



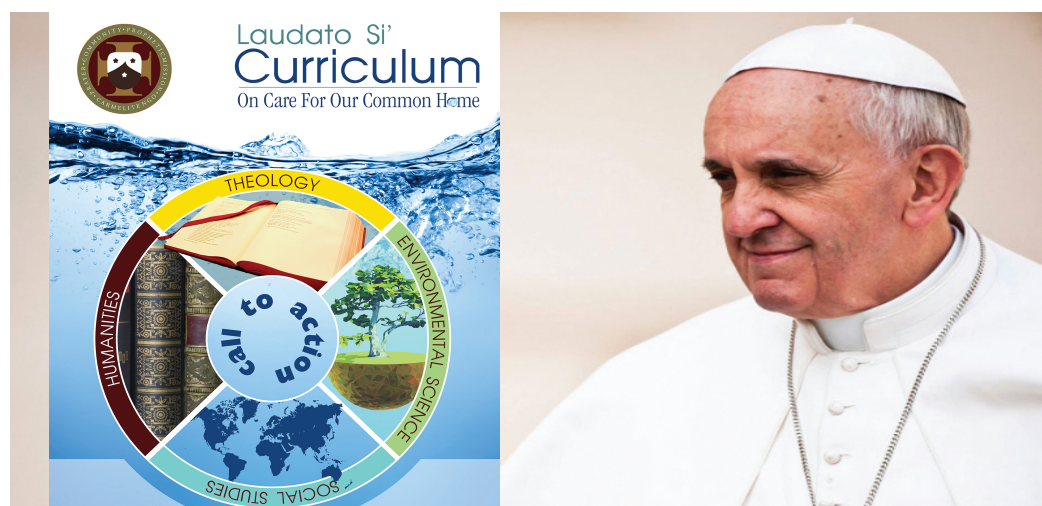
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"We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

-- Laudato Si #49
Pope Francis
May 24, 2015



Laudato Si - Curriculum for Secondary Education

Rolf Nepi Willemsen, O. Carm.

In his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*), Pope Francis urges us to “protect our common home (...) to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change” [*Laudato Si*, 13]. Taking this call for change to heart, the Carmelite NGO in cooperation with staff and faculty from Salpointe Catholic High School, a Carmelite ministry in Tucson Arizona, developed a viable response in the form of the *Laudato Si - Curriculum for Secondary Education*.

Pope Francis draws from Saint Francis’ *Canticle of Creatures* in naming his encyclical, which appropriately reminds us of our responsibility for the earth. He calls to mind our failure to acknowledge and live by the fact that “we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters” [LS, 2]. The change of heart *Laudato Si* describes is in no way new; already Saint John Paul II in 2001 called for a “global ecological conversion” [LS, 5]. *Laudato Si*, however, in detail elucidates the underlying issue of humanity’s continued sinful actions affecting the earth. It offers a concept of integral ecology based on a paradigm of relationships between the individual and God, self, other human beings, and all of creation. Due to the pressing necessity, Pope Francis addresses his encyclical not only to Christians but calls for dialogue that includes every person, regardless of religious background.

Pope Francis’ message is to appreciate and contemplate the world, and so to discover in each thing the reaction that God wants from us. Accordingly, the *Laudato Si - Curriculum for Secondary Education* aims to raise awareness in high school students, to help them think critically and so to protect the earth. It is organized for cross-curricular use in grades nine to twelve and offers specific lesson plans in four major disciplines: humani-

ties, environmental sciences, social studies, and theology.

The curriculum calls for change that allows us to refrain from making the same mistakes from the past. Set in the context of a learning environment, it prepares students to establish a commitment to human rights and environmental responsibility that is more based on experience than mere convictions. Students are so enabled to discover the joy that lies in serving God, both in aiding their brothers and sisters as well as caring for God's creation. The contemplative approach of *Laudato Si* leads to a conscious experience that all depends on God and that humanity is in an inseparable relationship with God's plan for creation.

Engaging in thought processes that bridge various disciplines, the Curriculum highlights that issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation are intrinsically linked to the Kingdom of God, as the Apostle Paul emphasizes in his letter to the Romans: "The Kingdom of God is not a question of food and drink, but of justice and peace" [Romans 14:17]. Looking at the world through the lens of values coming out of this Kingdom approach, significantly changes our perspective. It moves us to being concerned with God's plan for creation, rather than one-sidedly looking out only for ourselves.

