

Ecological Virtues in *Laudato Si'*

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1. Introduction

Laudato Si', Pope Francis' encyclical letter on care for our common home, has been widely hailed as a ground-breaking document. The Pope's invitation to "all people of good will" to radically reflect on humanity's disharmonious relationship with the very planetary home that hosts us along with millions of other forms of life, and radically change the destructive course of our current civilization, appear to have received a sympathetic and receptive hearing around the world. One of the significant contributions of the encyclical is the Pope's insistence on the cultivation of ecological virtues from the part of humanity for the responsible care of our common home. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis echoes the invitation from the Brazilian bishops for the cultivation of "ecological virtues" (National Conference of the Bishops of Brazil 1992, p. 61; see also: Pope Francis 2015a, par. 88)

According to Pope Francis, we will be able to protect and care for our common home only by learning to adopt radically new lifestyles, what he calls "new habits" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 209). The formation of healthy *habitus* for the stewardship of our common home can come only through the cultivation of appropriate "ecological virtues." According to the Pope, laws and regulations are insufficient in this regard and only the cultivation of sound ecological virtues can lead to a selfless ecological commitment. He writes:

The existence of laws and regulations is insufficient in the long run to curb bad conduct, even when effective means of enforcement are present. If the laws are to bring about significant, long-lasting effects, the majority of the members of society must be adequately motivated to accept them, and personally transformed to respond. Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 211).

In environmental ethics there is a growing awareness of the importance of the role of ecological virtues for the care of our common planetary home in the context of the contemporary ecological crisis. As Roland Sandler and Philip Cafaro write: "environmental virtues are the proper dispositions or character traits for human beings to have regarding their interactions and relationships with the environment" (Sandler 2005, p. 2). According to Mile Hulme, "practicing virtue can offer substantive, instrumental and normative benefits" for dealing with the challenges of climate change and

other ecological hazards (Hulme 2014, p. 304). It also befits the noblest part of our human nature. "It is right and good to be virtuous: virtue is indeed the true telos of Man" (Hulme 2014, p. 304). Ecologically virtuous actions can indeed bring out "the best in human beings" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 211) as Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*, and can significantly contribute to the safeguarding of our common home.

In this paper we shall discuss about the ecological virtues in *Laudato Si'*. The ecological virtues are not listed as such in the encyclical, but find repeated mention throughout the text. They are like signposts that indicate the road that we need to travel in caring for our common planetary home. We shall reflect at length on seven ecological virtues in the encyclical: praise, gratitude, care, justice, work, sobriety, and humility.

2. Praise

The very title of the encyclical is an invitation to praise the Creator. "*Laudato Si' mi' Signore*," "Praise be to you, my Lord", are the first lines of the Canticle of Creatures which was composed by St Francis of Assisi in the Umbrian dialect around 1225, the first vernacular Italian poem in history. Praise is a fundamental theme that runs throughout the encyclical and appears nearly thirty times in the text.

From a theological perspective, the very existence of creation, and of each and every creature, is to render glory and praise to God. Creation itself becomes an animate temple where the praise of God resounds (see: Brown 2006, pp. 38-39). The scriptures of various religious traditions, and the biblical tradition, in particular, abound in references to the unceasing hymn of praise of created realities for the Creator. The Christian scriptures are replete with references of creation's incessant liturgy of praise. As John Paul II reminded us in 1990, "the Bible speaks repeatedly of the goodness and beauty of creation, which is called to glorify God (cf. *Gen* 1:4ff; *Ps* 8:2; 104:1ff; *Wis* 13:3-5; *Sir* 39:16, 33; 43:1,9)" (Pope John Paul II 1990, no. 14).

The cosmic liturgy of praise is especially prevalent in the Psalms. The Psalms, as Pope Francis points out in *Laudato Si'*, "frequently exhort us to praise God the Creator, "who spread out the earth on the waters, for his steadfast love endures for ever" (*Ps* 136:6). (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 72) According to the Pope, "they also invite other creatures to join us in this praise: "Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created" (*Ps* 148:3-5)" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 72) In fact, the last of the Psalms ends inviting "every living creature to praise the Lord" (*Ps* 150: 6).

