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HOLINESS IS WHOLENESS

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Editorial

Holiness is Wholeness

“Everything is holy, everything is a miracle” is a refrain from the song “Holy Now” by Peter Mayer, a renowned American singer and songwriter from Minnesota. His lyrics instigated intense arguments and discussions on the net. Lydia McGrew, accusing Mayer of trying to promote a kind of pantheistic, anti-Christian spiritual egalitarianism, wrote to her Facebook friends:

[This] profound-sounding statement is false. Everything is not holy. A Black Mass is not holy. A demon is not holy... An instrument of torture is not holy. A murder is not holy. There is good and bad and right and wrong. Some acts are holy and some are evil... However sweet it may sound to say that everything that happens is a miracle that is also false. And again, as with holiness, so here: If everything is a miracle, nothing is a miracle... Every drop of rain that falls is not a miracle. Every flower that grows is not a miracle... When Jesus rose from the dead, that was a miracle. When Peter was released by an angel from prison, that was a miracle.

This dispute reminds me of another poem, “*Too Many Names*” by Pablo Neruda (1904 - 1973) in which he insists:

No one can claim the name of Pedro,
Nobody is Rosa or Maria,
All of us are dust or sand,
All of us are rain under rain.

.....
Let us not fill our mouths
With so many faltering names,
With so many sad formalities,
With so many pompous letters,

With so much of yours and mine,
With so much of signing of papers.

I have a mind to confuse things,
Unite them, bring them to birth,
Mix them up, undress them,
Until the light of the world
Has the oneness of the ocean,
A generous, vast wholeness,
A crepitant fragrance.

Neruda, in this poem transmits a kind of spiritual-restlessness or discontent, which is a crucial stage in one's spiritual journey. Human mind thrives on divisions and subdivisions and consider itself in control when it can differentiate, "I am Pedro, you are Rosa. This is my country, that is yours. This is mine, that is yours." 'Divide and rule' is the *modus operandi* of normal human mind. Being limited, human mind needs to break down the whole into parts to gulp it down. In order to grasp; human mind has to deconstruct things into their subcomponents. Thus begins the endless process of classification and naming going on in our mind. However, Neruda's poetic intuition revealed to him the fundamental truth behind categories and definitions that none of those things are actually separate. All divisions are man made or mind-made. We conceive today as Friday, and tomorrow as Saturday. But are the days actually divided? We can pretend for convenience that one day is separate from another; however no mind and no mores can actually divide them. Minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, etc., are mere concepts developed by human mind. When we fail to see that, we fall into a deluded sense of reality. Though we assume our body as having various limbs; in fact, it is a single entity. We often talk about races, yet genetically all humans belong to the same stalk. We speak about nations and continents, but they are all part of the same globe. These divisions are all entirely within our heads, not true expressions of reality. Those borders that look so definite on maps are just made up lines agreed upon by people playing political power games. They may serve a social or organizational purpose, but they are not foundational. People often fail to realize that our classifications are mere superficial and conventional impositions. When our minds are at rest all these divisions fade away. All things - every human, creature, and even human-made objects - are somehow manifestations of formlessness. In this view, we need not to grade or classify "things" as good or bad, valuable or worthless. Neruda insists that our constant act of definition-separation-categorization is not enhancing our vision but division of reality. Divisions blind us from seeing the reality as it is. When we drop our habit of labeling

everything that we come across, then for the first time we see things as they are. Titles obstruct our vision. Naming is a funny way of seeing things without actually seeing them. Thus human beings in general live in an imaginary, divided world created by their own mind and become strangers to this fluid, undefined living reality around them. According to Neruda what really exists is "a generous, vast wholeness" that actively invites every part of it to experience its fluid oneness. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), the world renowned Jesuit paleontologist and mystic testifies, "By virtue of the Creation and, still more, of the Incarnation, nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see. On the contrary, everything is sacred" (Chardin 1968:66). Unfortunately, human beings alienate themselves from that wholeness and behave like outsiders even though they are an integral part of the very same vast, majestic wholeness.

Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom Henri Le Saux, 1910-1973) in his book *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* tries to clarify his mystical experience as *advaitic* but not monistic. "...God himself is both one and many in his mystery - or rather, to put it more accurately, he is not-one, *an-eka*, and also not-two, *a-dvaita*" (Abhishiktananda 1984:135). The contemplative mind understands things in their unity and connection before it separates them: not completely one, but not two either. The Western often understood *advaita* as monism. Richard Rohr makes an interesting observation that the East first sees things in their wholeness; whereas the West first tends to see things in their diversity. For those who start with two (dissimilarity and distinction) it is almost impossible to ever get back to unitive consciousness or similarity, from which most compassion, or at least tolerance, proceeds. If we start with *advaita*, we can still go back to making needed and helpful distinctions, but now love and union is prior to knowledge and information. *Advaita* upholds the subtle distinction that all things share the same ground of being, the same supreme reality that encompasses great diversity. Basically nothing is separate. Abhishiktananda taught that although the *advaitic* vision is that of 'not two' (non-dual) the *advaitic* experience is not that of 'only one' (monism). He insists that the experience is neither *dvaita* (two) nor *eka* (one) but *a-dvaita* (non-dual) and *an-eka* (not one) which gives value both to unity and diversity simultaneously. Individuality is not swallowed up or identified with the One. Thus he speaks of *advaita-aneka* (not two, not one). The eminent Swiss psychotherapist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), tells us that our lives are guided by subconscious ruling images which he calls archetypes, such as the father, the mother, the eternal child, the hero, the virgin, the wise old man, the magician, the trickster, the devil, and the God image.

According to him the God archetype is the “whole-making instinct” of the soul. The God archetype is quite simply love at work driving us toward every greater embrace and ever deeper union helping us to become what we are, and become all that we are.

The Perfect and Perfection

The Greek word *teleios* is often translated into English as ‘perfect’. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus says: “you must be *teleioi* (masculine plural) as your heavenly Father is *teleios* (masculine singular). *Teleios* could also mean whole, complete, mature, full grown, lacking nothing, having arrived at an end or objective, etc. This implies a state of being beyond improvement, a state of totality. Beyond it there is nothing. It is the end, the pinnacle of a journey or a process such as evolution. The response of Jesus to the one who asked him, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” can be understood in the same line. Jesus replied “There is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17). According to Jesus that which is good or perfect is God, his Father, who has formed and holds all things in Himself, and without whom, and beside whom, there is no true substance, and in whom all things have their substance and subsistence. For Jesus God is absolutely perfect and is the perfection of all that truly exists, just as God alone is the absolute good, and the goodness of all that exists. Here we observe the non-dual vision of Jesus. As Abbot George Burke rightly indicates, this sentence sets forth certain fundamental truths about God and existence itself: Nothing exists beside God. Nothing exists outside God. God is self-existent and eternal. Everything draws its existence from God. God encompasses and includes all things in Himself – in His very being. All things are eternal in their essence or substance which is God. The manifested forms of all things are not eternal since they have a beginning and an end. God is the substance of all things, and is in himself unchangeable and immovable, and changes and moves all things else. Therefore everything that takes place is the action of God, either directly or through power borrowed or drawn from him. Consequently in the final analysis God is the sole Actor. The *santhi mantra* of Brihadaranyaka upanishad states:

*Om poornamadah, poornamidam poornaat poornamudachyate
poornasya poornamaadaaya poornameevaavashishyate
(That is perfect (whole/fullness/complete) this is perfect,
perfection derives from perfection. If perfection is extracted
from perfection, perfection itself remains).*

These opening words Brihadaranyaka upanishad elucidates the correlation between the creator and his creation. St. Paul recounts this very same idea in a different way in his first letter to the Corinthians, “When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (13:10). Paul implies that when we realize “that which is perfect,” our obsession with “that which is in part” simply would fade away. In other words ‘whole’ or ‘part’ depends on the way we look at them. All “things which are in part” are not perfect. Yet, “that which is in part,” or which is imperfect, has its source in, or springs from the Perfect. God is the Absolute, everything else is relative. Nevertheless all things are sacred because they have their existence from and within the Whole. The implication here is the classical principle that all things are mere appearances only, being the Real Itself under a transitory, fractional appearance. The word *maya* is often mistranslated in the West as unreal. *Maya* is in fact the inability or the utter confusion of human mind to distinguish between the absolute and the relative, the permanent and the momentary, the whole and the part.

