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).

Notably, Francis addresses his encyclical to all people willing to engage in dialogue on these issues (Pref.3). His tone is relational throughout, clearly recognizing the variety of actors - individuals, believers, politicians and government leaders, economists and business owners, and members of international organizations. He bemoans the seeming inability of international bodies to enforce agreements or to develop actionable plans to finance the necessary changes most critically needed to remediate climate change. He also recognizes the seeming impasses to halt the damage to soil, air, and water caused by deforestation, extraction of minerals as well as fossil fuels for purely economic gain. Causes, therefore, are individual, national, corporate, economic and structural. The complexity of the situation boggles the minds and weighs on the hearts of those who have long committed themselves to right these urgent situations which began to appear in the middle of the 20th century - a host of women and men who sounded the alarm locally and continue to work to save innumerable endangered species, clean up toxic waste, address threats to water supplies and prevent climate disasters, too numerous to name.

This Encyclical limits its citations to Papal, Vatican, and Episcopal documents from every continent,[1] a statement from Patriarch Bartholomew, and the series of international conventions and meetings beginning with the 1972 *Stockholm Declaration*, and including the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, 1992, and the Rio Plus 20 document. The problem is lack of implementation and enforcement not analysis. The more successful among these international conventions are related to hazardous waste, trade in endangered species, and the depletion of the ozone layer (4.III.161). This evidence represents every part of the globe in some particular and specific way. By focusing on both people who are poor everywhere as well as our poor sister, the earth, Francis refuses to pit the poverty of people against the

1 In North America, a series of national and local pastoral letters on the environment preceded the 2001 document of the USCCB cited in this encyclical: *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*. Ten years earlier, they addressed the environment in *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching: A Pastoral Statement of the United States Catholic Conference*. November 14, 1991, a year before the UN Rio Meeting." Bishops of the Northwest and British Columbia, both Canadian and Americans, produced *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*, Feb. 22, 2001, *This Land Is Home to Me: A Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region*,1995 and *At Home in the Web of Life : A Pastoral Message on Sustainable Communities in Appalachia Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of "This Land Is Home to Me" from the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia 1995*, and *A Pastoral Letter on the Forests of the Sierra Tarahumara*, Catholic Bishops of Northern Mexico, 2000, among others. Unfortunately, these teachings gained little attention and were not widely disseminated.

degradation of the earth. Both forms of poverty are the result of similar causes. The particular suffering of women and their children are inadvertently concealed among the category of the "poor" although poor women and their children always suffer disproportionately. Equally unacknowledged are the efforts of women as actors in the churches, in education, in international agencies, in governments, and in a host of NGO advocacy efforts and non-profit organizations, including women religious.

Nonetheless, Pope Francis' approach is practical, relational and spiritual. By making visible every corner of the suffering earth and its people, he gently compels us to look beyond our near neighborhoods and national realities. This encyclical embodies a vision of the church as a global community rather than as Eurocentric one. He correctly identifies the great disparity between the wealthier northern and western countries and the entire rest of the globe. He describes the reckless over-consumption of the few at the expense of the legitimate needs of the rest of the world without naming countries.

St. Francis as a Model of Integral Ecology

Pope Francis evokes St. Francis of Assisi, long the patron of ecology, and an "attractive and compelling figure," beloved by believers and non-believers alike, as a way of framing his appreciation of creation itself as God's gift and call to conversion. Historically, St. Francis' own conversion was a response to the rising mercantile economy of the urban centers of Europe and its effect on the urban poor. He relinquished his social station among the rising urban mercantile class in response to a deep, mystical experience he had in which he heard, "Rebuild my church." In response, he began to repair the church of San Damiano until he understood the more radical call to embrace Sister Poverty, and care for lepers and other despised persons. His entrancement with the natural beauty of the Umbrian countryside and his response of awe and wonder in prayerful withdrawal to a valley, a short walk beyond the town, resulted in ecstatic joy in God's creation, in all of its particularities, and in falling in love with God, the poor, and all creatures, experiencing them as "brother or sister."

St. Francis models the integral ecology his namesake wishes to promote. "If we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously" (Pref.11). Further,

the saint's relational appreciation and his poverty and austerity is "something more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled" (Pref.11).

