

Laudato Si' and Ecological Conversion

By David Kane

“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.”

— Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (35)

Perhaps more than anything, *Laudato Si'* is a call for all people to transform their hearts and actions. “An awareness of the gravity of today’s cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits” (209).

On a personal level, Pope Francis describes the need for an “ecological conversion” whereby the effects of [our] encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in [our] relationship with the world around [us]” (217). It becomes ever clearer that “[l]iving 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”(217).

The sense of awe and reverence for creation modeled by Saint Francis is a vital aspect of an ecological conversion. We discover “a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion”(220).

Inspired to Act

Those who have experienced an ecological conversion tend to make significant changes in their lives, from

transforming their lifestyles to becoming more active in support of the common good .

In terms of lifestyle changes, Pope Francis describes various ways that people can tread more lightly on Earth, 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”(220).

While not enough on their own, Pope Francis reminds us that even these minimal acts are important and “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” (114).

Additionally, these changes in lifestyle can have larger societal impacts. As consumers, our changing lifestyles and demands can help improve business practices by “bring[ing] healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic, and social power. This is what consumer movements accomplish by boycotting certain products. They prove successful in changing the way businesses operate, forcing them to consider their environmental footprint and their patterns of production. When social pressure affects their earnings, businesses clearly have to find ways to produce differently. This shows us the great need for a sense of social responsibility on the part of consumers”(206).

REFLECTION

Action for the Common Good

Yet, Pope Francis is clear that individual actions are not enough. "Self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world today ... Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds" (219). "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"(208).

Fortified by our ecological conversion and deeper sense of connection with creation, we look for others to work together for the common good. Luckily we have the possibility of getting involved in a "countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban" (232).

But how exactly can we work for the common good? How can we participate in birthing an economy based on a deep appreciation for God's creation? What would an awe-inspired economy look like?

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever experienced an ecological conversion? If so, how has it changed you?
2. What changes have you made in your life to tread more lightly on Earth? What more could you do?
3. Which do you think is more important, simplifying your lifestyle or working for social change?

Take Action

1. Join the [Ignatian Carbon Challenge](https://igsol.net/iggy-carbon) (igsol.net/iggy-carbon) for opportunities to practice ecological conversion on an individual and structural level.
2. Join a local environmental group in your area. Global chapters exist for 350.org, and the [Sunrise Movement](#) has chapters specific to the United States. Get involved in a group to take action.
3. Sign a petition asking that your senators support the [International Climate Accountability Act](#) which directs the United States President to make a plan to meet emission standards set by the Paris Climate Agreement. Send a message to your senator today at igsol.net/carbon-emissions.

Prayer

Creator God, help us to experience ecological conversion in our lives. Help us put into practice individual ways that we can tread more lightly on this earth. Walk with us as we continue to work for collective actions that can change the structures of society. Instill in our hearts a passion to preserve the great Earth that You have given us. Amen.

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