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THE PLACE OF THE POOR IN *LAUDATO SÍ*

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Abstract

In *Laudato Sí*, Pope Francis issued a call for an “ecological conversion” at every level of human life so that the cry of the earth and of the Poor may be heard and remedied. Examining the thoughts of a Pope known for his ministry to the Poor, this brief paper explores the place of the Poor in his encyclical from three lenses — anthropological, ecclesial, and socio-political. From “nature” to “creation”, from a disposable culture to a culture of awe, and from a fiercely anthropocentric, indifferent, and technocratic mindset to a vision of connectedness of all things, it traces the arguments and the spirit underpinning Francis’ text, so that the Creator may be praised for the gifts of creation, and humanity may learn not to be takers, users and abusers but, mindful of the Poor, to be appreciative receivers, givers and carers.

Keywords: *Laudato Sí*, Catholic Social Teaching, Climate Change, The Poor, Creation

“Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest” [*Laudato Sí*, 13].

God’s Poor deserve a special place in God’s creation, Pope Francis reminds the world in his encyclical.¹ And yet, the Poor of the earth, who contribute the least to its severe climate change, are regularly

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¹*Laudato Sí*, 10 (hereafter ‘LS’ when referenced within the text).

suffering the worst impact (LS, 48) of the ecological crisis confronting humanity's common home.

Upon Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio's election to the papacy, Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes whispered to him, "Don't forget the Poor."² In choosing the name Francis for his papacy, Bergoglio has since the outset of his pontificate set a seal on it, and embraced a set of agenda inspired by the saint from Assisi: the Poor, the environment, peace, and rebuilding the Church. First on the list is the Poor. It will be a pontificate of the Poor and for the Poor, resting on a bedrock of radical discipleship in simplicity and humility, freedom and co-humanity. From the inception of his pontificate, Francis has made addressing the dignity of the Poor a staple in his packed itinerary. Preferential option for the Poor,³ a theme that characterizes the God of compassion and mercy,⁴ is now a hallmark in Francis' ministry.

In LS, one can expect to see conspicuously embedded a "consistent ethic of life" in solidarity with the Poor, grounded in the conviction that all human life is sacred and all human persons have fundamental dignity rooted in the image of God. A text that addresses with urgency the pressing ecological crisis confronting us all, will feature a *subtext* on the Poor⁵ and an agenda with the Poor at its core. In it, Francis brings challenges of the heart and society to our consciousness.

In this brief paper, I shall explore Francis' thoughts on the Poor in LS from three lenses, his anthropological, ecclesial and socio-political imagination, respectively.

1. An Anthropological Imagination: Prioritising the Dignity of the Poor

Francis is particularly emphatic about the anthropology present in our modern culture being often far from the Christian vision. Patterns of materialism have all but captivated modern lives and distorted our humanity. As we seek happiness in objects rather than in relationship with God and others, we are alienated from our own humanity. Materialism has fostered three false cultures in our world: the culture of comfort centred on the self; the culture of waste that seizes, uses

²See Ernesto Cavassa, SJ, "On the Trail of Aparecida," *America*, Oct 30 2013 @ <http://americamagazine.org/trail-aparecida>.

³*Aparecida Concluding Document*, section 8.3.

⁴Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013.

⁵Easily the most cited term in the text, appearing no less than 42 times.

and discards; and the culture of indifference that desensitizes, even in the face of distressing poverty.

1.1. Catholic Social Teaching in a New Creation Consciousness

Francis' anthropological vision goes back to the creation theology of the Church. That said, LS also marks a watershed moment, representing as it does a third wave in the development of Catholic Social Teaching relative to creation-consciousness.

In Catholic Social Teaching, *Rerum Novarum* (1891) of Pope Leo XIII marks the first wave. Written at the time of the industrial revolution, it dealt with the rights and duties of capital and labour. Trail blazing workers' rights, its primary concern was the need for serious relief from "*the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class.*" It supported the rights of labour to form unions, and rejected socialism and unrestricted capitalism.

The Vatican II Pope, John XXIII, initiated a second wave in *Pacem in Terris* (1963), in which he spoke about peace in the world in a time of the cold war. Given its context, major topics canvassed included the dynamics of global interdependence, global poverty, human rights and solidarity.

