



***Laudato Si'* theological imperatives to ecological action**

The wisdom of our tradition in caring for our common home

For Catholic parishioners, educators and the Archdiocese of Canberra

September 17th, 2022

Integration: Faith and Ecology



- The danger of faith and ecological practice running **separately** in our parishes, schools and throughout the Catholic system
- From a **system** perspective – ecological education as central to “Catholic identity” and to the God of Jesus Christ
- From the **personal** perspective--ecological conversion is not simply a matter of education about the science, or the facts
- It is a matter of **inner transformation** – it has to connect to one’s deepest self-understanding – the place of faith

The urgency of the crisis



- What is happening to our common home?
- Pollution and Climate Change
- Water
- Biodiversity
- Decline in quality of human life, breakdown of society and inequality
- The sense of urgency in the encyclical and in Francis's public actions

Imperative 1: Catholic Social Teaching



- Catholic Social Teaching began with Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891)
- Social justice, rights of workers, critique of unbridled capitalism, common good, work for peace
- More recently: preferential option for the poor
- *Laudato Si'* (2015): a **new moment** in Catholic social teaching
- Since the 1980's Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have made important contributions calling for ecological conversion



- But with this far more developed work protection of God's creation is now **formally**, and **permanently**, brought to the centre of Catholic social teaching
- “It is my hope that this encyclical, **which is now added to the body of the church's social teaching**, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face”. (*Laudato Si'*, 15)

Imperative 2: Intrinsic Value of Creation



- Creatures have **meaning and value** not simply because of their **use** to human beings, but **in themselves**
- They have **intrinsic value**
- Why?
- Because God is **present** to each of them (“There is a **mystical** meaning to be found in a leaf”)
- Because God **loves** each of them (“object of the Father’s tenderness”)
- Because each of them has a **future** in God (“each creature, resplendently transfigured”)

Imperative 3: Other Creatures Reveal God



- Each creature is a **word of God** to human beings
- Creation is a kind of **revelation**
- A **manifestation** of God
- A **book** of God alongside the book of the Scriptures
- Nature speaks a **word of love** to us – “Nature is filled with words of love” (225)
- 84. “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.”

Imperative 4: Sublime communion with other creatures

- 89. “This is the reason for our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by the one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of **universal family**, a **sublime communion** which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect.”
- 92. “**Everything is related**, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the **love God has for each of his creatures** and which also unites us in affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”
- 221. In this way, we will help nurture that **sublime fraternity with all creation** which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied.

Imperative 5: Human roots of ecological crisis

1. The technocratic paradigm

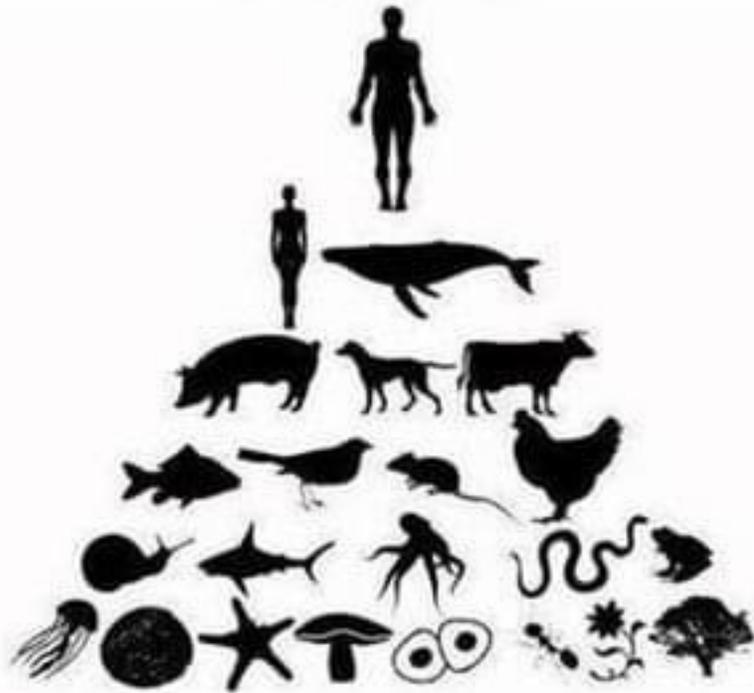
The power of the human; ever increasing progress; extractive view of nature; unlimited growth; reductionist view of knowledge; linked to unregulated market economics – Need for “liberation”; a “cultural revolution”; “another type of progress”; “non-consumerist model of life”; “co-operatives”; “technology that relieves suffering”.

2. The excessive anthropocentrism of modernity

An inadequate expression of Christian anthropology led to a “Promethean vision of mastery over the world”; “Independence” from nature; “Absolute dominion”; “Cry of nature is not heard”; Critique of anthropocentrism but not “biocentrism; Dignity of human beings; openness to others as “thou”; openness to the “Thou” of God.