In the cosmic liturgy of praise, human beings, however, have a very special role. They are called not only to pray and sing along with all creation in

the cosmic liturgy but also to become the very voice of creation's praise of the Creator. It is the unique vocation of human beings to become the voice of the entire creation's unspoken worship of God. Leontius of Byzantium wrote in the ninth century: "the creation does not venerate the Maker directly and by itself, but it is through [us] that the heavens declare the glory of God, through [us] the moon worships God, through [us] the waters and showers of rain, the dew and all creation, venerate God and give glory to God" (Leontius of Byzantium 1865, p. 1604). Saint Francis of Assisi is a beautiful example in this regard. Pope Francis reminds us in the encyclical how Saint Francis broke out spontaneously into joyful praise before the beauty of creation:

Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them "to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason". (Thomas of Celano 1999, p. 251) His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 11).

We praise the Creator when we are able to recognize His very image reflected on the mirror of His creation. As the Pope writes in the encyclical, "when we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 87). It is such a sentiment that finds magnificent expression in Saint Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of Creatures". Pope Francis cites this beautiful and meticulously woven hymn of praise of the Creator for the wonders of His creation (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 87).

A fundamental problem of modern humans is their deafness to the cosmic symphony of praise that created realities continually raise to the Creator. We live in a world starved of wonder, which is the stepping stone to praise. As Francis Schaeffer has written: "The wonder is all gone. Man sits in his autonomous 'decreated' world, where there are no universals and no wonder in nature. Indeed, in an arrogant and egoistic way, nature has been reduced to a 'thing' for man to use or exploit" (Schaeffer 1970, p. 89). We suffer from what Thomas Berry has called a sort of 'cultural autism' which hinder us from hearing and listening to the voices of creation.

In the process we have become autistic. We have lost our capacity for communication with the natural world in its inner life, its spirit mode. We find ourselves illiterate as regards the languages of the natural world. We do not hear the voices of the trees, the rivers, the birds, the mountains, the animals, or the insects (Berry 2011, p. 12).

Today, in the face of the contemporary ecological crisis, we need to rediscover the sense of marvel and praise before the beauty of creation. As Pope Francis writes, “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 12). In “the contemplation of beauty” as the Pope notes, “a quantum leap occurs, resulting in a fulfilment which is uniquely human” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 103). We will save our common home only when we learn to see it with a deep sense of wonder that wells up in spontaneous praise of the Creator for all the marvels of creation.

3. Gratitude

Closely linked with praise is the ecological virtue of gratitude. Pope Francis notes that unfortunately today nature is usually seen only “as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 76). Gratitude springs up in our hearts when we accept “each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 226). The foundation of a grateful existence on Earth is the profound realization “that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 159). The Pope repeats later in the encyclical that the “recognition that the world is God’s loving gift” naturally “entails gratitude and gratuitousness” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 220).

A grateful outlook on the natural world has concrete implications in our dealing with created realities. As the Pope writes: “Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 159).

Pope Francis praises the indigenous communities for having preserved the original sense of gratitude for the gift of the land and of their bodies. He writes: “For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 146).

Gratitude is a virtue we are fast losing today and Pope Francis invites us to recover it. He suggests we recover the simple habit of praying in thankfulness before and after meals. We quote him:

One expression of this attitude is when we stop and give thanks to God before and after meals. I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 227).

The Eucharist is the greatest act of praise and gratitude that anyone can render to God. The verb *eucharisteo* in Greek means precisely to praise and to thank. In the Eucharist, the gift of creation, symbolized in the form of bread and wine, are lifted up in prayer and thanksgiving back to the very Creator. As the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew writes:

In the bread and wine of the Eucharist, as priests standing before the altar of the world, we offer the creation back to the Creator (...) We celebrate the beauty of creation and consecrate the life of the world, returning it to God with thanks. (...) we offer the fullness of creation at the Eucharist, and receive it back as a blessing, as the living presence of God (Bartholomew I 2009e, 188).

Every Eucharist is a thanksgiving memorial, an anamnesis of God's stupendous work in creation as well as in redemption. As Louis Bouyer has pointed out, the early Christian eucharistic prayers, themselves modelled on Jewish prayer forms used in synagogues and especially in homes, and above all in the Passover meal, always began with a blessing of the gifts of creation, remembering and thanking God for his great works in creation and in salvation (Bouyer 1956, pp. 15-28). The orthodox theologian John Zizioulas, the Metropolitan of Pergamon, has shown how all the ancient eucharistic liturgies began with thanksgiving for creation and then continued with thanksgiving for redemption in Christ, and all of them were centred on the lifting up of the gifts of creation to the Creator (Zizioulas 1989, p. 4).

