

Laudato Si and the Comboni Mission

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Laudato Si is an encyclical that opens our eyes to the abuses that earth, our home, has been targeted with, and also raises awareness about how everything is connected: *“we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crises which is both social and environmental.”* (139) The cry of earth unites with the cry of the poor. Migration, human trafficking, and other social issues are somehow interconnected with climate change. We, Comboni Missionary Sisters, work with these issues, and it is in these realities that Laudato Si challenges our spirituality, education, mission and ministries in order to be faithful to our charism in the reality that the world is facing.

Laudato Si challenges our personal and communitarian spirituality. Pope Francis suggests *“an ecological spirituality”* (216) that *“motivates us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.”* (216). Having a spirituality concerned for the care of the earth is expressed in our values and in the choices that we make daily. Pope Francis urges a new and universal solidarity (14), and Patriarch Bartholomew exhorts us *“to replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing”* (9). What does it do to motivate our choices: the savings or our solidarity and *“obligation to care for creation”*? For instance, sometimes we choose the use of chemicals for cleaning, farming and other tasks without knowing the damage that we cause to the environment. The use of a car in some of our communities has become *“cheaper”*, faster, and easier than the use of public transportation, contributing, in this way, to global pollution. We prefer buying food in big supermarkets in order to save than in local farmers’ stores in order to be in solidarity with those who work the land. Laudato Si questions our lifestyle, values and choices, and shows us that solidarity with the poor and with creation is more evangelical than saving. Making common cause in the daily lives of our people is also lived out through our daily choices, in a coherent lifestyle.

The contemplation of the pierced Heart of Christ leads us to be *“contemplatives in the action”*. This means, to be completely *“present to everyone and to everything”* (226). This spirituality helps us *“to overcome that unhealthy anxiety which makes us superficial, aggressive and compulsive consumers”* (226), and promotes healthy humility and happy sobriety (224). Pope Francis mentions that a lack of humility and sobriety can cause *“a number of imbalances, including environmental ones”* (224). Imbalances that can drive us to *“frenetic activity”* and makes us feel busy, *“in a constant hurry which in turn leads [us]... to ride rough-shod over everything around [us]...”* (225). When we are fully present to people and to reality, we overcome individualism and a self-centered culture of instant gratification (162) which influences climate change. In addition, we think about the future that we are leaving to coming

generations. The contemplation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus helps us to develop intergenerational solidarity” (159). To be present to every person and every reality includes future generations.

Laudato Si challenges our formation style. We are dealing with new generations, and they will be responsible for identifying and implementing solutions to environmental problems. So, we can ask ourselves if our first formation is instilling ecological sensitivity and making changes in consumer habits (209), or if the formation is only a way of providing information. Formation is not limited to the young generations but also to all the sisters through the ongoing formation that we maintain at a personal and communitarian level. How does our ongoing formation contribute to create “*ecological citizenship*” (211)? How does this formation challenge us to change our lifestyle? New generations will be attracted by a coherent evangelical lifestyle concerned with the ecological reality in our planet.

Laudato Si raises awareness about how climate change challenges our mission and ministries. Missions may be in every place, but people residing in the poorest countries are “*10 times more likely to be hurt by a climate disaster than those in wealthy nations*”.¹ Yet climate disaster is not the only one which will affect those people. Laudato Si mentions that “*everything is connected*” (92). Climate change is interconnected with peace and justice. (92). For instance, wars are waged by countries in order to appropriate the natural resources of other countries. There are refugees from wars and from climate change. In addition, transnational companies violate human rights, implementing their projects in poor countries, without having appropriate regulations and exhausting their natural resources. For example, mining companies in Latin American and African countries destroy existing ecosystems, harm agricultural and farming practices, pollute drinking water systems, grab land, expel people from their land, and exacerbate the poverty in the region. Transnational companies in Asia, Africa and Latin America are replacing virgin forest “*with plantations of trees, usually monocultures*” (39) which affect the aquifers, fauna, biodiversity, and practices of agriculture. Are we redesigning our communities, taking into account these realities of mining and monoculture? Are our social projects promoting an economy which “*favours productive diversity and business creativity*” (129)? Many of the poor depend on “*natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry.*” (25). The poor are those most affected by the climate change crisis, so our preferential option for the poorest and most excluded people comes inevitably to our ministries.

We believe that our mission also consists in being bridges between people, cultures and religions. Bridges connect different realities, and they are built to pass over them. We are called

¹<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-pope-francis-climate-change-perspec-0618-20150617-story.html>

to be bridges in areas with extreme poverty where there is a lack of *“harmony, open spaces or potential for integration”* (149), and to *“weave bonds of belonging and togetherness”* (149). Laudato Si also exhorts us to propose solutions from a global perspective and to work interdependently. According to Pope Francis, *“interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan”* (164). We network with organizations such as VIVAT International that may influence the elaboration of global regulatory norms at the United Nations. How is our collaboration with VIVAT and other organizations at this level? In addition, Laudato Si invites us to participate in the dialogue for new national and local policies. We, Comboni Sisters, work at the grassroots level and know the reality of people; thus we have the responsibility to collaborate in the elaboration of social and environmental policies, and motivate other people and organizations to do so too. This duty is also part of our being bridges.

Laudato Si proposes to us an ecological spirituality, where our values and choices make a difference in the world, care for our common home, and concretizing our common cause with the people with whom we live. In order to have these values and make important choices, Laudato Si invites us to have an ecological education, which will challenge us to examine our lifestyle and our inheritance to the new generations. Our mission and ministries are marked by our preferential option for the poor, and Laudato Si reminds us that the poor are being more affected by climate change. The encyclical points to the importance of working together. If we want to make a difference through our ministries, we should be involved in global solutions through networking with other organizations. Pope Francis says that there are differentiated responsibilities in climate change issues. We hold part of these responsibilities, so, we must collaborate to look for solutions. Our common home cannot wait.