopulation and the dismissive use of the term ‘reproductive health’.

Despite these criticisms, he said *Laudato si’* “is still a genuinely revolutionary papal document, probably the most far-reaching and important of all encyclicals, especially in terms of its radical re-situating of theological anthropology.

“For that we owe Pope Francis a genuine and deep debt of gratitude,” Dr Collins said.

A copy of Dr Hindmarsh’s paper is available [here](#).

A copy of Dr Collins’ paper is available [here](#).

Both papers are available on the CCCG [website](#) under ‘media’ or ‘events’.

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