The Eucharist is indeed a cosmic act of gratitude and worship. As Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*: "Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 236). In this regard, Brandon Gallaher points out: "The living symbol of a humble and grateful way of life is the Eucharist. In the form of bread and wine, humanity offers back to God what is God's own and time and space are sanctified" (Gallaher 2015, p. 13).

As priests of creation, human beings are also called to live the *eucharistic ethos*: "using the earth's natural resources with thankfulness, offering them back to God" (Bartholomew I 2009b, p. 44). The gift (*doron*, in Greek) of creation, when offered back to the Creator in thanksgiving becomes a gift in return (*antidoron*, in Greek). "Nature is the *doron* of the Triune God to humankind. The *antidoron* of humankind to its Maker and Father is the respect of this gift, the preservation of creation, as well as its fruitful and careful use" (Bartholomew I 2009d, pp. 179-180). It also means sharing the gifts of creation generously with one's fellow brothers and sisters.

The contemporary ecological crisis exposes our inability to lift up creation and created goods in praise and thanksgiving. Our abuse of creation and created goods ultimately reveal our ingratitude to the Creator. The ecological crisis exposes our incapacity to live the eucharistic ethos. We not

only take the abundant gifts of creation for granted, but we also fail to share them with our fellow men and women, especially with the needy, in a spirit of communion (*koinonia*). We stand in need of living our lives gratefully on Earth, in the Eucharistic way, giving thanks to God for the gift of creation and sharing it generously with others.

4. Care

Care is another important ecological virtue of *Laudato Si'*. In fact, the encyclical carries the subtitle: *on "care" for our common home*. According to Pope Francis, the "ecological conversion" needed in the face of the crisis of our common home "calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 220). To care is authentically human and authentically Christian. As Jon M. Sweeney points out, "care is an essential human capacity, a virtue requiring action," deeply rooted in the Gospel Beatitudes and Christian humanism (Sweeney 2015, p. 4).

In caring for our common home and for the weaker members of our common household, we are indeed imitating God's own loving, tender care towards all creatures. As Pope Francis writes in the encyclical, "every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 77). We are called, as the Pope indicates, to "cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 14).

In being co-carers of God's creation, humans imitate and reflect God's own tender and loving way of caring for the physical world. Reflecting God in caring for creation is fundamental to what humans are. It is our clear job description in the Bible (Bookless 2008, p. 90). It is here, in fact, that humans reveal their specific identity of being created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). As Mark Bredin points out, "the essence of being made in the image of God is to care for creation as God cares and nourishes" (2008, p. 85). Fashioned in the image and likeness of God, the human being is expected to tend creation with the same care and compassion of God. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowen Williams, writes: "Genesis tells us that when we are called to relationship with our creator, we are in the same moment summoned to responsibility for the non-human world. That's how we express our relationship with the creator, our reality as made in God's image" (Williams 2009, p. 10).

As Pope Francis points out in the encyclical, care is ultimately founded on our universal fraternity as sons and daughters of a common heavenly Father and our cosmic fellowship with the rest of the created world.

Jesus reminded us that we have God as our common Father and that this makes us brothers and sisters. Fraternal love can only be gratuitous; it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us. That is why it is possible to love our enemies. This same gratuitousness inspires us to love and accept the wind, the sun and the clouds, even though we cannot control them. In this sense, we can speak of a “universal fraternity” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 228).

An ethics of care is rooted in a specific view of the world as a network of relationships. Pope Francis writes that “we must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 229). In fact, the basic “awareness of the connection between people gives rise to recognition of a responsibility for one another” (Gilligan 1982, p. 30). Pope Francis writes in the encyclical: “disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 208). He proposes some outstanding models from the Christian tradition in this regard. First among them is Saint Francis of Assisi whom the Pope cites already in the Preamble to the encyclical as the example par excellence of care. We quote him:

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. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 10).

According to Pope Francis what really moved Saint Francis to care for all creatures was his realization of oneness with them. The Pope writes: “for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. (...) His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, ‘from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’” (Francis of Assisi 2000, p. 590; see also: Pope Francis 2015a, par. 11). The Pope continues, “such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 11). He goes on to write how a caring attitude is the natural outcome of such an approach.

