

*“I have returned among you never again to cease being yours and all consecrated for your greater good in eternity. Come day come night, come sun come rain, I shall always be equally ready to serve your spiritual needs, the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the young and the old....will always have equal access to my heart, your good will be mine and your sorrows will also be mine. ” (WC # 3158).*

## REFLECTION ON LAUDATO SI

*What does the encyclical letter “Laudato Si” tells us Comboni sisters today, especially in the context where the poorest people still exist? Which aspects are more relevant and challenging for today’s mission?*

As Comboni Missionary Sisters we are called to work together with the poorest of our brothers and sisters and at the same time to be able to carry out the evangelizing mission in situations of oppression, injustice and poverty committing ourselves to draw attention to the values of the kingdom of God. (RL # 12 &13).

We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God’s creation. With the encyclical Laudato Si, Pope Francis invites each one of us to open our tents; he highlights the need of taking care of our common home, in which, nowadays the poorest are the most affected by climate change, since they mainly depend on natural reserves and resources such as land and various ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry for their survival in terms of a source of food and financial income for the families.

With the climate change that is happening very frequently in the last five years, access to basic needs, such as water and food for surviving is becoming a challenge in the daily life of a poor family.

As a source of income many families make charcoal to sell and clear the land for agricultural practices, and this leads to a rapid growth of deforestation in the area. Deforestation has many negative effects on the environment. The most dramatic impact is a loss of habitats for millions of species.

Deforestation also leads to climate change. Forest soils are moist, but without protection from the sun blocking tree cover they quickly dry out. Trees also help perpetuate the water cycle by returning water vapor back into the atmosphere. Without trees to fill those roles many forest lands can quickly become barren deserts.

Removing trees deprives the forest of portions of its canopy, which blocks the sun’s rays during the day and holds in heat at night. This disruption leads to more extreme temperature swings that can be harmful to plants and animals.

Trees also play a critical role in absorbing the greenhouse gases that fuel global warming, fewer forests means larger amounts of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere and increased speed and severity of global warming.

The principles of practicing sustainable agriculture invites each person to cultivate the land in such a way that the next generation can still have access to it in its fullness.

Every person is called to cultivate their land in a sustainable way. This practice is a system of farming based on a process that strives to meet the needs for an integrated, happy life of those depending on the farm developing the available human, physical, financial and natural resources.

Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself, each existing organism has a defined species and function as a system in the environment. For example, the presence of the trees in the environment absorbs carbon dioxide and releases oxygen purifying the air, it works also as a wind breaker, and controls soil erosion through its deep roots and increases soil fertility through decomposing and falling leaves.

The presence of stones with time forms the soil that it is needed for cultivation.

The presence of worms and wild animals helps in breaking down the waste, gives soil aeration for plants to grow and increases water holding capacity in the soil.

If we “kill/destroy” one of these systems all the others will feel the consequences.

The practice of sustainable agriculture has to be socially and culturally appropriate, because people are bound to practice and promote only what they can identify with. It is therefore important to do what is in accordance to the beliefs of the people for them to own it. Moreover, the practice of sustainable agriculture promotes a positive attitude to the environment and natural resources. Environment gives us space and media – soil and water- to practice agriculture, it also purifies the toxic materials that are either used or dumped and that can damage plants or pollute water and soil.

Finally, sustainable agriculture invites each person to have a holistic and scientific approach to the principle of common good and a central and unifying principle of social ethics, one which is based on respect for the human person, on the society as whole, particularly in defending and promoting the common good, showing at the same time solidarity with and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.

For the indigenous communities, 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 and this gift passes from one generation to the other.

God created the world and gave the “mandate” to human beings to grow, to multiply and to take care of the land, not to rule over it, as is mentioned often in the encyclical *Laudato Si*. We are the stewards of God’s creation, there is an intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet. As Comboni Missionary sisters we cannot evangelize or express that God is love and that He loves us to the surrounding people if they don’t have access to reliable and clean water, if they cannot cultivate in order to have their daily food because their land has been taken away by someone that has power over them.

As St. Ambrose put it: *“you are not making a gift of what it is yours to the poor person, but you are giving him/her back what is his/hers, you have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone not to the rich.”* Therefore everyone has the right to possess a sufficient amount of the earth’s goods for themselves and their families.

The special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of the society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the good of our common home.

Each part of creation has a God given purpose, reveals God's goodness and generosity, it is independent and in some way reveals God without being able to capture the fullness of God (# 84-88).

*"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generation and towards humanity as a whole...our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others."*  
(Caritas in Verita # 48, 51)

How do we treat this gift that God gave to us? Do we see land as a sacred place or just as a mere place where we live to survive? If it is a gift from God why doesn't everybody has access to it? What can we do to make people aware, through our daily-ministries, of this gift that God gave us?

*"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole"*. As women consecrated to God for the mission, how are we living this responsibility in our daily-lives?

How are we involving the poor to become active participants in the life of the society?

For today's mission, independently of our ministries and wherever we are present, we must take into consideration the environment, which encompasses all living and non-living things occurring naturally on Earth and surrounds each person living on it.

Pope Francis very often reminds us that we cannot take care of the environment if we cannot take care of our brothers and sisters, if we do not have a generous and compassionate heart towards the poorest and abandoned people surrounding us, because everything is interconnected in this world.

It is an invitation to educate ourselves to take care of the covenant that God made between the humanity and the Creation. *"God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gn.1: 27-28)*

*"The Lord God then took the man and woman and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it". (Gn2: 15)*

As Comboni Missionary Sisters, are we open to educate ourselves to take care of the covenant that God made between humanity and Creation?

Laudato Sì, invites us to work in an effective community network with the local people entering into an encounter with their culture and traditions, for example, working together with the local chief and elders of the villages/community to form a constitution which helps the community to live from the environment and from what the land can give in a sustainable way in order to come up with a new way

of being sustainable (If a person cuts one tree to make charcoal the person should plant three trees in order to have a less negative impact in the environment).

We are invited to live an integrated ecology which includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideas, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence must not be contrived, but found uncovered.

To take care of nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity of living together and communion, ultimately extending “universal fraternity” to all creatures, even the wind, sun and clouds.

As Comboni Sisters, is our lifestyle reflecting an integral ecology in harmony with creation? Is our lifestyle, inviting us to live together and in communion in universal fraternity to all creatures, wind, sun and clouds?

### Concluding Prayer

Psalm 8

How great is your name, o Lord our God,  
Through all the earth!  
Your majesty is praised above the heavens;  
On the lips of children and of babes  
You have found praise to foil your enemy,  
To silence the foe and the rebel.  
When I see the heavens, the work of your hands,  
The moon and the stars which you arranged,  
What is man that you should keep in mind,  
Mortal man that you care for him?  
Yet you have made him little less than a god;  
With glory and honor you crowned him,  
Gave him power over the works of your hand,  
Put all things under his feet.  
All of them, sheep and cattle,  
Yes, even the savage beasts,  
Birds of the air, and fish  
That make their way through the waters.  
How great is your name, O Lord our God,  
Through all the earth!

Reflection by Sr. Isabel Gomes