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Care for Creation is in the Order of Love

[Pope Francis: Laudato Sí #77]

By Matthew Rousso *

The Gospel of Creation



“There is an essential interconnectedness between the rights of nature and the rights of the human person”

Pope Francis has been rightly acclaimed as a champion of climate care, especially since he wrote *Laudato Sí*. But he was not the first pope to do so. Both Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI also called us to be good stewards of creation. However, *Laudato Sí* of Pope Francis was the first encyclical written on the care of creation and as such, being the second most authoritative of Catholic teachings, asks of all of us an assent of faith. And among all the writings and talk about the climate these days, Francis is almost the only one who connects climate care with spirituality, directly linking it with the Great Commandment by saying “...**care for creation is in the order of love.**”

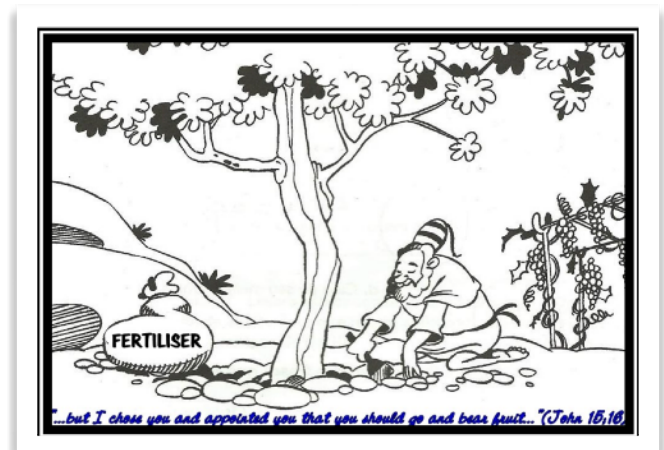
It is no wonder, what with his understanding of the place of care for creation as a religious calling, that Francis entitled an entire section of his encyclical as the Gospel of Creation. Francis recognizes and understands that the climate is the concern of scientists, yet he also recognizes that people of faith, specifically Christians, must see it as a particular obligation. He quotes St. John Paul II saying in his 1990 World Day of Peace Message that Christians must “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty toward nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.” Francis dedicates the Gospel of Creation to discussing a number of theological reflections which he feels are important in understanding this responsibility within creation:

First: Human Dignity: Quoting Genesis 1:31 that “the Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God’s image and likeness” Francis concludes “This shows us the immense dignity of the human person” (#65) The dignity of the human person is of primary importance in the Church’s Social Justice Teachings and is of supreme importance to Francis in any talk about care for creation. He will dedicate an entire section of *Laudato Sí* to reflections on what he calls “*Integral Ecology*” in which he firmly states that every environmental crisis is a social crisis. There is an essential interconnectedness between the rights of nature and the rights of the human person. To emphasize the dignity of the human person as well as the grandeur of all creation, Francis quotes Pope Benedict’s saying that “we were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason ‘each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.’” [#65]

Second: Original Sin: Wanting everyone to understand the interconnectedness of all of creation, Francis even refers to the disruption of the original harmony between God, our neighbor, and the earth itself as a sinful rupture. [#66]

Third: Stewardship vs Dominion: Pope Francis seems to want us to see a profoundly different theological understanding of the Genesis account of creation in saying that there has been an incorrect interpretation of the word “dominion as understood by the Church.” Francis says “We must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.” [#67] This understanding, he says, has encouraged “unbridled exploitation of nature.” Instead of saying we have been given dominion over creation, he prefers that we say we have been called to “till and keep the garden of the world.” “Tilling” refers to cultivating, plowing, or working, while “Keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving.” (#67)

A much better way for us to understand our relationship to the earth, I believe, is that of stewards-



hip. Francis himself uses the phrase “*Responsible stewardship.*” (#116). We are called to care for the earth, just as we have been called to care for one another. There are numerous examples of stewardship and stewards (sometimes called property managers) in the Bible that help us to know who we are in relation to our world. Two of the best-known parables about stewardship are the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree. The by-line for *Laudato Sí*, “**Care for Our Common Home,**” clues us in to see that Francis is advocating greater stewardship for creation rather than dominion.