A Joyful Mystery to Be Contemplated

Pope Francis also uses his saintly patron to exemplify a long-standing principle of the ascetical tradition of the creation as a "book of nature." God reveals Godself, "speaks to us and grants glimpses of God's infinite beauty and goodness, 'through the greatness and the beauty of creatures'" (1.I.12). Pope Francis then draws us beyond the utilitarian, economic, or instrumental value of the created world to experiencing it as "a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise" (1.I.12). He returns to this theme of contemplation repeatedly throughout the encyclical. The creation as a joyful mystery to be contemplated keeps our hearts open and responsive both to God and to all others with whom we share this planet as "our common home." Experiencing God in and through creation moves us to protect it, and if we keep our hearts open, it sustains us in our ecological efforts. Pope Francis names the problems with our hearts that block effective solutions - "denial of the problem, indifference, nonchalant resignation, or blind confidence in technical solutions" (Pref.14). He urges "a new and universal solidarity" (Pref.14). He calls everyone to do something about our ecological crisis as a consequence of embracing this way of relating to God, to the creation as well as to those who are poor.

After describing the unsustainable situation of the perilous present, Francis returns to creation again as a theological and spiritual category. "The Gospel of Creation" (2.62-100) summarizes the contemporary, papal, and theological synthesis of the theology of creation under the rubric of faith and reason in harmony with, in this case, science. Francis teases out the very real ecological faith convictions rooted in our faith and influenced by Catholic social teaching. He reinterprets the Genesis command of "dominion" over the earth in the light of "till and keep" the garden of the world (2.II. 67). He believes "till and keep" implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. While Francis recognizes a limited right to private property, because the "earth is the Lord's," God rejects every claim to absolute ownership." The earth belongs to everyone (2.II.67). He concludes: "this responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world" (2.II.68). Finally, he says, "the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures" (1.II.68).

Citing church teachings, especially those since the Rio Conference in 1992, Francis reprises our relatively, recently developed teaching on the relationship between the creation (our natural world) and human persons. These teachings may surprise many Catholics and some Evangelical Christians whose operative theology remains the domination of creatures less than "man," which in many cultures includes domination over women and children as well as animals, etc. all based on God's having given man "dominion over the earth" (Gen. 1:28). In many western cultures, this has resulted in utilitarian and exploitive attitudes and actions in relation to the earth's resources with little or no consideration of damage to or preservation of the natural world and callously appropriating the land and its resources from indigenous peoples.

Francis clearly assigns the cause of our distorted relationship with creation to a form of idolatry. By replacing the notion of "creation" with the scientific word, "nature," often used without any reference to God as creator and the creation as Creator God's gift to the entire human community results in separating the gift of creation from the origin of all and the gift-giver, namely God. Francis names God's love as the "moving force in all-created things" (2.III.77), agreeing with Dante that it is God's love "which moves the sun and the stars." Francis wants us to recognize and return to a more robust relationship with God, with one another, and with the rest of creation in a "universal communion." He calls us to deepen our Trinitarian awareness of the on-going activity of God within the world, interacting with it relationally in and through all of the processes unfolding in the creation - human and non-human actors alike. The Spirit is at work in the heart of things, a form of "God's art," which is another manifestation of God's interacting with and within the world and inviting human persons into an "I-Thou" relationship with God. Thus human persons "as subjects …can never be reduced to the status of an object" (2.III.81).

At the same time, Francis describes other living beings as more than "mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination." And in this first section, he sounds the theme he develops in great detail in subsequent sections of the harm done "against the majority of humanity" by unrestrained exploitation of the earth's resources focused only on "profit and gain" and achieved through the abuse of power (3.II.82). Francis contrasts this selfishness, backed up by power, with the way of Jesus and his teaching on power as service. He limns a vision of "the ultimate destiny of the universe in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity

of all things" (2.IV.83). This is a thoroughly evolutionary vision inspired by Teilhard de Chardin's insights that hold together all creatures as "moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things" (2.IV. 83).