Holy: a Fantasy Created by Dualistic Mindset

The kind of ‘holiness’ that leads to and thrive on division is an illusion created by a moralistic mindset. Human mind, on account of its limited resources, in an attempt to comprehend whatever is set before it, has to divide and compartmentalize. Good and evil, angels and demons are all creations of dualistic mentality. Every dichotomy and duality we encounter is the result of this habitual tendency of mind. The medieval philosophers identified three transcendental properties of being: *unum, bonum, verum* (one, good and true). A closer look will reveal these three properties belong to wholeness rather than holiness. True wisdom is one’s ability to go and grow beyond all dichotomies and divisions. We need to venture a path that leads us beyond the immediate, superficial, divisive and dualistic mind and embrace the wholeness in a comprehensive and holistic way where - in that cosmic orchestra - everything finds its proper place and role. The famous Sufi mystic Abdul-Qader Bedil (1644 - 1721) in his poem *Creation’s Witness* appeals to his listeners “Stop struggling for perfection, and recognize the perfection you already are”. Thomas Merton observes:

Every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man that I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy. My false self and private self is the one who wants to exist outside of the reach of God’s will and God’s love - outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion (Merton 2003:36-37).

In every religion we can observe an ongoing tension between the 'divisive morality' and the 'unifying spirituality'. 'Letters' (Scriptures) are well-intentioned human attempts 'to capture and encapsulate' the 'Spirit'. Even though 'words' serve to awaken human consciousness, they are incapable of entrapping the Spirit. That is why St Paul wrote, "Letter kills but it is spirit that gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Since human beings are meeting points of matter and spirit, there is nothing abnormal and unnatural about this enduring paradox. Signs, symbols and languages are the arena where the manmade angels and demons fight for their survival and dominance. Mysticism is the graveyard of angels and demons, where divisions, dichotomies and dualisms vanish and the awareness of unity, oneness, wholeness, bliss, freedom, peace, equity, equanimity and celebration find their eternal abode.

Meritocratic Religions and Their Purity Codes

'Holiness' and 'Perfection' are used by meritocratic religions as tools for social control, oppression and persecution. They suggest, preach and promote divisions, dichotomies and dualities everywhere. The identification of 'holiness' with 'moral perfection' permits them to propose and promote "purity code" among their followers. Religious practices thus become an exercise of naval-gazing and self-promotion. This is appealing and seductive to egoists, who ache for self-glorification. Egoists consider everything in terms of their own ascent, various attempts at spiritual achievement, the attaining of merits and rewards, climbing upward, performing for God, playing their own worthiness game, and then pretending that they are succeeding at it. They compare and contrast themselves with others. They check how perfect they are and how pathetic other people are. This leads them to the false conclusion that they are better than others because they have done this or that and distanced themselves from the 'unholy'.

According to Richard Rohr, whenever and wherever people are concerned about being right, some form of 'purity code' sets in. Thus religions degrade into legalism and ritualism. They present God as a judge who rewards the righteous and punishes the offenders. Even though fear and greed are the driving force behind this form of religiosity, it is found effective and alluring to many people since it gives the egotist a sense of security and superiority. If people are caught up in this kind of religiosity the 'purity codes' soon morph into 'debt codes'. It is not just about things that one must do or must not do, but debts one must pay to a wrathful God. It is this small frame of retributive justice that nurtures egocentricity and individualism. For them freedom is frightening. They live in a world of either/or. Dualistic

thinking gives egoists a false sense of clarity and correctness. Dualistic thinkers see only in parts and argue about the pieces, like those five blind men who fought over the elephant they claimed to have known through their own personal investigation.

Man Created God in His Own Image and Likeness

Each religion/culture/nation holds a mirror of its own make. Those mirrors vary according to the interests and the craftsmanship of their makers. People who look at those mirrors see concocted versions of reality reflected on them. In fact, there is no need to look into mirrors to see reality. Drop all mirrors, turn around and confront reality as it is. The Christian image of a torturous hell, and God as a petty tyrant, has not helped us to know, trust, or love God in any way. God ends up being less loving and forgiving than even ordinary people. It is noteworthy that the word "hell" is not mentioned in the first five books of the Bible. Paul and John never used the word "hell" in their writings. Many Eastern fathers such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Peter Chrysologus, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory of Nazianzus taught some form of *apocatastasis* or "universal restoration" (Acts 3:21). According to Jesus "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living - for to him everyone is alive" (Luke 20:38), as a result our opportunity for growth, change and improvement can never cease. As Richard Rohr rightly puts it, threat and fear are lowest level of motivation (even vengeful and eternal threats!). They do not create loving people, but fearful people. At this point in history most Christians have been preconditioned by a cheap story line of retributive justice, and no one proclaims the much more profound Biblical notion of restorative justice. Those who uphold the idea of hell operate out of a scarcity model, where there is not enough Divine Love to transform, awaken, and save. The dualistic mind is in fact incapable of comprehending the notion of infinity, limitlessness, or eternity.

