

## ***LAUDATO SI: ABOUT OUR COMMON HOUSE.***

The present paper wishes to share a few thoughts about the significance of the Papal encyclical *Laudato Si* to a Comboni missionary sister as well as the relevance of such magisterial pronouncement to the lives of the peoples with whom we are directly involved.

The first emerging aspect in this document is the awareness that everything is inter-related, inter-connected and inter-dependent, a conviction that has permeated the entire encyclical like a mantra.

The second aspect refers to the environmental drama due to the rupture of the correct relationship between humanity and creation. Thus, *Laudato Si* calls for a "bold cultural revolution" (114) and a serious, constant and profound ecological conversion characterized by the changing of the "styles of life" (5).

According to Pope Francis, many factors have led to the actual situation: political, economic, cultural and social systems, nevertheless the most harmful effect comes from the human being's attitude towards life in the planet earth, and that approach needs to be reviewed and corrected.

In line with his predecessors, Pope Francis underlines that the annihilation of the planet is first and above all the refusal of a gift, not just because the world was entrusted to the human beings, but because life itself, the most valuable present given to all, has been outraged, threatened and in danger of eradication. The acknowledgment that the planet is a dwelling place and the humanity been conceived as one people inhabiting a common house, obliges us to think and act interdependently, not only in what concerns styles of life, a model of production and consumption which influence the world, but rather it calls for finding the alternatives for the crisis from a global perspective, because the symptom of a malady threatens the whole body, thus the axiom "think globally and act locally" becomes a matter of uninterrupted educational style.

Another very challenging aspect treated by *Laudato Si* is to recognize this epochal crisis as a great opportunity to witness one's identity (147) in promoting the betterment of life. The Pope praises the initiatives of groups capable of modifying the environment through the genius and creativity peculiar to them, such human resources potentially create a web of relationship and generates

community bounds (148). The caring for our common house means caring for each other and it compels us to be the sentinels, being attentive to any sign against life as well as alert to whatever attempt made to jeopardize the social resources of the people, a real temptation of a techno-economic paradigm which favors a hegemonic system oriented to flatten the differences.

In this perspective, the Pope manifests his preoccupation about the cultural inheritance of the peoples; according to him, "the disappearance of a culture can be as serious as or more than the disappearance of an animal or plant species" (145). He is also particularly concerned about the inequalities and the degrading poverty of which the great majority of humanity is subjected. The Pope appeals for solidarity and a decisive preferential option for the poor, such option consequently should apply the principle of destining the common good of the earth to those always excluded from the partition, since the earth, our common dwelling, is a shared inheritance. The preferential option for the less privileged derives from our faith convictions as well as from a fundamental ethical demand, such is the assurance of the Latin American Church, as it affirms in *Aparecida*: "Our faith proclaims that Jesus Christ is the human face of God and the divine face of man. Therefore, the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in that God who has become poor for us, to enrich our poverty. This option is born from our faith in Jesus Christ, the God made man, who has become our brother. This option, however, is neither exclusive nor excluding" (329).

*Laudato Si* offers a unique opportunity for 'ecumenical dialogue'. John Zizioulas, an Orthodox theologian, baptized such an insight as "the existential ecumenism"<sup>1</sup>, meaning the effort of facing together the environmental crisis. According to Zizioulas, the existential, fundamental problems, transcend our traditional divisions to the point of almost extinguishing them. In fact the actual crisis does not leave space for standing by attitudes, it challenges our capacity to step on a common ground and that signifies protecting and promoting life. It is known that there isn't a single way of interpreting and transforming reality, therefore we must welcome the richness and the contribution of the Churches, Religions and the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ioannis Zizioulas, *Custodi del Creato, presentazione dell'enciclica Laudato si*, Rivista Nuova Umanità, XXXVII Ottobre-Dicembre 2015, Città Nuova, Roma, pag. 480.

civil society as a whole to promote what the Pope calls, an “integral ecology” (137).

Finally, I cannot conclude this paper without paying tribute to the inspirational figure of this encyclical, Saint Francis of Assis, and the legacy of his mystical contemplative gaze towards all types of life imbued with meaning and sense of existing. Saint Francis became so intimate and familiar with the wonders of creation that he embraced everybody and everything as brothers and sisters. The Canticle of the Creatures expresses beautifully his innocent wonder regarding the created things and this simple, humble and childlike manner’s spirituality may be an element not to be ignored in caring for our common house and common dwellers, a spirituality which is revealed in a transformative experience, fruit of the working of the Spirit in creation whose divine life is the essence of the mission. According to Bevans, “while we have in the past understood mission to be something that human beings do *to* and *for* others, the Spirit leads us to understand that mission is done with all creation. In fact, ‘in many ways, creation is in mission to humanity, for instance the natural world has a power that can heal the human heart and body’<sup>2</sup>.

*Laudato Si*, indeed, opens up a horizon for a new environmental consciousness and an unmatched opportunity for the mission.

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<sup>2</sup> S. BEVANS, *Together towards life: reflections on the WCC mission statement*, in *Periodical Verbum SVD*, Vol. 56, 2015, Germany, pag 153.