Now, in 2015, Pope Francis grapples with the myriad questions from ecological degradation on which human consciousness the world over has intensified in recent decades. In LS then, we see a sustained and integrated response to the new era when human activities are impacting the environment in ways and on a scale that had never been seen before. Embodying a third wave in Catholic Social Teaching, this text now focuses directly on God's creation, and the colossal threats to its ecological and social environments. It calls for an ecological consciousness, an ecological conversion and nothing less than a revolution of the heart on the part of all of humanity and the agencies that they run so as to adequately attend to the cry of the earth and the cry of the Poor.

Additionally, LS demonstrates a Christian consciousness of human relationship to God's creation in a way that carves a new milestone in the development of creation theology. This is best traced in three steps.

First was the early "*dominion over the earth*" perception. With divinely-vested ruling-right, humanity was seen as wholly entitled to take whatever was present in creation for its use and advantage. It would be a long while, for the idea of abuse, plunder and environmental degradation to enter into human consciousness.

Paradoxically, the onset of modernity would precipitate this consciousness. Modern scientific discovery and technological creativity, which yielded a greatly enhanced human capacity to control and even override nature to human advantage, had also awakened a sense of horror towards the harm that humanity was doing to nature, and to itself really.⁶ With it, a “stewardship” model emerged, gaining more traction as awareness of ecological degradation and its harmful consequences to humanity grew, and marking a second stage in the development of creation-consciousness. A biblical “manager” responsible for the goods and property of another, a *steward* manages wisely, treats property with care and respect. Made in the *imago Dei*, this steward is agent and representative of the Creator, and whose place and reason for existence is *to image God* in the world.⁷

Now, in a development that clearly moves beyond the theologies of *dominion* and *stewardship* and identifiable as a third milestone in creation theology, LS stresses the intrinsic worth of all of creation [“brother sun”, “sister moon”, and “mother-sister earth”]. In an intensive grasp of the inter-relatedness of all things in creation on account of their common source, they are seen as “ontological siblings” because they come from the same divine ground.⁸ There is now a fresh reading of the Creator’s command “to keep and till” grounded in an appreciation for honouring God through honouring His creation.

Cosmos-goodness is now incorporated into the core of Catholic approach to ecology (LS, 236). Reverence for creation penetrates the hearts with awe and wonder, promoting a “universal communion,” kinship with all creatures, and a sense of belonging and rootedness (LS, 11, 76, 151). The point is, linking all this and more to its aim of promoting praise and worship of the Creator as a constant horizon (LS, 87), LS insists on the fundamental dignity of the Poor from cover to cover. The inter-relatedness of all things in creation means that the *degradation of the natural ecology at once alerts us to the degradation of the*

⁶For example, the works of Romano Guardini, particularly *The End of the Modern World*, Wilmington, DE: Isi Books, 1998, cited 8 times in the encyclical.

⁷Arthur E. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, 281; Pope Benedict XVI [Joseph Ratzinger], *In The Beginning*, Grand Rapids, MI: William E. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995.

⁸Robert Barron, *Bridging the Great Divide: Musings of a Post-liberal, Post-conservative Evangelical Catholic*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004, xvii. See also “ontological siblings” cited multiple times in Robert Barron, *Exploring Catholic Theology: Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015.

living conditions of the Poor. In ecological crisis, the Poor are always the most vulnerable and the most readily abandoned (LS, 66). Truly, the Poor, in Asia as elsewhere, are not 'poor', but are impoverished and rendered poor through abuse, exclusion and neglect. They have got to be *adequately considered*⁹ and their dignity adequately factored into assessing individual lifestyle and social planning, economic activities and political manoeuvring. LS advocates for the Poor, to help us better engage questions of poverty around the world.

1.2. Forgetfulness of Creation

Three issues, amongst a string of issues, fall within the purview of this heightened ecological consciousness.

1.2.1. Forgetfulness of the Creator

First, embedded therein is an intense reaction against human *forgetfulness* of creation and the Creator that result in pervasive dysfunction in our natural and social environments. The core of the message in LS is an appeal to remember who we are as created and part of creation, and to an ecological conversion and change in culture and lifestyle.

Bringing ecological care to its religious and moral roots, it covers a wide terrain of human activities worthy of prayerful reflection. But when people rush in to cherry pick for agenda-specific political-bashing or activist-affirmation, there is a real danger of missing the soul of the encyclical set out in its introductory paragraphs where readers are alerted to the depth of our spiritual problems.