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, 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 (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 11).

In the encyclical, Pope Francis proposes also other models of care. Saint Therese of Lisieux, for example, “invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 230). The Pope insists on such ‘little’ steps to care for our broken world. According to him, “an integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 230).

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis speaks also of communitarian forms of care. He writes, care is “also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 231). Care can indeed create a civilization of love on Earth. For the Pope, care is nothing but the social expression of love or Christian charity. He writes drawing abundantly from Catholic social teachings:

Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also “macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones” (Pope Benedict XVI 2009, p. 642). That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a “civilization of love” (Pope Paul VI 1976, p. 709). Social love is the key to authentic development: “In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2004, p. 582). In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 231).

Pope Francis insists that to care for the natural world and for society at large, and for the weaker sections in particular, “is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us” (231) The Pope writes:

In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 232).

According to Pope Francis, the perfect model of care is Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus. She now “cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 241). Pope Francis mentions in this regard also Saint Joseph who through his work and generous presence, cared for and defended Mary and Jesus, and who is also the custodian of the universal Church. “He too can teach us how to show care; he can inspire us to work with generosity and tenderness in protecting this world which God has entrusted to us” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 242).

5. Justice

Justice becomes an important ecological virtue in the context of the great inequalities that co-exist with and largely contribute to the crisis of our common home. The foundation for eco-justice is the common destination of all material goods, namely, that created goods belong to all. Pope Francis writes:

Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 93).

However, though “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity (...) twenty percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive” (New Zealand Bishops Conference 2006; see also: Pope Francis 2015a, par. 95). According to the Pope, “this vision of ‘might is right’ has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 82). The Pope points out that such a situation is “completely at odds” with “the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 82).

The contemporary ecological crisis becomes an epitome of injustice on account of the tragic truth that is caused largely by the rich and affluent but its disproportionate victims are the poor and vulnerable (see: Kurethaadam 2014, pp. 254-257). As the impacts of the crisis on human communities become increasingly evident, it is also becoming clear how “disparities in the distribution of damages between rich and poor nations mount” (Srinivasan *et al.* 2008, p. 1768). Even today, rich countries like the USA, Canada, those in Western Europe, Japan, Australia, etc. contribute many times more greenhouse gases per capita than poor countries but will experience much less of the

fallout. In contrast it is the poorest countries and most vulnerable citizens who will suffer the earliest and most damaging setbacks from impacts of contemporary ecological crisis – from pollution to increased exposure to droughts, floods, storms, and sea-level rise (Sze & London 2008, pp. 1342-1343).

While the ecological crisis affects our common home and its common household, its deleterious impacts will befall mainly on the poor and the most vulnerable sections of our society. The ecological crisis is brewed within the crucible of inequality. The injustices brewed by the contemporary ecological crisis are conspicuously manifest in the case of climate change, the greatest of the ecological challenges facing humanity. There is no dearth of assessments which emphasise the fact that the impacts of climate change are falling first and most heavily on the ‘poorest and most vulnerable people around the world’ (Cuomo 2011, p. 693). We quote Chris J. Cuomo in this regard:

Climate change was manufactured in a crucible of inequality, for it is a product of the industrial and the fossil-fuel eras, historical forces powered by exploitation, colonialism, and nearly limitless instrumental use of ‘nature’. The world’s wealthiest nations, and the privileged elite and industry-owning sectors of nearly of all nations, have built fortunes and long-term economic stability on decades of unchecked development and energy consumption. By dumping harmful waste into the common atmosphere we have endangered everyone, including those who have contributed little or nothing at all to the industrial greenhouse effect: the ‘least developed’ nations, the natural world, and future generations (Cuomo 2011, p. 693).

Robert Henson expresses well the tragic irony of an ecological problem like climate change that will affect the poor most, yet they have contributed least to its underlying causes.

If all that global warming did was to make life a bit steamier for the people who consume the most fossil fuels, then there’d be a karmic neatness to it. Alas, climate change doesn’t keep its multitude of effects so nicely focused. A warming planet is liable to produce a cascade of repercussions for millions of people who have never started up a car or taken a cross-country flight (Henson 2006, p. 139).