Vision and Division

Lack of vision is division - the original sin. The desire for a separate identity and destiny besides that of God was and still is the cause of all rifts and sufferings. According to the Bible, having a private (selfish) agenda than that of God was the reason behind the loss of paradise. The vision and mission of Jesus was to regain the lost paradise through his availability and full cooperation with the holistic (divine) plan. The Paradise or the Kingdom of God is not a spacio-temporal entity, but a mental disposition of total allegiance and alignment with the divine design. Our identity and subsistence are within and not without God.

Each of us participates, replicates and contributes to the whole. Though we do have a certain kind of 'wholeness' within ourselves we are never apart from the larger whole. As John of the Cross rightly puts it, God is *el Todo* (the All) and there is only *nada* (nothingness) besides him. Sin is nothing but our failure to discern and live our true identity and actual purpose in life. Sin is a conscious refusal to play our divine role and live our divine life. It is a life without collaborating with our unique vocation. A pot that is kept upside-down, even if it gets drenched in rain, will never get filled. Totality includes all. Nobody can exclude oneself from the sum total. The distance between the person and the Sun remains the same whether s/he faces the Sun (light) or her/his own shadow (darkness). Any attempt to stand apart from the totality is not only unrealistic but also a delusion of human mind. Whether we are conscious of it or not we are an integral part of the whole.

Mystic Mind Transcends Paradoxes

As long as human mind remains superficial and ego-driven, it encounters divisions, dichotomies and dualities. We bump into paradoxes everywhere. A paradox is something that initially looks like an irreconcilable polarity, but instead of avoiding, if we dare to look deep into it and engage it will eventually lead us into a different level of perception hitherto unknown to us. It will open for us a 'third eye' that will enable us to see beyond mere either-or. It is not our destiny to live and suffer in a divided world. A mystical or non-dual mind can comprehend, reconcile and accommodate the whole without rejecting any part. True spirituality clears away the illusion of separateness. The contemplative mind can help us see how everything belongs to the One Wholeness, which we call God, Creator or Being. As a superb symbol of this creative reconciliation and accommodation of the opposites Richard Rohr points towards the Crucifix. Jesus was crucified between a good thief and a bad thief, hanging between heaven and earth, holding on to both his humanity and his divinity, a male body with a feminine soul. Jesus rejected neither side of these forces, but embraced them all, and "reconciled all things in himself" (Ephesians 2:10). According to Rohr, what was personified in the body of Jesus was a manifestation of the universal truth: Matter is, and has always been, the hiding place for Spirit, forever offering itself to be discovered anew. Rohr calls it "the mystery of incarnation" - the essential union of the material and the spiritual worlds. St. Paul views Christ as the Archetype and Model for all of creation (Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:15-20) and "holds all things together" (Colossians 1:17). In Jesus Christ the dynamic unity between human and divine, personified and cosmic is revealed and realized.

Mysticism is experience-based whereby we come to know something really for ourselves. It is not about believing in something; it is about living what we believe. Mystical teachings come from a high level of consciousness and inner experience. Mystic minds do not treat matter and Spirit or humanity and divinity as separate. In fact, from the very beginning those were not separate. According to the Bible, from the primordial chaos it was the Spirit that brought matter into existence and matter is still the realm where Spirit reveals itself. The scientific discoveries of Einstein and the theories like Big Bang concur with the teachings of great mystic minds. Instead of remaining at the periphery if we take a deep plunge into the disturbing paradoxes we may succeed to surface with the connecting links of the universal reality. A true conversion or change of vision is essential to move from self-consciousness to cosmic-consciousness. Until we obtain a mystical experience our mind would remain divisive and dualistic. Selfishness is the product of a dualistic mindset. Mystical experience enables a person to overcome the subject/object bigotry. According to Richard Rohr, this 'unitive experience' frees us from the burden of ego and facilitates us to live in, through, and with others in harmony. That is precisely the experience of those who are in love. This 'unitive experience', like falling and being in love, cannot be sustained at the ecstatic level, yet can be referred back and be integrated within the rest of our life.