Laudato Si' is a call to a shift in Worldview

EGO



ECO



THEO



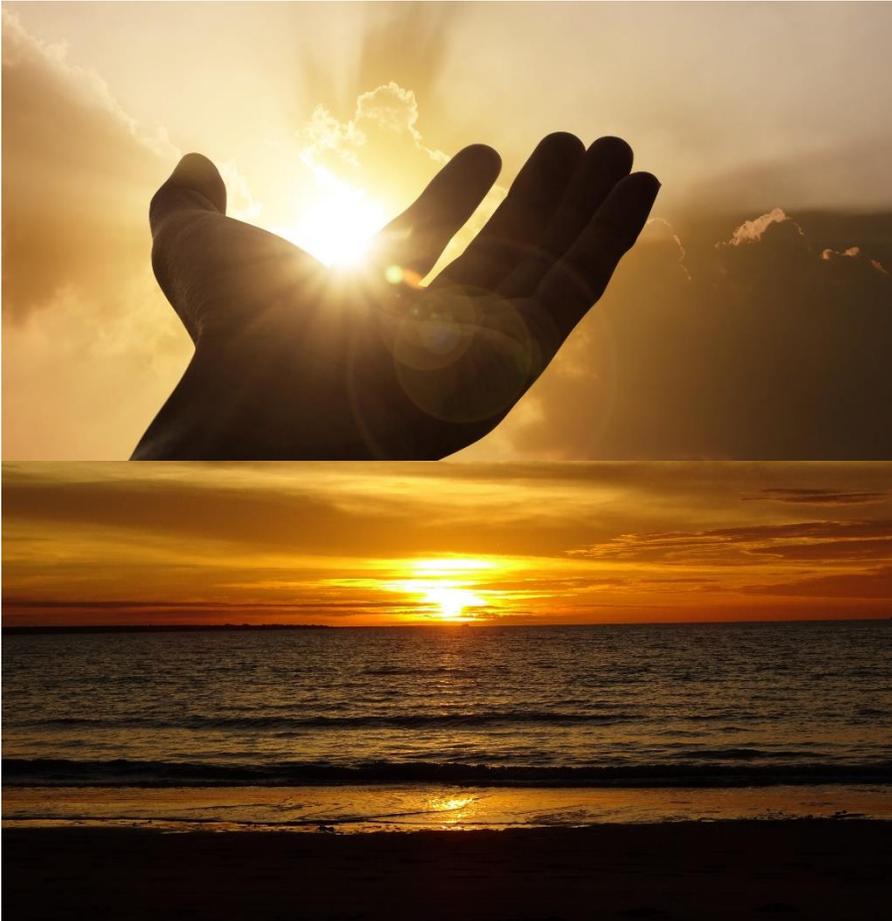
Imperative 6: Integral ecology



- 10. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of **care for the vulnerable** and of an **integral ecology** lived out joyfully and authentically.
- He was particularly concerned for **God’s creation** and for the **poor and outcast.**”
- 139. “We are faced not with **two** separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with **one complex crisis** which is both social and environmental.
- Strategies for a solution demand an **integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.**”
- 49. “to hear both the **cry of the earth** and the **cry of the poor**”

Imperative 7: Education to Wholeness

- 211. “There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through **little daily actions**, and it is wonderful how **education can bring about real changes in lifestyle**.
- Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as:
- Avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.
- All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings.
- Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be **an act of love** which expresses our own dignity.”



- 212. “We must **not** think that these efforts are not going to change the world.
- They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread.
- Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to **live more fully** and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.
- For example, the Vatican’s Laudato Si’ Action Platform (LSAP) is a coordinated initiative for everyone to take action in the catholic church.

Imperative 8: Ecological Conversion and Vocation

- 217. “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”.
- For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound **interior conversion**.
- It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment.
- Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent.
- So what they all need is an “**ecological conversion**”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.
- Living **our vocation** to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue;
- it is not an **optional** or a **secondary** aspect of our Christian experience.”

Imperative 9: Community Conversion

- 219. Nevertheless, self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today.
- Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset, and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness.
- Social problems must be addressed by **community networks** and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds.
- The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a **community conversion**.
- In May 2020, Pope Francis launched the 7 Laudato Si' Goals and in May 2021 the Laudato Si' Action Platform (LSAP) as a coordinated call for action for everyone in the catholic church: families, parishes, education (schools and universities), diocese, business & farms, consecrated women and men, church agencies and organisations.

Imperative 10: Inner Peace



- 225. “On the other hand, no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself.
- Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life.
- Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wracking distractions, or the cult of appearances?
- Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride roughshod over everything around them.”

Questions



1. What, for you, is the central imperative to act of *Laudato Si'*?
2. How can we see our communities better showing the interconnections between ecological education and Christian faith?
3. What action has priority in light of ecological conversion?