The contemporary ecological crisis reveals a profound situation of injustice in which the lifestyles of the minority affluent societies are threatening the very livelihoods of the more vulnerable populations of our common household. Justice demands paying back debts incurred. As Caritas Internationalis points out, the developed world has borrowed from the development potential of poorer countries and these ‘loans’ must be repaid (Caritas Internationalis 2009, p. 4). In the context of the contemporary ecological crisis what we need today is not so much philanthropy but justice for

the poor. Pope Francis writes in the encyclical, citing Pope Benedict, “only when ‘the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations,’ (Pope Benedict XVI 2009, p. 686) can those actions be considered ethical” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 195).

The contemporary ecological crisis is ultimately about justice. It is about justice between communities of the same human generation (intra-generational) and between current and future generations (inter-generational). As Pope Francis writes in the encyclical, “We can be silent witnesses to terrible injustices if we think that we can obtain significant benefits by making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay the extremely high costs of environmental deterioration” (2015, par. 36).

Eco-justice is primarily about concern for the poor and vulnerable members of our common household, “whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 162). Hence, there is “an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of intragenerational solidarity” (Pope Benedict XVI 2010, p. 45; see also: Pope Francis 2015a, par. 162). Eco-justice demands that the right to development of poor and the question of poverty alleviation be placed at the heart of a true moral response to the contemporary ecological crisis. Again Pope Francis writes, “We need to reflect on our accountability before those who will have to endure the dire consequences” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 161).

Eco-justice is also inter-generational. According to Pope Francis, “our inability to think seriously about future generations is linked to our inability to broaden the scope of our present interests and to give consideration to those who remain excluded from development” (2015, par. 162). Intergenerational solidarity is ultimately a question of justice.

Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: “The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next” (Portuguese Bishops Conference 2003, p. 20). An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 159).

The care for our imperilled common home requires that we become passionate agents of eco-justice. As Pope Francis notes in the encyclical, the faith that sustains us in our struggle for justice is that the “God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil. Injustice is not invincible” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 74).

6. Work

The down-to-earth character of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on care for our common home, is most evident in the ecological virtue of work. As the Pope writes: "Any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour, as Saint John Paul II wisely noted in his Encyclical *Laborem Exercens*" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 124). Significantly, Pope Francis dedicates a number of paragraphs in the encyclical to the theme of work and the dignity of human labour.

In the overall context of caring for our common home in peril, Pope Francis understands human work to be collaborating with God's handiwork of creation. He writes:

According to the biblical account of creation, God placed man and woman in the garden he had created (cf. Gen 2:15) not only to preserve it ("keep") but also to make it fruitful ("till"). Labourers and craftsmen thus "maintain the fabric of the world" (Sir 38:34). Developing the created world in a prudent way is the best way of caring for it, as this means that we ourselves become the instrument used by God to bring out the potential which he himself inscribed in things (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 124).

We read in the creation narratives in the opening chapters of the Bible that the stewardship of creation is the first and primary task entrusted to Adam, the first human being (see: Kurethaadam 2014, pp. 329-331). It is the very first commandment given to humanity. In the Yahwistic account of creation in the Book of Genesis, which predates the Priestly account by a few hundred years, the creation of Adam out of dust from the ground, and the task of cultivating the garden where he is collocated, are intimately connected. The creation of Adam itself is closely associated with the task of taking care of the garden. The earthly garden is prepared by Yahweh and the first human being, also formed out of clay, is placed there to cultivate it and guard it (Gen 2:15). In a wider sense, the garden entrusted to humanity is the *oikos* of the planet Earth, a veritable garden in the vast cosmic expanses, which was gradually prepared for life to flourish. It is the stewardship of this common home, lovingly prepared by God as an abode for humanity and the rest of creation, that humanity is entrusted with.

An important characteristic of the theme of stewardship in the Book of Genesis is that humans are called to be co-carers of creation along with God. God is already caring for His creation. Humans need only to assist Him, to partake of God's stewardship of the world. As the ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew I reminds us: "God has not allowed humanity to be a mere spectator or an irresponsible consumer of the world and of all that is in the world. Indeed, humanity has been called to assume the task of being primarily a partaker and a sharer in the responsibility for everything in the created world" (Bartholomew I 2009a, p. 39). Here human work finds its noblest ideal as

partaking in God's own work to maintain our common home. According to Pope Francis, we become virtuous to the extent that we live out our human vocation to protect creation. The Pope writes: "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" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 217).