A Language of Love

In the final section of this chapter, Francis asserts that "the entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (2.1V.84). The beauty and intricacy of creation provide the Creator with a universal language of love spoken to human persons everywhere. Francis offers a robust teaching about God's self-revelation to everyone through "particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning." He then moves to the mystical level, citing John Paul II, "for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice" (2.IV.85).

In this section, Francis describes in an anecdotal way, what many experience as "God's caress" in natural settings. This is an almost universal experience, more primordial even than Scriptural texts which also recognize the importance of particular places in our spiritual histories. Jacob's vision at Bethel is one example. "God was in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen.28:16-22). But once Jacob does know, he reverently creates a shrine in response.

Much of the environmental movement is deeply spiritual today. Those who experience God consciously in particular landscapes work hard to preserve them for others for years to come. Belden Lane writes of landscapes of the sacred, describing how a particular place takes on a personal meaning, demonstrating how places become "holy" because of what we experience there gratuitously. Those who are receptive to this human-divine communication weave these places into their spiritual narratives. Not only do these experiences live on in their hearts and imaginations, but they lead them to seek solace, rest, and renewal in places of natural beauty, often in the wilderness (1988). The experience of "God's caress" in such places does not occur on one's own terms. At one moment a person may show up and nothing happens. At another, someone expectantly shows up, and something often happens that is beyond one's expectation or control.

It isn't even necessary to be in some wild and untamed place to experience God in creation although the eremitic traditions favored such places as well as contemporary, wilderness enthusiasts. For some,

a tree in full bloom in Manhattan, amidst the traffic and press of crowds of people on the sidewalk, may be sufficient to transfix them with its beauty and reveal God's presence right there. Likewise, it seems any direct connection with the earth, gardening, for instance, may also suffice (Ruffing, J. 1997).

Recent studies name "nature deficit" as a common problem for children in highly urbanized settings who interact more with their technology than with the natural word as their playground (Louv, R. 2008, 2012). The remedy, of course, is to balance experiences with technology with an intentional connection with nature. Adults, too, benefit significantly from time in nature, shown by a growing body of empirical evidence, spurring adults to work toward sustainable business, communities, and economies. All who experience the healing and wholeness-making qualities in the natural world do not always connect them with the living God or with any particular religious tradition. But they often result in a sense of interconnectedness with our common home.

A visit to India in 1995, made me wonder what happens to these revelatory and healing qualities of nature when every body of water –ocean, streams, and lakes - were visibly polluted and toxic. When a ravaged creation is a threat to human well-being due to pollution, inadequate sanitation, rubbish, etc., does it not mediate danger and become a counter-sign of creation as a gift of God to us all? What does it mean for poor people who live in degraded environments to be deprived of this sense of God's self-communicating presence through the natural world? The effects of our collective treatment of the earth may cause both physical as well as spiritual harm to vast numbers of poor people who live in polluted environments or even near or on rubbish heaps.

Francis describes the positive spiritual dynamics of our relationship with creation that moves from this caress of God and leads to a response of praise and gratitude for God's goodness expressed in this magnificent array of creatures and processes. God is reflected in all that exists, moving us to praise, and Pope Francis draws us into praise by citing St. Francis' well-known and much beloved "Canticle of the creatures." In this way, Pope Francis demonstrates that the ultimate purpose of other creatures is "moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things" (2.III.83). This eschatological vision of our destiny becomes "another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures" (2.III.83). We "are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator" (2.III.83) in the fullness of the Risen Christ.

Something Seriously Wrong

After delineating this vision, Francis notes inconsistencies in human behavior. There is something seriously wrong if a sense of deep communion with the rest of nature does not also include compassion for people. We must manifest not only concern for the environment but also love for human persons as well as a "commitment to resolving the problems of society" (2.V.91). Because everything is so intimately related, our hearts must expand beyond a concern for preservation of the environment to include peace and justice as well. Because the earth is our shared inheritance, the few do not have an absolute right to own property at the expense of depriving the many who need the means to support themselves and live under humane conditions. The disproportionate consumption of the earth's resources by only 20% of "the world's population that consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive" is completely unacceptable (2.VI. 95).