Like his namesake from Assisi, Francis praises God for the beauty and the provision of gifts in Mother earth who is like a sister to us. But, our "*forgetfulness*" of all that has rendered us blind to the destruction of our "mother" and deaf to the cries of our sister for "the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her." Seeing ourselves as her "lords and masters," we feel "entitled to plunder her at will." So at the heart of the ecological crisis is the "wound" of "*forgetfulness*," the cause of humanity's conflict with itself. The "violence present in our hearts, *wounded* by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness

⁹For discussions about the concept of *the human person adequately considered*, or *HPAC in short*, see Jeffrey & Angie Goh, "29. Human Person Adequately Considered [HPAC]" at <http://www.jeffangiegoh.com/wp-admin/post.php?action=edit&post=816>; Louis Janssens, "Artificial Insemination: Ethical Considerations," *Louvain Studies* 8 (1980) 3-29; Dolores L. Christie, *Adequately Considered: An American Perspective on Louis Janssens' Personalist Morals*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, 4, Louvain: Peeters, 1990.

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' (Rom 8:22)" (LS, 2). We have even forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (Gen 2:7), made up of elements from our sister-mother-earth, breathing her air and receiving sustenance from her.

Living in created abundance, we have forgotten the limitations of our creatureliness. The three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships — with God, neighbour and the earth itself — in which human life is grounded, has been broken. "This rupture is sin" (LS, 66 & 8). There is no healing without a spiritual revolution. So *Laudato Si'* urges "ecological conversion" and responsible "ecological citizenship." The urgent question is: What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us? (LS, 5, 216-221; 211; 160).

Remembering overcomes problems that lie at the root of our ecological crisis — our lifestyle, attitude and mentality towards creation.

1.2.2. From "Nature" to "Creation"

Second, human forgetfulness of creation slips insidiously into a view of the environment and all things in it as "nature" — a mere "given" instead of a "gift" — as simply there for the taking instead of something to be appreciated and grateful for. An unthinking perception of the sheer "givenness" and "thereness" of things breeds a utilitarian and wasteful mentality, and feeds the regnant throwaway culture where people use and discard things, often on a presumption of "entitlement." At root lies a serious forgetfulness of God.¹⁰ Francis' response is vehement: "We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us" (LS, 67).

In corresponding social problem, people use, abuse, ignore, and discard other human persons at convenience and for myopic profit. In this disposable culture, "takers" and "abusers" roam, inconsiderate, utilitarian, even abusive. We take, we use, and then we dispose soon as we are done. This affects our relationship with the natural ecology and our social ecology. Forgetful of creation, society turns deaf to the cry of the earth and of the Poor.

¹⁰In "Embracing Our Limits: The Lessons of *Laudato Si'*," *Commonweal*, September 23, 2015, Rowan Williams writes of "the persistent tendency of modern human agents to act as though the naked fact of personal desire for unlimited acquisition were the only 'given' in the universe, so that ordinary calculations of prudence must be ignored. Measureless acquisition, consumption, or economic growth in a finite environment is a literally nonsensical idea; yet the imperative of growth remains unassailable, as though we did not really inhabit a material world."

Christianity changes the way people view the natural world by describing it as *creation* — a view that can result in healing to our lands and communities.

When reality is seen as “creation” and related to as “gift,” our consciousness becomes *attentive* to things and to human persons. Perceiving “gratuity” in creation, we can *receive* with surprise, joy, gratitude, and even awe. Grateful recipients learn to make return-gifts. This is what Francis has in mind. Remembering and communing with the Creator, we too can become “givers” and “carers.” Christians are called to accept the world as “a sacrament of communion,” in a global sharing with God and neighbours (LS, 49).

Jesus being the Word who connects God to creation (Jn 1), we recall the essence of our Eucharistic life in a trilogy of terms. First, *memoria* ranks ahead of all else in Jesus’ command to “do this in memory of me.” At the table of the Lord, the very act of gathering is a sign of remembering, as the community of believers gathers to remember what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Second, if believers remember, they can be grateful. Grateful souls, beyond being rule compliant and before turning suppliant, gather for *eucharistia*. And third, remembering and grateful, believers enter into *diaconia*, ministering to all in need, especially the vulnerable Poor.

