

## Notes for Siena Heights Talk

- LAUDATO SI', mi' Signore" – "Praise be to you, my Lord". In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us...This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.

### Importance of Laudato Si'

#### *Background*

- Rerum Novarum, 1981: the founding document of modern Catholic social teaching. "New things" of the industrial revolution – huge social and economic upheavals, inequalities, injustices.
- Laudato Si', 2015: "new things" are the impact of human activity/ economic model on the planet and on social bonds.
- Before industrial revolution - impact of human activity on environment was limited and localized. Barely any economic growth. Long centuries of flat population and living standards.
- All changed around 1750 - wave after wave of technological progress, each building on the last - textiles, steam engines, railways, steam ships, electricity, automobiles, aviation, petrochemicals, and information and communications technology.
- Huge spike in economic activity and population growth. Started in England, spread out. Biggest increase only after WW2. Since industrial revolution, population up ninefold, to 7 billion. And world output (\$100 trillion) over 200 times bigger. Not slowing - by midcentury, population over 9 billion/ size of the global economy could increase threefold.
- This means: bumping up against planetary boundaries/ disrupting some of the earth's core cycles of biology, chemistry, and geology. Leaving "safe operating space" of Holocene—10,000 year "long summer"—and entering Anthropocene (unknown and uncertain consequences).

- Planetary boundaries: (1) climate change; (2) ocean acidification; (3) overuse of freshwater resources; (4) land-use changes; (5) interference with the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles (caused mainly by fertilizers); (6) ozone depletion; (7) chemical pollution; (8) airborne pollution from burning fossil fuels; (9) a rapid loss of biodiversity.
- LS: ““Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years.” He discusses these problems.
  - Pollution = earth is looking like “an immense pile of filth.”
  - Climate change: affirms “solid scientific consensus” that earth is warming, mainly due to human activity (intense use of fossil fuels).
  - Land use changes: deforestation (rain forests) in Amazon, Congo, Indonesian archipelago.
  - Ocean acidification.
  - Water – safe drinking water a universal human right (condition for exercise of other rights). But stress on both quantity plus quality.
  - Loss of biodiversity – destruction of web of life: “Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.” Ecosystems sustain us: “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another” (endows scientific reality with moral meaning).
- Also the “boundaries of exclusion”: extreme poverty (can’t make basic needs) still about 800 million (equivalent undernourished). 6 million children die each year before 5<sup>th</sup> birthday (almost every one treatable and preventable). Oxfam: 62 people own as much wealth as half world population. 200 million unemployed.
- Note: a lot better since before industrial revolution (life was nasty, brutish, and short). 1800: 95 percent below poverty line (not 10 percent), life expectancy 35 (now 75). But: came from energy powered by fossil fuels, and is compatible with vast inequality and injustice. Leads to violence, social breakdown, criminality, drug use, and a loss of identity (Pope Francis).

#### *Drill down on climate change*

- Carbon dioxide concentration in atmosphere: past 400 ppm (3 million years, 7 degrees warmer, 6 meters higher). For 800,000 years, between 150 and 280.
- Warmed by over 1 degree already – could by 4-6 degrees (game over).
- Already seeing record droughts, floods, fires, severe weather – not reported!

- The dry areas: Darfur, Sahel, Russian food prices and Arab Spring (55,000 died in Russia). Syria (75 percent of farmers lost crops/ 85 percent of herders lost livestock/ 1.5 million displaced (plus another 1.5 million from Iraq). Christians and Muslims in Sahel.
- The people who contribute least hit hardest. Bottom 3 billion, 6 percent of emissions. 85 percent from top 2.5 billion. US: 17 tons per person (7 in China and EU). Cardinal Bo: “criminal genocide.”
- Effects:
  - Worse than two world wars and Great Depression combined (Stern).
  - 100 million in extreme poverty by 2030.
  - Greatest public health crisis of 21<sup>st</sup> century.
  - Africa crop yields down 50 percent.
  - Deaths (400,000-700,000) Or 5 million – 6 million (90 percent developing). Really hard to measure, probably more.

### **Diagnosis of Laudato Si'**

- LS: Deep **connection** between human beings and natural world and among human beings themselves (give rise to ethical responsibility). But modern ideologies lead to **disconnection**. Answer is **reconnection**.

#### *Connection*

- “Everything is connected” = all living reality is part of a complex physical, chemical, and biological network. Humans: “we are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it.”
- Integral ecology: relationship between human beings and the natural world is interconnected, inseparable, and part of a larger whole. Human life defined by 3 relationships (God, man, earth), and when one broken, others broken. Cain and Abel.
- Also connections among people. Ancients – we are social animals, finding fulfillment in social context. Modern evidence – flourishing depends not on money but on relationships and sense of purpose. Happiness studies: social engagement and support key. “Positive psychology” = relationships, engagement, meaning and purpose, and accomplishments and achievements. Life only makes sense on context of community. African proverb: “I am because we are and because we are, therefore I am”.