True union does not in fact, take away distinction, but actually intensifies it. The more one gives one's self in creative union with another, the more one becomes one's self. Rohr considers this a reflection of the Trinitarian life: perfect giving and perfect receiving between three who are all still completely themselves. The more one becomes one's True Self, the more capable one is of not overprotecting the boundaries of one's false self. The seed that dies to its limited self, finds itself hundred fold. We will have nothing to protect after enlightenment, and that is the reason behind the freedom and happiness we observe in enlightened people. According to Rohr the concept of Holy Trinity is an attempt and invitation to interactively experience God as transpersonal (Father), personal (Christ), and impersonal (Holy Spirit) - all being true in different stages of life. Salvation in effect is universal belongingness and cosmic connectedness. People use wide-ranging terms like heaven, *moksha*, *mukthi*, *nirvana*, union, enlightenment, liberation, salvation, etc. to depict that state.

Pauline Vision of Holiness is Wholeness

St. Paul learned from his experience on the road to Damascus that religion should not be used for social control and persecution; rather,

Christ connects us all in love organically. It is that 'cosmic consciousness' that inspired him to say, "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). From his personal experience Paul realized that religion is not an ethical matter, but it is a mystical matter. Paul confronted Peter when he resisted eating with the Gentiles after the conservatives came from Jerusalem and tried to reinstate purity codes (Galatians 2:11-12). Paul challenged even the newly formed community of believers who tried to hold on to their old belief systems. He criticizes the Galatians for submitting to the teaching of the Judaizers who insisted the Gentiles should be circumcised to join their new "sect" of Judaism. Paul reminds them, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Mystic is a person who can rise above and reconcile polarities since s/he sees the totality, not part by part. Paul was a non-dual thinker though he loved to teach in a dialectical way.

Paul constructs and then beautifully overcomes the paradox of weakness and strength: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). However, most of Christian history is made up of a demanding spirituality of "perfection." The Pauline spirituality of "imperfection" undermines the egoist use of religion for purposes of self-promotion. According to Paul, we come to God not by being strong, but by being weak; not by being right, but through our mistakes; not by self-promotion but by self-forgetfulness. Reliance upon obedience to laws and requirements (mere ego achievements) is a kind of self-validation. "You just believe and you are saved" is not exactly what Paul intended to say. That is an irresponsible and superficial attitude than the claim that one is saved by good works. Protestantism often projected Paul as the champion and defender of the great idea of justification by faith against the Roman Catholic insistence on works of righteousness, which makes a nice dualistic split that fundamentalists prefer and promote. A mature spirituality will lead people from the performance principle (any form of meritocracy) to the pure realm of grace. This stance utterly levels the playing field of holiness, so all losers can win - which is everybody - based on their availability.

Paul employed many metaphors to illustrate the unity in diversity. However, his favorites were bread and body. He wrote to the Church of Corinth, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf" (1Corinthians 10:17). He further elucidates his point using the imagery of body, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ..."

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it" (1Corinthians 12: 12-14,20,26-28). St Paul elaborating our oneness with Christ says, "He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:18). Being parts of the same body, Paul reminds Ephesians of their collective responsibility, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25). What we normally treat as our 'true Self' is in fact our imaginary 'false Self'. Our true self is the 'whole' and our 'false self' is our separated, temporal, limited, spatial self. According to Paul collaboration is not an option but an obligation "so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:12). He links his own sufferings to the suffering Church, "Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the Church" (Colossians 1:24). He concludes, "so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:5). It is in God - the Ground of All Being - individuals subsist. In Pauline view the Body of Christ is first of all a corporate reality. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Yahweh made promises to Israel as a whole. When Christianity diverted its attention from community to individuals, from whole to parts, it missed its focus and direction. A reward/punishment understanding of salvation points to a very limited victory for God, in which almost no one wins, including God. During the Dark Ages Christianity lost its corporate, collective, social, historical, cosmic message and became individualistic, vindictive and domineering. The original clarity, purity, beauty and universality of the Good News now remain discarded in the junkyards of our heritage. We need to reclaim the abandoned and forgotten pieces of Christian charisma for our own wholeness and cosmic wellbeing. As Paul rightly indicates the plan of God is "in the fullness of time, to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:10).