1.2.3. Integral Ecology

The consequences of this third wave are huge and extensive. At the United Nations on 25 September 2015, Francis even spoke of the “*right of the environment*,” thereby pointing to a nascent but significant development in Catholic thinking on the inherent worth of creation apart from the humans who dominate it. So the encyclical draws a connection between social and environmental injustice. “Human environment and the natural environment,” it reads, “deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation” (LS, 48). The heart of its proposals is “integral ecology.”

Nature is neither something separate from ourselves nor a mere setting in which we live (LS, 139). This holds true in all fields: in economy and politics, in different cultures particularly those most threatened, and in every moment of our daily lives. By concrete examples, analyses of environmental and social problems are tied in “one complex crisis” (LS, 139, 141). Thus, an integral perspective brings the ecology of institutions into play. As all things are related, the health of a society’s institutions *ipso facto* affects the environment

and the quality of human life, so that “every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment” (LS, 142).

Human ecology, then, becomes inseparable from the notion of the common good. Concretely, injustices are commonplace as growing numbers of people are seen deprived of basic human rights and deemed expendable. Committing oneself to the common good entails making choices in solidarity based on a preferential option for the poorest in society (LS, 156-158). Committing to intra-generational care for the Poor of today is also the best way to leave a sustainable world for future generations.

Chapter Four is worth careful attention for the practical examples it offers of the effect mistreatment of the earth has on the poor and disadvantaged. But it offers great insights as well on the abuse of the human body, on urban living and on the ecology of daily life. Ultimately, however, the inter-dependence of all things draws us to the singular truth: *to ignore the connection between ecological degradation and human degradation is to ignore the inviolable human dignity of the Poor.*

2. An Ecclesial Imagination: Promoting the Welfare of the Poor

Christianity for Francis is first and foremost a story and a practice, rather than a doctrine, a law, or a liturgical formula. It is the story of Jesus of Nazareth encountered as the Christ, whose life-practices were from start to finish singularly centred on inaugurating and bringing to fruition the Kingdom of God where the Poor has a privileged place. His story and practices endured and perpetuate through those who believe in him and would continue his work in Kingdom-advancement.

Clearly and explicitly, Francis has been training the spotlight on the poor and needy to the point of placing them at the core of who we are as Church and who we are as Christians. The universal Church he leads shall be “a Church of the Poor and for the Poor.” So insisting, he takes his marching orders straight from the Kingdom-oriented Jesus of the Gospels. Francis’ famous church-slogan is no mere slogan. He has lived with the Poor, identifies with the Poor, and sees himself as representative of a church *of* the Poor. Living a poor Church really changes things.

In 2007, Cardinal Bergoglio chaired the drafting committee of the *Concluding Aparecida Document* at the 5th General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM). After a period of Vatican sidelining of liberation theology, it was refreshing to see the phrase “preferential option for the Poor” used again. Aparecida highlighted the ecclesial

identity of the Latin American Church since the first CELAM meeting in Medellín in 1968. Notable recurrences in the messages of Francis include “a poor Church for the Poor,” “Christ at the Center,” and “going to the periphery”.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis calls for a church community that is characterized not by an inward looking focus on inner ecclesial concerns, but by the twin pivots of missionary discipleship and the Church with the poor and suffering at the centre of its life and praxis. Without this life praxis, the Church risks being seen as just the rich, lacking in lived experiences of material poverty, speaking *about* the Poor as if they are always “other”. So Francis extols “pastoral conversion” as the first key to the mission of the Church. This entails opening one’s heart and door.

Opening one’s heart is not in the first place to absorb and regurgitate irrefragable dogmatic articulations of the ontological and soteriological truths concerning Jesus the Christ; rather, it is a spiritual surrender to the profound life of faith, humility, simplicity and compassion of Jesus. Opening door is not in the first place welcoming people into our offices and institutions and receiving their homage; rather, signifying the missionary spirit of Jesus, it is *to go out* to serve those in distress and in the periphery.

So in actions proportionate to his words, Francis has spelt out the implications of his ecclesiology of “a poor Church for the Poor” by drawing attention to some striking images. At his first Chrism Mass in Rome, he insisted that pastors need to *go out* “to the ‘outskirts’ where there is suffering, bloodshed, blindness that longs for sight, and prisoners in thrall to many evil masters.” Pastors, he famously urged, must behave like shepherds in the midst of their flock, living with “*the smell of the sheep.*”¹¹

Francis has powerfully and vividly said, “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”¹² A church in the streets is a *field hospital* for the Poor, the vulnerable and hurting,¹³ a source of spiritual care, mercy and hope. It also confronts an economic status quo where the majority of people are barely living from day to day.