- Not just social animals but moral animals: evidence of altruism/ pro-social norms. Seek cooperation for mutual benefit - reward trust and kindness and punish cheating and callousness (even at a personal cost). Evolution = groups excelling at cooperating and upholding moral norms did well.

### *Disconnection*

- Technocratic paradigm: all economic intervention assessed solely in terms of utility, productivity, efficiency. Turn means into ends (narrows ethical horizon). Focus on unlimited growth (no heed to limits of this). For business, only “value” is financial value.
- Exalts human power – logic of “possession, mastery, and manipulation.” Modern anthropocentrism, Promethean vision of mastery – unrestrained profit seeking and power (economic, political, technological). Conflict, not cooperation (among humans and with nature – think Saruman). LS: ““immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience”. Cardinal Oscar: man is technical giant, but ethical child.
- Practical relativism = everything irrelevant unless serves immediate interests. Treat people and things as objects to be taken advantage of. Self-centeredness, self-absorption, self-centered culture of instant gratification.
- Manifestations: forced labor, modern forms of slavery, abortion, the sexual exploitation of children, the abandonment of the elderly, human trafficking, the sale of organs, organized crime, the drug trade, and commerce in blood diamonds and endangered species. Also: disordered desire to consume more than necessary, putting faith in “invisible forces of the market” (treating fallout on people and planet as acceptable collateral damage).
- Throwaway culture: people and things used to satisfy gratification and discarded when no further use. Leads to economy of exclusion – excluded not even part of society: outcast, leftovers, collateral damage. Don’t have the right to have rights (Gustavo Gutierrez). And debris, desolation, filth.
- Where does this come from? “Myths of modernity” = individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, unregulated market.
- Old idea: people sought the good life, holistic human flourishing, living in accord with what is intrinsically worthwhile (purpose, relationship, community contribution). Necessary condition: exercise virtues in line with excellence (so moral development). So in harmony with true nature of person!

- Only attain good life by contributing to, and benefitting from, the good of the community (social animals). Common good (GS): “sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.” The good of shared social life not divisible into sum of individual goods. And climate/ environment essential part of common good.
- Enlightenment: no common good, only individuals with individual purposes driven by human power. Use of science to gain knowledge and control of nature; individual freedom exalted for own sake (disconnected from common good). Root of technocratic paradigm and cult of individualism!
- This relates to how Pope Francis sees the market. Detour into neoclassical economics: self-interested people maximize satisfaction of subjective material preferences. And markets good extent they exhaust all voluntary trades – can’t make somebody better off without making somebody else worse off. Break it down:
  - Egoism, not altruism.
  - Material – consumer goods/ services. No value to relationship, meaning/ purpose, development in broader dimensions.
  - Subjective: preferences sacrosanct. No moral improvement, cultivation.
  - Competition, not cooperation.
  - Sen: economy or society can be Pareto optimal and perfectly disgusting.
- In essence, market is just exchange for mutual benefit. Can be based on cooperation, reciprocity, fraternity (Caritas in Veritate). Problem is ideology – deified market/ magical conception of market/ seedbed for collective selfishness.
- Instead of “invisible hand”, Pope Francis sees “invisible thread” linking all forms of exclusion—a system that “has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature.”
- Even deeper: inculcates bad habits – tell people to be selfish, greedy, materialistic – they will! Social norms are malleable. Evidence on economic students, bankers, business schools and criminality. Crowds out pro-social behavior. Good society replaced by goods society. “Purpose” is consumerist mentality without acquisitive ceiling.
- Inequality reinforces corruption of social norms by severing sense of shared purpose necessary for common good (Plato, Aristotle, US founders). Inequality reduces trust, social cohesion, behind social ills. And evidence:

rich less empathy, less generous, more likely to lie or cheat. Why? More wealth plus greater distance meant they view self-interest and greed as virtuous. Reinforces market ideology. "Root of social ills."

- As a result, "Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own...the culture of prosperity deadens us."
- Bottom line: "Let us say NO to an economy of exclusion and inequality, where money rules, rather than serves. That economy kills. That economy excludes. That economy destroys Mother Earth."