Carmelite spirituality is prone to adapt an approach of such kind, based on the two-fold reality of mysticism and prophecy, which are at the very center of the charism. The Curriculum emphasises how this naturally flows from a paradigm of mystical and prophetic response, one that the then Cardinal Bergoglio foreshadowed in his intervention during the pre-Conclave General Congregation meetings of the Cardinals: "The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all forms of misery" (9 March 2013). Contemplative transformation thus becomes the matrix for a prophetic lifestyle of inclusivity, as nothing can be excluded from the love of God.

As such, the Curriculum re-emphasizes a form of Gospel-centered evangelization as an act of reaching out to those at the margins, while at the same time denouncing all that diminishes God's plan for creation. Being disciples of Christ, we are all called to listen for the cry of the earth and of the poor. Regardless of how far we might find ourselves removed from the distress of human beings and the result of neglecting the impacts of our actions on the earth, "we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment" [LS, 49].

In providing a curriculum for the use in high schools, the Carmelite NGO reaches out to young people to consider how their actions in the present impact the future of the earth. It is a matter of accompanying teenagers in their formative years, by inspiring them to be passionate for the reign of God, to seeking peace without the obsession of consumerism and finding joy in possessing less. *Laudato Si* speaks of just that: "Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things" [LS, 222]. Such a spirituality acknowledges the value of a communally oriented lifestyle in recognizing the interrelatedness of ourselves with creation in all aspects of life. Saint John of the Cross reminds us that "in the evening we will be judged on our love" [Dichos 64]. Being open to God's love allows us to surrender ourselves to God and so mend our ways. Being led to love, we then see our brothers and sisters through the eyes of God, which moves us to live a life of justice and peace.

The curriculum helps students to acknowledge their interrelatedness and the com-

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Resources for this Issue:

Laudato Si' – the document

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Ten Takeaways from Laudato Si'

<http://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2015/06/18/top-ten-takeaways-laudato-si>

The Challenge of Laudato Si'

<https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otn.cfm?ID=1096x>

The Carmelite NGO Facebook page. Please check it out and "like" us: www.facebook.org/TheCarmeliteNGO.



Companion Encyclicals: Laudato Si and Gaudete et Exsultate

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* offers every person and nation a spirituality that provides a blueprint for individuals and nations to take responsibility for caring for our common interests in preserving the Earth.

Recently, Pope Francis issued, what I suggest is a companion encyclical to *Laudato Si - Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad). *Laudato Si* has its focus on one's individual responsibility as well as a nation's responsibility to care for all of creation. *Gaudete et Exsultate* has its focus on individual holiness and connects it to a global holiness. Pope Francis says, "To the extent that each Christian grows in holiness, he or she will bear greater fruit for our world."

In *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis suggests the Beatitudes as a way to holiness.

"A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for 'this is the will of God, your sanctification' (1 Thess. 4:3). Although Jesus' words may strike us as poetic, they clearly run counter to the way things are usually done in our world. Even if we find Jesus' message attractive, the world pushes us towards another way of living. The Beatitudes are in no way trite or undemanding, quite the opposite. We can only practice them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and our pride." (GE 65)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Being poor of heart: that is holiness.

The Gospel invites us to look deep within our hearts to discover what one believes to be his or her security. Earthly possessions are often what make us feel secure. But we know earthly wealth ensures nothing. We can lose it all in an instant. The Beatitudes teach us that lasting security comes by imitating Christ who though rich, "made himself poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). "Wealth ensures nothing. Indeed, once we think we are rich, we can become so self-satisfied that we leave no room for God, for the love of our brothers and sisters, or for the enjoyment of the most important things in life." (GE 68)

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness.

From the beginning, the world has endured suffering, conflicts, and disputes. Unfortunately, we tend to cause suffering by placing others in categories that are determined by their ideas, customs, the way they speak or dress. Pride and vanity allows each person to think that he or she has the right to dominate others. Jesus offers a different way, the way of meekness. Christ says: "Learn from me; for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt. 11:29)

"Meekness is an expression of the interior poverty of those who put their trust in God alone. In the Bible the same word – *anawim* – usually refers both to the poor and to the meek. The meek "shall inherit the earth" for they will see God's promises accomplished in their lives.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Knowing how to mourn with others: that is holiness.