¹¹“Pope: Homily for Chrism Mass [full text]” at the official Vatican website @ <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-homily-for-chrism-mass-full-text> .

¹²*Evangelii Gaudium*, 49.

¹³See Antonio Spadaro, SJ, “A Big Heart Open to God,” *America*, September 30, 2013 @ <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview> .

Going out to the margins, Francis embraces the Poor amongst the homeless, the sick and deformed, and the prisoners, including women, whose feet he washes and kisses.

Strikingly, at the heart of Francis' ecclesiology and call to pastoral conversion is the call to "tenderness"¹⁴ and to the strange gifts of tears. In his first official trip outside Rome, he celebrated Mass on the tiny Sicilian island of Lampedusa to commemorate thousands of migrants who have died crossing the sea from North Africa, underlining his drive to put the Poor at the heart of his papacy. Reports of the deaths of desperate people trying to reach a better life had been for him like "a thorn in the heart." He lamented *the world's inability to cry* because of the "globalization of indifference." He charged all to "ask the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty of our world, of our own hearts, and of all those who in anonymity make social and economic decisions which open the door to tragic situations like this."¹⁵

Francis knows that a church that is powerful and attractive is one that talks about Jesus and acts like Jesus. Only a church that locates its source of power and authority in Jesus can transform the world.

Down the ages, the picture Jesus drew of the rich man who ignored Lazarus the poor man (Lk 16:19-31) has haunted Christians. Putting into a global setting the parable of the rich man turning his eyes away from the poor Lazarus who crouched at the door and whose sores were licked by dogs, the Second Vatican Council insisted on "the inescapable duty to make ourselves neighbours to everyone in distress."¹⁶ Jesus himself followed the prophets in stigmatizing social injustice, especially in the failure to act justly and lovingly towards those like Lazarus who suffer and are in terrible need. But, teaching as no prophets before him had ever taught, he *identified* himself with those marginalised by society, and made the final judgment depend on our practical concern for "the least of these."¹⁷ In a special way, the destitute show us the face of Jesus and bring us into his presence. Like society, the measure of the Church is how we treat the least of these. In line with the spirit of Vatican II, LS pleads the cause of the

¹⁴A word whose significance to Francis is borne by its repeated appearance for nine times in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

¹⁵"Visit to Lampedusa: Homily of Holy Father Francis," "Arena" sports camp, Salina Quarter, Monday, 8 July 2013.

¹⁶*Gaudium et Spes*, 27.

¹⁷Mt 25:40; Jeffrey Goh, "God Lives on the Margins," *Philippiniana Sacra* 49, 146 (January-April 2014) 51-62.

Poor of this earth, vigorously reminding the Church of her duty to promote the welfare of the Poor, and rich nations of their obligations towards poorer nations.

3. A Socio-Political Imagination: Spotlighting the Plight of the Poor

In LS, Francis enlarges the dream of Vatican II for social justice towards the destitute and deprived. He calls the Church and the world to hear the cry of created nature and become reconciled with the earth. He is sensitive to the cry of the Poor rising also from our earth, as human greed plunders and wrecks the earth almost beyond remedy. In all this, Francis has unswervingly pointed to the scandal of poverty in a world of plenty as a piercing moral challenge for the church and the whole human community. Seeing the social order as grossly unjust, he spotlights the plight of the Poor, linking environmental abuse to a growing “culture of waste” and economic and social exclusion.¹⁸ It is the same wilful blindness and indifference that threatens a vulnerable planet and the people on it, the poorest most of all.

Modernity is marked by an excessive anthropocentrism (LS, 116) that prizes technical thought over reality. In this anthropocentric and technocratic mentality, the *realities* of creation and human nature are rejected. The world as we see it is fast and furious with all the incredible creativity and inventions of contemporary technology. Sadly, it is also shrouded in captivity by this powerful force of technology, endlessly bleeding and disintegrating it. LS clarifies the dehumanizing effect of an unbridled capitalism that is armed with contemporary technology, putting it in service of greed. When maximizing profits is the only goal, what we end up with is “a sort of ‘superdevelopment’ of a wasteful and consumerist kind” which results in dehumanizing deprivation. This mentality underlies the existential threats confronting human life, for everything, from nature, the human body and mind, to the social institutions, business technocrats take as so much “raw material” to be “engineered” using technology, medicine, even law and public policy. As society is dictated by the interests of powerful groups, we have all but failed to give the Poor regular access to even basic resources.¹⁹

¹⁸The theme of social exclusion rendering the Poor invisible was taken up by Cardinal Turkson at the 2015 Synod on the Family. See <http://cvcomment.org/2015/10/24/from-the-synod-13-cardinal-turks-sons-address-linking-family-to-laudato-si/>.

