



## Reflection Paper: November 2016

### *“On the Care of our Common Home”*

Preparation for the AIC Assembly of Delegates (March 2017)

**400 years with Saint Vincent  
towards the future in our Common Home**



**Some reflections of Pope Francis based on his encyclical letter,  
LAUDATO SI (Part One)**

N.B. This paper invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

**We propose using the method of *Lectio Divina***

1. Read this presentation.
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant).
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God).
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

❖ **Prayer: A Prayer for our earth**

*All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  
Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  
O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.  
Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.*

***Pope Francis*** (at the end of his encyclical letter)

❖ **Reflections of Pope Francis based on his encyclical letter, Laudato Si**

On June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the encyclical **Laudato Si** was published. In that document **Pope Francis** makes an urgent plea to humankind to create ecological awareness and to care for the planet as our common home. The document contains 247 paragraphs (six chapters) and concludes with two prayers (one of those prayers is referenced at the beginning of this reflection).

We will highlight some points from the first three chapters of the encyclical:

**““Laudato Si, mi signore” --- Praise be to You, my Lord.”** *In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to You, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs”* (Laudato Si, #1).

*“This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the*

*earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Romans 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Genesis 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters” (Laudato Si, #2).*

In **paragraph #14** the Pope refers to the words of the bishops of South Africa who stated: **“Everyone’s talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation”**.

In the **first chapter**, which is entitled, ***What is happening to our common home***, the Pope speaks about pollution and climate change and states that **“the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all”**. He then goes on to say that *“humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption”* (Laudato Si, #23).

The Pope also speaks about the problem of water which is indispensable for human life. In **paragraph #29** he writes: *“One particularly serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water related diseases, including those caused by microorganism and chemical substances. Dysentery and cholera, linked to inadequate hygiene and water supplies, are a significant cause of suffering and of infant mortality”*.

The **second chapter**, entitled, ***The Gospel of Creation***, is divided into the following sections: the light offered by faith, the wisdom of the biblical accounts, the mystery of the universe, the message of each creature in the harmony of creation, a universal communion, the common destination of goods and the gaze of Jesus. When talking about the common destination of goods the Pope states: *“Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since **God created the world for everyone**. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged”* (Laudato Si, #93).

In chapter three, entitled, ***The human roots of the ecological crisis***, we read in **paragraph #102**: *“Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads. We are the beneficiaries of two centuries of enormous waves of change: steam engines, railways, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles, airplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies. It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us...”*.

This same thought is continued in the following **paragraph (#103)**: *“Technoscience, when well-directed, can produce important means of improving the quality of human life, from useful domestic appliances to great transportation systems, bridges, buildings and public spaces”*.

Then, in **paragraph #104**, the Pope tells us that we should not ignore these technological advances, including knowledge of DNA and nuclear power, which have given humankind a great power over itself and yet there is no assurance that this power will be used wisely: *“We need but think of the nuclear bombs dropped in the middle of the twentieth century or the array of technology which Nazism, Communism and other totalitarian regimes have employed to kill millions of people”*.

❖ **Commitment:**

It is important to give special attention to this aspect of *Lectio Divina* and make a concrete commitment with regard to **CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME!**

***Guide for making commitments:***

*What specific commitments are you willing to make as an individual?*

- *What activities can you undertake in your home, in your daily life?*
- *What activities can you promote that might be carried out by people who are your neighbor (for example, recycling, sharing information for more efficient use of electricity, etc.).*

*What specific commitments can you make as a local or national group?*

- *Within the framework of existing activities and projects, what ideas, in accord with your reflections, will move these projects forward?*
- *Could you start a new project as a result of these reflections?*

Translated by Charles T. Plock, CM



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### **Some reflections of Pope Francis based on his encyclical letter, LAUDATO SI (Part Two)**

N.B. This paper invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

**We propose using the method of *Lectio Divina*:**

- ❖ Read this presentation.
- ❖ Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant).
- ❖ Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God).
- ❖ Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

❖ **Prayer: A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation**

*Father, we praise you with all your creatures. They came forth from your all-powerful hand;  
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love. Praise be to you!  
Son of God, Jesus, through you all things were made.  
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother, you became part of this earth,  
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.  
Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory. Praise be to you!  
Holy Spirit, by your light you guide this world towards the Father's love  
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.  
You also dwell in our hearts and you inspire us to do what is good. Praise be to you!  
Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,  
teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you.  
Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made.  
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.  
God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love  
for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.  
Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference,  
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,  
and care for this world in which we live.  
The poor and the earth are crying out.  
O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life,  
to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.  
Praise be to you! Amen.*

***Pope Francis***

❖ **Reflections of Pope Francis that are based on his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si***

In the **fourth chapter**, entitled ***Integral Ecology***, the Pope reflects on environmental, economic and social ecology. In this regard the Pope writes: “*When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it*”. The Pope tells us that we are a part of nature and are, therefore, included in nature. He goes on to state: “*It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. 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*” (#139).

In the same chapter the Pope writes about cultural ecology, the ecology of daily life, the principle of the common good and justice between generations.

With regard to the **principle of the common good** we read in #157: “*Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her*

*integral development. It has also to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups, applying the principle of subsidiarity. Outstanding among those groups is the family, as the basic cell of society. Finally, the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good”.*

When speaking about **justice between the generations** the Pope poses some difficult questions: “*What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?*” He then concludes with the following words: “*We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn” (#160).*

In the **fifth chapter**, entitled, ***Lines of Approach and Action***, the Pope proposes dialogue on the environment in the international community; dialogue for new national and local policies; dialogue and transparency in decision-making; politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfillment and religions in dialogue with science.

With regard to the last point, religions in dialogue with science, the Pope recommends: “*Believers themselves must constantly feel challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions. They need to be encouraged to be ever open to God’s grace and to draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace. If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve. Cultural limitations in different eras often affected the perception of these ethical and spiritual treasures, yet by constantly returning to their sources, religions will be better equipped to respond to today’s needs” (#200).*

In the **sixth** and final **chapter** entitled, ***Ecological education and spirituality***, the Holy Father invites us to move towards a new lifestyle, to engage in a process of education with regard to the covenant between humanity and the environment and to also engage in a process of ecological conversion. The Pope also speaks about joy and peace, civic and political love, sacramental signs and the celebration of rest, the Trinity and the relationship between cultures, the Queen of all creation and beyond the sun.

Let us pause and reflect briefly on two of those themes: [1] Civic and political love – “*We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it. We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good” (#229); [2] This encyclical would not be complete without some mention of the Blessed Mother: “*Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power” (#241).**

Pope Francis states that the destruction of nature is a sin that has serious consequences because God always forgives and human beings forgive sometimes, but the earth never forgives. The Pope underlines the fact that not everything is lost because human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start.

❖ **Commitment:**

It is important to give special attention to this aspect of *Lectio Divina* and make a concrete commitment with regard to **CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME!**

***Guide for making commitments:***

*How can we respond to the challenges that the Pope places before us with regard to the following:*

- *Integral ecology: finding solutions so that the excluded members of society have their dignity restored to them at the same time as we care for nature.*
- *Ecological education: becoming aware of the reality that we need one another, that we are responsible for one another and responsible for the present and the future situation of our world.*
- *Proposing changes to current policy (promoting dialogue for new national and local policies).*

Translated by Charles T. Plock, CM