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis speaks of how Jesus worked with his hands and notes how most of his life was spent in ordinary work. Jesus thus sanctified human labour and our humble efforts to be good stewards all of God's creation. We quote a beautiful paragraph from the encyclical here:

Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mk 6:3). In this way he sanctified human labour and endowed it with a special significance for our development (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 98).

In the encyclical, Pope Francis points out how the Christian tradition has "developed a rich and balanced understanding of the meaning of work" and cites also recent examples like Blessed Charles de Foucauld (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 125). The Pope makes a special reference to the millennia long Christian monastic tradition. The monastic spiritual intuition concerning work is particularly relevant today in the care of our common home.

We can also look to the great tradition of monasticism. Originally, it was a kind of flight from the world, an escape from the decadence of the cities. The monks sought the desert, convinced that it was the best place for encountering the presence of God. Later, Saint Benedict of Norcia proposed that his monks live in community, combining prayer and spiritual reading with manual labour (*ora et labora*). Seeing manual labour as spiritually meaningful proved revolutionary. Personal growth and sanctification came to be sought in the interplay of recollection and work. This way of experiencing work makes us more protective and respectful of the environment; it imbues our relationship to the world with a healthy sobriety (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 126).

Pope Francis offers some profound reflections on human labour in the encyclical. He points out that a proper relationship between human beings and the natural world around us requires "a correct understanding of work" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 125). He proposes a rather holistic understanding of work. According to him, "This has to do not only with manual or agricultural labour but with any activity involving a modification of existing reality, from producing a social report to the design of a technological development" (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 125). Further on he states that "work is a necessity, part of the

meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 128). Work is the noble sphere for the personal growth of all human beings and their relationships at all levels. We quote the Pope in this regard:

We need to remember that men and women have “the capacity to improve their lot, to further their moral growth and to develop their spiritual endowments” (Pope Paul VI 1967, p. 274). 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 (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 127).

According to the Pope, “we were created with a vocation to work” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 128). Therefore “the goal should not be that technological progress increasingly replace human work, for this would be detrimental to humanity” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 128). It is important therefore to guarantee people, especially on the part of those in authority, “a dignified life through work” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 128). The Pope is critical of the current economic systems which often do not recognize the dignity of human labour and generate high rates of unemployment as they are more concerned about technological progress and accumulation of capital. According to him, “To stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 128). Based on the dignity of human labour and everyone’s right to work, Pope Francis raises his voice in defence of employment. Quoting Pope Benedict XVI in this regard, he affirms, “it is essential that ‘we continue to prioritize the goal of access to steady employment for everyone’ (Pope Paul VI 1967, p. 274), no matter the limited interests of business and dubious economic reasoning” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 127).

Laudato Si’ has been hailed as an ecological and social encyclical at the same time. Pope Francis’ profound reflections on the dignity of human labour as a means to care for our common home and for the members of our common household certainly appear to support such a claim.

7. Sobriety

Today our common home is crumbling because of unbridled consumption on the part of the rich minority. It is not the mass of poor people that destroys the planet, but the consumption of the rich. In fact, we live in a very ironical situation today with the rich overconsuming and the poor struggling to make ends meet. Pope Francis states forthrightly in this regard: “We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much

waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 90). Pope Francis re-echoes here a critique which was already raised by Pope John Paul II in his 1990 *Message on ecological stewardship*. Pope John Paul II wrote:

It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness – both individual and collective – are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence (Pope John Paul II 1990, no. 8).

When our planetary home is on the brink of collapse because of overconsumption of the natural resources, it is important to rediscover sobriety in our lifestyles. Unfortunately, in today’s world, as Pope Francis points out in *Laudato Si'*, we lack “a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 105). He is critical of schemes like the trading of “carbon credits” to reduce the emission of polluting gases worldwide, because they only deal with the symptoms of the crisis. He writes: “This system seems to provide a quick and easy solution under the guise of a certain commitment to the environment, but in no way does it allow for the radical change which present circumstances require. Rather, it may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 171).