Fourth: Distorted Anthropomorphism: The spirituality of Laudato Sí and Pope Francis also challenge us to right our thinking about the hierarchy of being. Quoting the Catechism of the Church he says *“Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. . . Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature...”* [#69] And *“clearly the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.”* Francis is saying that all of creation - human creatures and all creatures, in fact, all of creation - must be so respected that there be no subordination among them.

Francis returns to this line of thinking when he begins to talk more spiritually about the Mystery of the Universe. He again wants to have us see the wonder and sacredness of all creatures and of the entire universe. In very poetic language he proclaims *“Every creature is the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection.”* [#77]

Fifth: Manifestation of God: Catholic Theology has traditionally held that there are two sources of revelation namely the Bible (written revelation) and Sacred Tradition (oral revelation). These are considered the two ways God has revealed and continues to reveal himself to humankind. Pope Francis wants us to also see that God is revealing himself in the whole universe. He quotes the Canadian Bishops and Pope St. John Paul II to give weight and continuity to his thoughts. *“From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine.”* [Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.] And *“Alongside revelation properly so-called in sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of the night.”* [Catechesis of John Paul 2000] [cf. LS #85]

Sixth: God’s Very Presence: Pope Francis says that when we meditate on the mystery of God’s manifestations in the universe, our hearts are moved to praise. And he begins to praise God as he utters aloud the hymn of St. Francis of Assisi. [#87]

After a seemingly deep meditation on the fact that God’s beauty and wonder are manifested in the universe, and after praying the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, our Holy Father Francis seems dissatisfied; it almost seems that he feels he has not fu-

lly explained what is thinking. He seems to suddenly remember something the National Council of the Bishops of Brazil said in 1992. He then reiterates what I think is one of the most profound statements in the encyclical:

“The bishops of Brazil have pointed out that nature as a whole not only manifests God but is also the locus [the place] of his presence. The Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into a relationship with Him” [#88]

“In God We Live and Move And Have Our Being”
Acts 17:28



Picture of Radish Seeds sprouting in Huerta San Francisco in the Community of Las Lomas de Santa Ana, Esquipulas, Guatemala.

* **Matthew Rousso**, Director New Orleans Maryknoll Affiliates New Orleans, LA - February 14, 2023

“This is the moment to achieve Climate targets”

On 30 March, an Evaluation Webinar for the IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report - released on 20 March - was held by Catholic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocate within the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

These organizations are the Carmelite NGO, UNANIMA International, VIVAT International, the International Young Catholic Student (IYCS), Pax Romana, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Boston College, and the Laudato Si' Movement (LSM), with the support of Caritas Internationalis and the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNEA).

For this purpose, an online round table with recognized experts and voices from society was organized and the participation of more than one hundred people, and a Statement on Climate Change was produced.



The webinar was reported by the National Catholic Reporter as an article.

The official presentation of the Statement to the National Delegates at the UN headquarters in NYC will be done on Friday, 28 April, by the co-organizers' staff that work there.

30+ Religious Institutions have committed to divest from Fossil Fuels - 20 April 2023

Our General Fr. Micéal O'Neill expressed: "The Carmelite Order - "Brethren of Blessed Mary, Our Lady of Mount Carmel" - is pleased to accompany this Fossil Fuel Divestment announcement in line with its Fossil Fuel Divestment commitment approved at the 2019 General Chapter. The Carmelite Order puts its spirituality and mysticism on Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation at the service of the Church and humankind through concrete actions in line with the proposals of the encyclical Laudato Si' related to the search for an Integral Ecology." [Acta Capituli Generalis Ordinis Carmelitarum (2019), Analecta 70(2), 582].

Follow this link for further information

Where is your treasure?

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Event flyer, and link to the webinar video

The Statement has been shared among the Religious at the UN coalition (RUN) and is very welcome. Now work is being done with the Justice Coalition of Religious to spread it further, taking profit from the Earth Day drive (22 April).

We invite you all to join us by endorsing the Statement by filling in this Google Form.