### *Reconnection*

- Pope Francis's call for structural change: "let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change. This system is by now intolerable: farm workers find it intolerable, laborers find it intolerable, communities find it intolerable, peoples find it intolerable ... The earth itself – our sister, Mother Earth, as Saint Francis would say – also finds it intolerable."
- Need reconnection to each other and to creation. Calls for a new type of progress: one that is "healthier, more human, more social, more integral". What that means: integral and sustainable human development.
  - *Integral*: good of whole person and every person. Let all people flourish across all dimensions. Pope Francis: "live well", so that all people are able to "find meaning, a destiny, and to live with dignity." Especially through work: "a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment."
  - *Sustainable*: Pope Francis: economic, social, environmental pillars. Pope Francis: "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."
- This means respecting the rights of the poor and the rights of the environment "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor":
  - *Rights of the poor*: Universal destination of goods—right to private property never absolute, but comes with "social mortgage". "Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. It is about giving to the

poor and to peoples what is theirs by right. The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church's social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples."

- *Rights of the environment:* (1) Human beings are part of nature and inseparable from it, so harming nature harms human beings; (2) "every creature, particularly a living creature, has an intrinsic value, in its existence, its life, its beauty and its interdependence with other creatures."
- How do we do this? Renewed orientation to the common good, animated by virtue of solidarity (a habit). Common good is "central and unifying principle of social ethics" entailing "a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters."
- And solidarity is "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because *we are all really responsible for all.*" For Pope Francis:
  - Across space, especially the poor – "a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters" - "must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them". Also an ethical response to globalization (reflects interdependence).
  - Across time: legacy from past and loan from future (Hamilton: *Legacy. What is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see.*);
  - Even across species.
- Since problems come from misguided mindsets, flawed values, and corrupted norms of behavior, we need transformative change. "Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life." (LS 202).
- Virtue can be infectious—the good habits of one person can encourage good habits in others, which can in turn mold better social norms—they "call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread." So ecological citizenship and ecological education—reconnect us to each other and the earth.
- But self-improvement and individual action not enough: "self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today." Need institutional conversion.

- Global problems require global solution. Need “one world with a common plan” for areas of global commons. SDGs (guide to policy through 2030, and Paris Agreement (reduce emissions by 80 percent by 2050 and zero by 2070).
- Implementation at the domestic level. Decarbonization: (i) energy efficiency; (ii) make electricity carbon free; (iii) fuel switching. We have the technology: 90 percent of new electricity generation in 2015 was in renewables. In US, more jobs than either coal or oil/ gas production.
- And also solidarity with the poorer countries – help pay “ecological debt” for energy transition and help them cope with the effects of climate change already built in.
- But here are the problems with politics and economics, under sway of technocratic paradigm—narrow horizon (short-termism); narrow focus (profits and economic growth); narrow interests (selfishness).

<p>Global GDP: \$100 trillion  Global poverty gap: \$300-\$400 billion  Cost of saving 5 million lives: \$40 billion  Cost of universal education: \$40 billion  Cost of solving climate change: \$1 trillion  Cost of providing renewable energy to bottom 3 billion: \$250 billion  Energy subsidies: \$5.3 trillion  Annual military spending: \$1.5 - \$2 trillion  Global wealth of billionaires: \$7.1 trillion  Money in tax havens: \$20-\$30 trillion  Pay of top 10 hedge fund CEOs: \$10 billion</p>
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- The sway of vested interests: “There are too many special interests and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected”. “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” (LS 26).
- Myron Ebell: Laudato Si’ “is, in general, scientifically ill-informed, economically illiterate, intellectually incoherent, and morally obtuse. It is also theologically suspect, and large parts of it are leftist drivel, albeit couched in the vocabulary of Catholic social teaching.”

- *Business*: maximizing profits/ shareholder value. How they treat developing countries—the “ecological debt”. Needs orientation to common good—good goods, good work, good wealth. Pope Francis—less on profits, more on employment and sustainability (not waste of money). “Noble vocation” if focus on common good.
- Nudging politics and business away from technocratic paradigm and cult of individualism toward common good? Role of civil society, including religions – counteract forces of inertia, indifference, and ideology LS: “draw public attention to these issues and offer critical cooperation, *employing legitimate means of pressure*” (LS 38).
- Organizing politically and “power of wallet”—induce companies to act more responsibly. Consumer boycotts can change the way businesses operate, “forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production” (LS 206). Anti-apartheid and civil rights. Fossil fuel divestment—sound financial and sound moral strategy (\$20 trillion/ 80 percent of fossil fuel reserves in ground).
- Overall, need leadership, education, role models, positive reinforcement, negative “naming and shaming”, a vigorous civil society, and quality public discourse and deliberation. And religions must stand on the front line.

## **Conclusion**

- Goal: a “cultural revolution” to realign economic progress with moral progress, to replace political lack of courage with moral courage.
- Pope Francis: “the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize.” Active agents of own development.
- Replace a “globalization of indifference” with a “globalization of hope.”
- “God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. Praise be to him!”