Pope Francis therefore calls for a “bold cultural revolution” of sobriety in our times. The ecological crisis demands that humanity effect a radical transition from affluence and wasteful abundance to sufficiency and moderation (On the concept of sufficiency as against overconsumption, see: Gorge et al. 2015, pp. 11-22). As K. C. Abraham writes:

While we cannot agree upon a uniform life-style, a conscious and judicious rejection of extravagant and wasteful use of natural resources should be priority and possibility for all. We need to put a limit to our needs. A slavish acceptance of all that the consumerist economy produces and what the market dictates would be contrary to ecologically responsible living (Abraham 1994, pp. 79-80).

An ecologically sustainable life-style calls for a certain degree of asceticism, the sure antidote for the ills of our consumerist society. It is a virtue totally eclipsed in our consumerist culture, which we need to re-discover, if we are to save our planetary home and defend the vulnerable members of our common human family. According to Pope Francis, it is when we are willing to

be ascetic that we can truly offer ourselves to God “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable” (Rom 12:1) (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 221).

Any radical and long-standing solution to the contemporary ecological crisis presupposes our willingness to alter extravagant life-styles. It is not an easy task. But there is no alternative. According to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, “a reduction of human consumption and the embrace of a life of simplicity are needed so that resources are preserved for future generations and the poorest” (Abraham 1994, pp. 79-80). We have no common future unless we save our planet and be willing to share its resources with our poorer brothers and sisters through a life-style of ecological sustainability. We recall in this regard the prophetic admonition of Pope John Paul II in the aforementioned 1990 *Message*.

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its life style. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause. As I have already stated, the seriousness of the ecological issue lays bare the depth of man's moral crisis. If an appreciation of the value of the human person and of human life is lacking, we will also lose interest in others and in the earth itself. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few (Pope John Paul II 1990, no. 14).

Pope Francis asks for limits to be put on growth, or that there be even decreased growth in the rich and developed world, going against the current myth of infinite economic growth. He writes: “We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 193).

The invitation to tread gently on Earth through the adoption of a sober and simple lifestyle is at the core of Christian spirituality. Pope Francis writes in this regard:

Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more”. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of

understanding and personal fulfilment (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 222).

As Pope Francis points out, “Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 223). According to the Pope, “happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 223). Sobriety, according to Pope Francis, is to see the world with the eyes of God and from the vantage point of the poor and needs to become a basic lifestyle. He told the Roman Curia officials in his 2015 customary Christmas address:

Sobriety (...) is the ability to renounce what is superfluous and to resist the dominant consumerist mentality. Sobriety is prudence, simplicity, straightforwardness, balance and temperance. Sobriety is seeing the world through God’s eyes and from the side of the poor. Sobriety is a style of life which points to the primacy of others as a hierarchical principle and is shown in a life of concern and service towards others. The sober person is consistent and straightforward in all things, because he or she can reduce, recover, recycle, repair, and live a life of moderation (Pope Francis 2015b, no. 12).

Today, in the context of the contemporary ecological crisis, we need to challenge our current mind-set and our profligate consumerist life styles, if we are to save our home planet for ourselves and for future generations. It is time to recover the wise traditions of humanity that greatly value the virtues of sufficiency, moderation and contentment. It is in returning to a simple life-style that we return to the lap of mother Earth, who has sufficient for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed, as Mahatma Gandhi used to say. Only a lifestyle of sobriety can save our common planetary home wrecked by our reckless consumerist life styles.

8. Humility

Humility is the mother of all ecological virtues. Pope Francis notes that “sobriety and humility were not favourably regarded in the last century. And yet, when there is a general breakdown in the exercise of a certain virtue in personal and social life, it ends up causing a number of imbalances, including environmental ones” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 224). According to Pope Francis, lack of humility leads to mindless domination over the planet.

Once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment. It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider our selves autonomous, when we exclude God from our

lives or replace him with our own ego, and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 224).

The contemporary ecological crisis stems ultimately from our refusal to recognize our humble self-identity as creatures. It is the sin of human hubris which lies, in fact, at the root of our irresponsible stewardship of God's creation and of our common household. As Michael S. Northcott rightly notes, the contemporary ecological crisis results ultimately from our refusal to see ourselves as creatures. "At the heart of the pathology of ecological crisis is the refusal of modern humans to see themselves as creatures, contingently embedded in networks of relationships with other creatures, and with the Creator" (Northcott 2007, pp. 14, 5, 16).