¹⁹For an analysis of the dominant technocratic paradigm, see *Laudato Si*, Chapter 3.

Francis wants to steer the world to the notion of the “common good”²⁰ which is inseparable from human ecology. The common good is “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment fully and more easily.”²¹ There are three elements in the common good: respect for the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person, the social well being and development of society, and the stability and security of a just order. The common good may primarily be accomplished by the variety of social institutions, including family, religious communities, businesses and labour unions, but a crucial element of the common good falls to government for its realization. John Courtney Murray, SJ called this element “the public order.”²² Emphatically, LS insists that “solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters” is both a summons and an ethical imperative for attaining the common good (LS, 158).

At the socio-political level, Francis’ approach to Catholic Social Thought often catches people off guard for its seemingly amazing revolutionary content. It is, in reality, a profound *personalism* in the Christian faith. The consistent theme in this personalism is an insistence that every individual matters, the acid test for which being our treatment of the most vulnerable people in our society. In his ministry, Francis seeks to transform society by insisting that no one can be reduced to less than human, no one can be dismissed, no one can be marginalized. The *human person* takes priority over any cause; the human person *is* the cause who cannot be exploited or abused without defacing the divine. Everywhere he goes, he draws out the personal, social and political implications of this principle, criticizing any human system he finds at odds with it.

When he criticizes capitalism, pivotal to his arguments is the reduction of human beings to the sum of their desires, consumption or pleasures, which ultimately turns them individualistic and dulls them to the needs of their neighbours. Human persons cannot be made instruments for the benefit of others. In his restatement of Christian personalism, any society that is content with poverty and

²⁰A phrase cited no less than 29 times in the document. See especially section IV of Chapter IV.

²¹*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1905; *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

²²See, e.g., John Courtney Murray, “Contraception, and the ‘Liberal Catholic’ Justification for Abortion,” @ http://www.ratzingerfanclub.com/liberalism/murray_contraception_abortion.html

hopelessness, is not reflecting the values of faith, and any believer who is content in such a society has failed to live the faith.²³

Instead, he alerts all to our “social debt” towards the Poor, the right to clean water being a clear instance (LS, 30). Against the culture of waste, food thrown out is food stolen from the table of the Poor (LS, 50). Huge consumption by rich nations has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, robbing them of what they need to survive and creating an unacknowledged but true “ecological debt” between the global north and south (LS, 51). The world is skewed when international trades are dominated by more powerful interests, and foreign aids dictated by donor-agendas (LS, 52). Francis urges an international spirituality of solidarity so that the world may begin to eliminate extreme poverty and promote social development (LS, 172). The earth being a shared inheritance, it is a matter of fidelity to the Creator that harvests are shared with the Poor and the sojourners (Lev 19:9-10; LS, 71, 93).

Here, three lines from Francis are particularly striking. First, when he talks about this personalism, he calls us “to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other.”²⁴ To suggest that when we encounter another human being, we are encountering the sacred is an extraordinary statement. It is a belief that human beings cannot be exploited or abused without defacing the divine. And so LS is hard-hitting against an excessive profit-mentality in the technocratic paradigm (LS, 101-114), in business enterprises and in the unlevel field of business negotiations between rich and poor nations. In this regard, his second shocking line co-opts the fourth century saint, Basil of Caesarea, who described indifference, greed and a profit-mentality at all costs the “dung of the devil.” In the face of the Poor of the world, Francis never ceases to remind all profit-takers and fence-sitters of the story of Cain and Abel. His third striking statement is a terse question he puts to them: “Where is your brother?” (LS, 70).

In sum, as Pope Francis praises God for His glorious creation, he simultaneously urges the world to learn to weep. It is only after we have cleansed our eyes with tears that we can begin to see the immense reality of the ecological destruction and human suffering in the world and right around us.

²³Michael Gerson, “Pope Francis’ Profound Personalism,” *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2015.

²⁴*Evangellii Gaudium*, 169.