In order to inspire conversion, Francis closes this chapter with a description of Jesus' own relationship with the creation, recognizing God's role in creation and God's care for all creatures. He highlights Jesus response and sensitivity to natural beauty and his obvious contemplative response to the land, his craftsmanship, and his harmony with creation. Finally, this Christological reflection portrays "the destiny of all creation as caught up with the mystery of the Risen Christ," who continues to draw creatures to himself, "imbuing them with his radiant presence" (2.VII.99-100).

Causes of the Crisis

In such a brief essay, it is not possible to discuss the entire encyclical. It is, though, important to note that Pope Francis very clearly offers a penchant analysis of the human causes of the ecological crisis - the technological paradigm and its globalization combined with its increase in power over the material world. This growth through technical means of power over many aspects of life has not been "accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values, and conscience" (3.I.105). He shows the profound limitations on freedom when controlled by the 'blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest, and violence" (3.I.105). It is illusory when we fail to recognize any limits on the earth's resources. So too, it is illusory when the intersections between economics and political life fail to acknowledge the deleterious effects on the many and their quality of life. Pope Francis describes the need for a multidisciplinary approach to these massive and interconnected

systemic problems in order to resist the domination of all by this paradigm In Chapter Six, he describes the conversion and spirituality necessary to mount such a resistance and calls for ecological education and deep conversion of life-style as remedy along with the actions he proposes in Chapter Five based on an ethics of the common good.

The third major cause is the crisis and effects of Modern anthropocentrism, which wildly distorts the perceived place of human persons within the creation. A typical feature of modernity, operating out of a "dominion" paradigm, ignores the real harm done both to the environment and to persons who are poor. Both forms of behavior distort the relationship of persons with nature as well as with one another. These interpersonal relationships need to be reordered and healed in order to cope with the environmental crisis. Finally, he identifies relativism as part of the anthropocentrism that leads to misguided lifestyles. In this widely held perspective, "everything is irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests" (3.III.122). Self-centeredness is the root of most forms of exploitation of the vulnerable and the abandonment of those who do not serve our interests. The "market" will do the rest.

An integral ecology keeps the dignity of humans in view and takes into consideration the value of labor and of human work. Pope Francis turns again to St. Francis and others in the spiritual tradition to discuss the meaning of work and to sketch a theology of work. These take into account how "Work should be the setting for this rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play; creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God" (3.III.126). Work is such an important part of life - that lack of meaningful work seriously impairs human development, adult growth, and a major source of meaning.

The final topic of this chapter focuses on genetic modification which Pope Francis describes but calls for more discussion on the ethical implications. His overriding concern is the way technology can so easily be severed from ethics and does not easily " limit its own power" when so many vested interests are at work, and all of the effects are not always made available in the decision-making process.

Integral Ecology

Chapter Four returns to the theme of integral ecology which was introduced in the first chapter. For Pope Francis, integral ecology embraces three interrelated sets of relationships. The first is the way environmental, economic and social ecology interact with one another. The environment implies the "relationship existing between nature and

the society which lives in it" (4.I.139). Francis emphasizes strategies that result in an integrated approach to "combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature" (4.I.139).

Economic ecology takes the environment into account as "an integral part of the development process."[2] Many businesses simply refuse to assume responsibility for the full cost of doing business by ignoring ecological considerations and passing on their costs largely to governments after great harm is done to local environments and communities.

Social ecology requires an analysis of how the human community relates to themselves and to their environment. This includes an analysis of family, work-related and urban context, and how persons relate both to themselves and to the environment. Harm to the environment harms the social body as social ecology can harm the environment. This social ecology is institutional, beginning with the family and extending to the wider local, national and international communities. How well these interrelated institutions function affects both its people and the environment.

Cultural ecology is the "historic, artistic, and cultural patrimony" (4.II.143) of the people. Ecology involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense which respects local cultures. Our present consumerist world view negatively affects local cultures. Environmental exploitation not only deprives local people of their resources supporting their own livelihoods but also negatively affects local cultures - weakening the sense of meaning and community. Indigenous communities are particular affected. Their need to remain on their own lands is deeply part of their identity and values, as well as the fact that their sacred ground maintains their connection with their ancestors. The ecology of daily life is another interrelating ecology. This has to do with the quality of life in a given area, urban or rural. The interrelationship of these various ecologies is governed by the well-developed principle in the church's social teaching of the primacy of the common good over profit or personal gain.