A worldly person tends to ignore the suffering or sorrow of others. They direct their attention to entertainment, pleasure and other means of escape to make his or her life more pleasurable. A person who sees things as they truly are and sympathizes with the pain and sorrow of others is capable of touching life's depths and finding authentic happiness.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness: that is holiness.

"Hunger and thirst are intense experiences, since they involve basic needs and our instinct for survival. There are those who desire justice and yearn for righteousness with similar intensity. Jesus says that they will be satisfied, for sooner or later justice will come. We can cooperate to make that possible, even if we may not always see the fruit of our efforts." (GE 77)

True justice comes about in people's lives when they themselves are just in their decisions. "Seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Is:17)

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness.

Mercy has two aspects. It involves giving, helping and serving others, and it also includes forgiveness and understanding. "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you." (Lk. 6:36-38). "Jesus did not say, 'Blessed are those who plot revenge.' He calls 'blessed' those who forgive and do so 'seventy times seven'." (Matt. 18:22). Remember all of us have been looked upon with divine compassion.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Keeping a heart free of all that tarnishes love: that is holiness.

Pure of heart speaks of those whose hearts are simple, pure and undefiled. A heart capable of love admits nothing that might harm, weaken or endanger that love. "Man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7). There can be

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mon call to be in tender and caring relationship with God, neighbor, and all of creation. In the contemplative encounter of God we realize our shortcomings, our involvement in sinful systems and our responsibility to give personal and non-violent witness as ecological citizens by mending our ways, both in a change of heart and in concrete action. Hearing the cry of the poor and of the earth, recommits our efforts for justice, peace, and integrity of creation. While doing so we are encouraged not to lose heart in the face of the many injustices in the world today, but to rekindle the hope that feeds our faith in the salvific action of Jesus Christ.

The curriculum provides simple lesson plans that want to motivate students to grow in their understanding of stewardship, helping to plant a seed of ecological conversion in the hearts of young people; a spark necessary to renew the covenant between humanity and the environment that Pope Francis envisions in *Laudato Si*: “Change is impossible without motivation and a process of education” [LS, 15].

The Carmelite NGO offers the curriculum in English and Spanish to download and to order a hard copy for use in Carmelite as well as non-Carmelite schools on the website www.laudato-si-for-all.com. In addition, a study guide for adults and college students has been developed.

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no love without works of love. This Beatitude reminds us that the Lord expects a commitment to our brothers and sisters that comes from the heart; “if I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3). From our heart’s intentions come the desires and the deepest decisions that determine our actions. A heart that loves God and neighbor genuinely, and not merely in words is a pure heart.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Sowing peace all around us: that is holiness.

Peacemaking is not restricted to the absence of war, but also involves our behavior toward one another as well as all of creation. Often we are a cause of conflict or misunderstanding. Gossip, negativity and destructive behavior do not bring about peace. We need to be artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill. To those who sow peace Jesus makes this promise: “They will be called children of God.” (Matt. 5:9)

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Accepting daily the path of the Gospel, even though it may cause us problems: that is holiness.

Jesus warns us that the path he proposes goes against the flow; even making us challenge society by the way we live and, as a result, become a nuisance. In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy. The thirst for power and worldly interests often stands in our way. Whatever weariness and pain we may experience in living the commandment of love and following the way of justice, the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification. When the New Testament tells us that we will have to endure suffering for the Gospel’s sake, it is speaking of persecution. Jesus says we are blessed when people “utter all kinds of evil against us falsely on My account” (Matt 5:11).

According to Cardinal Blasé Cupich of Chicago, *Gaudete et Exsultate* is, “One of the most important magisterial documents on holiness since Vatican II.” Cardinal Cupich goes on to say; “the pope has given Catholics an accessible guide to holiness that urges us in a very practical way to cultivate a disposition of mercy toward the other.” Pope Francis has given us guidance on our journey towards holiness when he suggests the practice of the Beatitudes as a means towards holiness. He admits the Beatitudes are difficult to practice. We do not need to try to practice all of them at once, but focus on them one at a time. We can use them in an examination of conscience before going to sleep at night or before receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Little by little we can make progress on our journey towards holiness. Keep in mind the advice of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, “perfect charity consists in putting up with others mistakes and not being scandalized by their faults.” We can also include-- being patient with ourselves in discovering and eliminating our mistakes and faults.

by Jane Remson, O. Carm.

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