Through the categorization and labeling of reality into holy and unholy, a divisive and dualistic mindset fosters ego that is controlled by greed, fear, guilt, and shame. It is on account of this foul start religions fail to lead their followers forward on their spiritual endeavor. From a dualistic perspective holiness is a matter of intellect and will. The one who could discern holy from unholy and good from bad is a wise person and the one who build up enough willpower to make the right choice wins! However, a deep and close observation of the reality will reveal the truth that such distinctions

are merely mental and therefore deceptive. The root of violence is the illusion of separation - from the creator as well as the creation. As Richard Rohr rightly indicates, a non-dualistic, contemplative mind sees things in wholes and not in divided parts. It abstains from labeling and categorizing things so that it can come to see them in themselves, apart from the words or concepts that become their substitutes. An open mind and heart are the essential qualities to rise above divisions and resistance. The only thing that keeps us from God and heaven is our false notion that we are separate from God. A contemplative, non-dual mind is indeed the mind of Christ. It enables us to live our lives from a place of non-judgment, forgiveness, love, and contentment with the ordinariness of our lives and it elevates us to a holistic life of freedom, delight, intimacy, perpetual hope and cosmic belongingness.

From a Divided World to a Catholic World

God, defined as love by John (1Jn 4:8), is more than a noun; it is a verb – an action, a process, a relationship, or interconnectedness. Our haunting sense of otherness and separation is the heavy price we pay for dividing the whole in order to comprehend. Leading their adherents to divine union is the goal of all religions. One definition of the word ‘religion’ is ‘to unite or to bind’ (*re+ligare*). But often religions are not binding but dividing people. Christianity first emerged not as a new religion, but as a reform movement or ‘sect’ within Judaism. Christianity was not so much about doctrines or eternal salvation, but about how to live a better life here and now, within the “The Reign of God.” It was thus a lifestyle before it became a belief system. It was known as “The Way,” a movement that emphasized Jesus’ teachings, death, and resurrection as the path to transformation. Gradually the movement grew and took on a life of its own, welcoming non-Jews as well as Jews, becoming more inclusive and grace-oriented, and surely less tribal, until it eventually called itself “Catholic” or universal. Christianity encouraged alternative behaviors that were both attractive and threatening to the exclusive worldview of the Roman Empire. Christianity was appealing to many because it elevated the lives of people from a chaotic world to a Catholic world. Early Christianity emphasized unity and sharing. It proposed sharing possessions equally rather than accumulating wealth; living together with people of different ethnicities and social classes rather than segregation. Human dignity or sacredness depends on our mutual belongingness and connectedness. Today’s need is a united world that appreciates and celebrates unity in diversity and not an apartheid world that says, “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (*Animal Farm*, George Orwell, 1945).

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Reflections on the Spirituality in *Laudato Si’*

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Abstract

Laudato Si’ of Pope Francis, at its core, is a spiritual document. He frames his pragmatic teaching on the environment in a theological and spiritual frame through his use of Francis of Assisi in the beginning and end of the document and proposes a contemplative view of our common home and its role in our experience of God as well as recognizing that all of us need to undergo a profound conversion in a host of ways so that all of our brothers and sisters can also share our common home as their birthright.

Introduction

Pope Francis’ poetic and persuasive encyclical (2015) on our current ecological crisis summarizes both the complex and interrelated human causes of our rapidly deteriorating common home and prescribes remedies of a profoundly practical and spiritual nature. The encyclical begins and ends in a hymn of praise to creator God, who reveals Godself through the beauty and wonder of creation in all its interrelated complexity, intricacy, and diversity. This creation now suffers from self-centered and greedy humans who have appropriated it for personal enjoyment, economic gain for the few, while callously disregarding the invisible and seemingly unimportant masses of women, men, and children who live in despoiled and often toxic urban and rural environments in extreme poverty. Pope Francis identifies sister earth as “among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor,” “our sister who now cries out to us” (Pref.2).