Chapter Five offers "lines of approach and action" and moves toward the need for stronger international agreements and actions because a global perspective on these issues, as well as national and local ones are required. Some immediate actions are clear - replacing the use of fossil fuels as rapidly as possible and developing renewable sources of

2 A citation from the 1992 Rio Conference.

energy. As of yet there are no international agreements about how to pay for this necessary transition. Individual countries cannot do this alone and there is an urgent need for a genuine world authority. Climate change is real, progress has been very slow, and greater responsibility "falls to the countries which are more powerful and pollute the most" (5.I.169). Poorer countries need to eliminate extreme poverty first, but their elites need to reduce their scandalous consumption. In addition, governments need to combat corruption and develop less polluting forms of energy. Where governments are weak and ineffective, laws already enacted lack enforcement and private for profit interests tend to exploit the weakness. The situation of climate change and environmental degradation is serious, and enforceable international agreements are needed as are global regulatory norms to penalize unacceptable actions involving contaminated waste or damage done by industry in transnational situations.

In addition to international agreements, new national and local policies are also badly needed. There is a sharp criticism of short term politics that benefit consumerist sectors of the population as well as the unwillingness of elected officials to pander to electoral interests instead of upsetting the public with necessary measures that would reduce the level of consumption of raw materials and harmful sources of energy. Such short term power politics prevents progress on far-sighted environmental agendas needing governments to enact. Pope Francis, nevertheless, tries to encourage politicians to rise to the occasion and its seriousness and calls them to courageously" leave behind a testimony of selfless responsibility" (5.II.181).

Call to Ecological Conversion and Means of Spiritual Growth

The final section of the encyclical returns to salient themes sounded in the preface of the document. It is a clarion call to ecological conversion, drawing on our spiritual tradition to describe how everyone, individuals as well as communities can respond to the challenges before us. The ecological crisis is largely the result of our own making, individually and collectively and we are the ones "who need to change" (6.I.202). We behave the way we do because "we lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging and of a future to be shared with everyone" (6.I.202). This requires *metanoia* (changing our minds), arriving at an intellectual conversion that requires us to change our harmful behaviors and develop a new lifestyle.

A compulsively consumerist culture leads us to believe that our most important kind of freedom is the "freedom to consume" while it

disguises the actions of "the minority who actually wield economic and financial power." Without genuine insight into our situation, our self-centeredness and greed only increases. Pope Francis points to our existential unrest and emptiness, along with an anxiety that leads to even more consumption, obscuring any sense of the common good. Social unrest is as catastrophic as extreme weather, especially when only a few people are able to participate in a consumerist life-style. But all is not lost, since we are "capable of rising above" ourselves, "and choosing again what is good." In this last section Pope Francis calls us to change our lives, to exert social pressure in our purchasing, and personally do what we can to reduce our own consumption. He draws on the *Earth Charter of 2000* as a common source of inspiration to act now with others. He tries to inspire us to care enough for others and the good of the earth "to limit our self-centeredness and self-absorption" (6.I.207). Adopting these attitudes will help us sensitize our consciences so that we will be able "to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society" (6.I.208).

These new attitudes are not enough. They must become new habits. The prevailing cultural and economic norms prevalent in affluent societies make it difficult to develop these new habits which will require an education in genuine spirituality. More than simply a scientific paradigm is needed. A new vision of our place in the world and an awareness of our colonization by an unsustainable form of free market capitalism require an education in restoring our sense of interconnectedness with others, peace within ourselves and harmony with nature, other creatures and God.

