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A manifesto for a new earth and new humanity

Laudato Si' – On Care of Our Common Home

Pope Francis's new encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, subtitled 'On Care for Our Common Home' underscores its main message: that we share a small interconnected planet which can only become a reality in 'relationship' with all creation, people and the Creator. This relationship calls all to a change or conversion of heart - both individual and communal. The Pope is making a **challenging call to all people who seek justice and integrity of creation** - not just people of faith. There is a call to make a space that allows dialogue and engagement to occur. There is a call to inclusion. An exclusion derived from a politics dictated more by special interests and powerful elites has resulted in our most vulnerable sisters and brothers being marginalised. Clearly here is a response to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

We have here from Pope Francis a loving letter to all his sisters and brothers about our 'sister' Earth and how we need each other. Inspired by his namesake St Francis of Assisi who has modelled for 800 years a concern for the poor, the environment and for peace, the Pope uses St Francis' 13th century *Canticle of the Creatures*, a hymn to God's creation that refers to 'brother sun', 'sister water', 'brother wind', and 'sister Mother Earth'. Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life. It is a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. **This mother now cries out to us because of the harm inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods endowed to her.**

The Encyclical begins with an invitation to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home. It is an **appeal for a new dialogue about the future of our planet where everyone is included in the conversation because the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affects us all.** [LS 14] His concern is to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good. [LS 188]

Whilst drawing on the writings of his predecessors from John XXIII to Benedict XVI, Francis has been inspired by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I, well-known as the 'Green Patriarch', and spiritual leader of many of the world's 300 million Orthodox Christians. This encyclical is ecumenical in a more radical sense. It is not only addressed to Catholics or to Christians but an attempt by one of many leaders to address an issue that goes beyond the future of the church to the future of humanity. *Laudato Si'* is at heart a **call for a renewed and deepened humanity**. It is not a mere policy document.

Prior to the release of *Laudato Si'*, the impression was that the encyclical would be more a policy statement to make the maximum impact on the negotiations at the upcoming UN Conference on Climate Change in Paris at the end of 2015 and would focus mostly on the issue of climate change. If it just spelled out policy goals for the Paris conference, *Laudato Si'* would



have a very short shelf life. It is nothing less than an **assertive call for dialogue that will shape our lives for decades to come**. Despite concerns by conservative politicians and church leaders about the church meddling in controversial politics and science, their reactions suggest that the Pope has hit a nerve by speaking a truth that many would like to hide and embarking on a revolution long needed.

It could be called a 'spiritual' document but it is a document of a **faith that walks**. It synthesises anthropology, spirituality, ethics, science, ecology and society. Above all, it addresses one of the most critical moments in human history. It has been called **explosive, prophetic, bold and direct addressed to all people who will listen and want to be part of the solution to care for the earth, God's creation**.

As many people do, the Pope sees that something has happened and is happening to the earth and things need to change. We need to go beyond asking the crude question as to what will it cost

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to act or not act to asking about the value of respecting the earth with profound responsibility. Criticisms that have emerged seem to come from a desire to avoid responsibility for one another and for the whole of creation. **Francis has said that we have clearly trashed the earth and our relationship with it is out of harmony – something that Indigenous people would appreciate more.** As well as considering the destruction of the earth is his concern about poverty an issue that can drive many of the 'haves' crazy. He dares to speak while too many people live in silence.

The document highlights the **interconnectedness and interdependence of all creation** and how **humanity has been damaging the earth** by a technology and economics not based on moral values. This leads to increasing damage and wasteful consumption. It leads to a throwaway culture that negatively impacts on the poorest communities. **Here is the link between the cry of the poor with the cry of the earth.**

There is an intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet. It is not a simple call to action on climate change but an 'integral ecology' where dialogue and discussion leads to an expanded

dialogue on the world's moral and political agenda. So far, the debate has been dominated by interests that were and are contrary to the common good. The Pope wants to **open dialogue about the distorted values of consumer culture, the power of multinational corporations and abuse of power, the view that sees people and creatures as objects to be used, economic systems motivated by short term profit, a mentality that puts technology on a pedestal.** 'Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life.' [LS 189] Interestingly, the word 'dialogue' is used at least 21 times, 'debate' 12 times, and 'discuss' 6 times.

The document mentions a number of symptoms such as climate change, resource depletion, water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, pollution and urban decay but we need to reflect on the causes. At heart, it comes back to a lack of moral foundations to guide us in our activity. Human technical progress and the domination that comes from that has outstripped humanity's moral growth and respect for all living things, a fraternity where no one and nothing is excluded because the Earth as a 'shared inheritance', a 'collective good', the 'patrimony of all humanity', the 'responsibility of everyone'. The conversion that we are called to **must lead to a revolution in thinking and acting that leaves behind domination, control and abuse of power that results in more and more impoverished people and an impoverished Earth.** It results from a new way of seeing where 'right relationships' or justice and the common good recognises that the forces of the market and corporateness cannot and will not respect the interconnectedness we need.

It is important for us in the Pacific region

to remember also our relationship with the peoples of the Pacific who are inordinately affected by climate change with its effects on the people and their culture. Pope Francis states, 'In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events... Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming... The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming.' [LS 23] 'Many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change.' [LS 38]

Without being specific he **rebukes some multinational corporations** that operate in economically underdeveloped countries who 'after ceasing their activity and withdrawing, they leave behind great human and environmental liabilities such as unemployment, abandoned towns, the depletion of natural reserves, deforestation, the impoverishment of agriculture and local stock breeding, open pits, riven hills, polluted rivers and a handful of social works which are no longer sustainable.' [LS 51]

Francis tries to awaken the consciences of all, especially the economically and politically powerful, to the plight of the poor and the now impoverished earth. The environmental problem is part of a much larger problem - the failure to recognise the truth that we are all, everyone and everything, interconnected. We must read this Encyclical if we want to be part of the solution.

Full set of resources and references are on the ERC website www.erc.org.au



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