The ecological crisis results from our negation of our radical dependence on the Creator, and the "refusal to accept limits placed upon humanity on account of its creaturely status" (McGrath 2002, p. 79). As the ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I points out: "The arrogant apostasy of humanity from its relationship with our divine Creator's creation is the deeper reason behind the presumptuous and improper exploitation of the ecological environment" (Bartholomew I 2009c, p. 169). Our current ecological predicament results from our stubborn refusal to accept any limit whatsoever – be it regarding the carrying capacity of the Earth in the case of the 'ecological footprint' of individuals, communities, and nations, or in the case of the 'carbon footprint' directly linked to climate change, as we have seen earlier. At a deeper level such a refusal is a rebellion against the very natural order of creation conferred on it by God, and a revolt ultimately against the very Creator. In fact, the refusal to accept any limit that arises from our creaturely status was the 'original' sin of humanity, as we read in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis. Such an arrogant posturing also masks the unbridled human desire to have dominion over all of creation, overruling God's exclusive lordship over His creation¹.

The classical Greeks described hubris precisely as 'the desire to become greater than the gods' (Euripides). The human defiance of God's lordship over creation and the human urge to usurp the power and privileges of the Creator is also evident in the narrative about the building of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1ff). As Alister McGrath points out: "It is a powerful symbol of the human refusal to accept limits – whether natural or ordained – and to quest for domination and transformation. It is in the birth of this mind-set that the true roots of our ecological crisis lie" (McGrath 2002, p. 79). Our kingly role over creation, conferred on us in total gratuity in spite of our absolute insignificance

¹ According to Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* is precisely an invitation to recognize and embrace our home planet's natural limits (see: Williams 2015, pp. 13–15).

– as poignantly expressed in Psalm 8 – cannot be exercised “on our own but only in dependence on our Lord, the Creator, Sustainer, Saviour God” (Bookless 2008, p. 95). We are *imago Dei*, and not our own images. Pope Benedict XVI writes in this regard: “The first step towards a correct relationship with the world around us is the recognition by humans of their status as created beings. Man is not God; he is His image” (Pope Benedict XVI 2011).

The contemporary ecological crisis reveals how we have denied our creaturely identity as *imago mundi* – created like every other creature from the dust of the Earth, from humus, the etymological root of the term humility. Today we need to rediscover our self-identity as *imago mundi*, created from the dust of the Earth. Our creaturely identity as *imago mundi* and our intimate fellowship and consequent inter-dependence with the rest of creation is clearly evident in the first pages of the Bible, especially in the older Yahwist narrative of creation. The very name Adam is from the Hebrew *adamah*, meaning literally ‘earth’ or ‘soil’. So we are basically ‘earthlings’, we are creatures of the earth, with feet of clay (Bookless 2008, pp. 31-32). An awareness of our ‘earthly’ origin should enable us to regain an authentic sense of humility before the Creator and the rest of the created world. Significantly, *humilitas*, the Latin word for humility, literally means to be “grounded”. Such creaturely humility will indeed be a sure antidote for the hubris of modern anthropocentrism in which lie some of the main roots of our contemporary ecological crisis.

Pope Francis refers in the encyclical to Saint Joseph as a just man, hard-working and strong but who also shows great tenderness. The Pope then goes on to point out with insight that tenderness is “not a mark of the weak but of those who are genuinely strong”, of those who are “fully aware of reality and ready to love and serve in humility” (Pope Francis 2015a, par. 242). Our imperilled common home requires committed persons willing to serve in humility. Ecological humility is indeed vital for the salvation of Earth and of humanity today. As one of the Gospel beatitudes states: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth” (Mt 5:5).

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Ecological Virtues in Laudato Si'

Abstract: *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' recent encyclical on care for our common home, invites humanity to cultivate "ecological virtues" in order to become more responsible stewards of our imperilled common home. According to the Pope, the formation of healthy habitus for the stewardship of Earth can be achieved only through the cultivation of appropriate ecological virtues. It may be recalled that there is a growing awareness of the importance of the role of ecological virtues in environmental ethics today. In this paper we shall reflect on seven ecological virtues: praise, gratitude, care, justice, work, sobriety, and humility. They do not receive a separate treatment in *Laudato Si'*, but are mentioned throughout the encyclical. They are like signposts that indicate the road that we need to travel in caring for our common planetary home.

Keywords: ecological virtues, ecological crisis, stewardship, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis

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