The environmental education Pope Francis calls for is an education in spirituality both in environmental practices as a new form of asceticism as well as making a conscious "leap toward the transcendent" (6.II.210). As Kathleen Fisher has stated it, "Do we love the creation enough to save it?" We will, Fisher assures us, "save what we love" (2009). Francis encourages a list of environmental practices that many already practice. And if not, they are surely a place to begin. Although these are not sufficient alone to change the larger systems that also need to change, they do affect us and do encourage the change in life-style that eventually will make a difference. Francis astutely says that these concrete practices listed in No.211 "benefit society…for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread" (6.II.212). This education can take place in many settings, and Pope Francis wants the church to be one of those places. He returns to the theme of "the relationship between an education in aesthetics and maintaining

a healthy environment" (6.II.215). Learning to stop and pause in the face of natural beauty interrupts "our self-interested pragmatism and tendency to treat everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple" (6.II.215). A pause for natural beauty and response to the creation re-educates our hearts and is a natural form of contemplation.

Pope Francis draws on the Christian sacramental tradition to invite us to recognize our faults and failures that lead to repentance and desire to change, once again using St. Francis as model for conversion. Acknowledging how we have harmed God's creation through our actions and failures to act" helps us experience a change of heart" (6.III.218). When our chaplain preached on *Laudato Si'* the week it was released, he noted that in all his years of celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, he had never once heard anyone confess a sin against the creation. The conversion needed is communitarian not only individual.

This basic conversion helps us change, but Pope Francis is also deeply aware of other deep dispositions that foster "a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness" (6.III.220). Gratitude comes first in response to the gratuitousness of all the good gifts of God and God's creation. It connects us to the rest of creation and engenders a generosity of heart. As believers, we experience a relational universe and become conscious of the bonds which link us with God and every creature.

Pope Francis reprises in his conclusion themes with which he began his encyclical. He cites the inherent meaningfulness of the creation as gift of God and its Christic dimension of already being drawn toward fulfillment. How then can we harm other creatures? Freedom from the obsession with consumption leads to a prophetic and contemplative life-style, capable of deep enjoyment not based on consumption. A quality of presence to reality opens us to appreciate the beautiful and to be content with little. This is an antidote to collecting pleasures which will never satisfy, rather than responding to what is already present and given within ordinary life (6.IV.222). This joy is not based on consumption but on a deeper level of relatedness and quality of presence. When we limit some "needs" which only diminish us, we have the interior spaciousness to be open to a wider realm of possibilities. Sobriety and humility have hardly characterized the 20th century, but these virtues can lead to a satisfying life when one is at peace within oneself. The balanced life-style that results from these virtues opens us to hear and respond to the "words of love" with which nature is filled and which arrive as gift from the Creator who lives among and surrounds us" (6.IV.225).

These are all habits of the heart, long-taught spiritual practices of finding God in all things, (St. Ignatius) the practice of the presence of God (Brother Lawrence), a contemplative attitude (William Barry, SJ) – all historical and contemporary ways of naming a capacity to live fully present to whomever one is involved with and not be preoccupied with the next event (6.IV.226). Sacramental life draws us into this flow of presence to God and God's gifts as well as evoking response from us. Sunday and Eucharist can be a time of Sabbath, a time of rest, and a time of contemplative presence which refreshes and renews our sensibilities.

In all of these practices, we are called to an expansive love which draws us into the gratuitous love of others, even our enemies. This love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care is also civic and political, making us and our world more humane. Pope Francis, as pastor, brings years of practical experience to his reflections on spiritualty, offering a catalogue of interrelated attitudes, processes, and practical actions that yield a life of genuine joy because God is dependable and God loves us. He ends these passionate, practical and demanding reflections with two beautiful prayers for our further contemplation—a prayer for our earth that can be shared with everyone and one more specific to Christians, tutoring us in this poetic and sapiential way how to pray into this deeper ecological conversion of mind, heart, and behavior with gratitude and joy. *Laudato Si'*!

Conclusion:

Francis clearly writes this encyclical on ecological issues as clearly from theological and spiritual perspectives as he does from scientific and political ones. He understands that nothing will be done sufficiently on these issues unless all those whom he addresses appreciate the natural world as a place where God reveals Godself to us and which the entire human family needs and shares as a condition for life. He combines this holistic, contemplative vision with a profound call for conversion in specifically ecologically ways - a new asceticism, as it were. He does this from a global perspective demonstrating the interconnectiveness of life on this earth, and our responsibility for it. It is both an eminently practical and spiritual document.

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