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# CRY OF THE EARTH, CRY OF THE POOR

## *"Laudato Si" and Jesuit Higher Education*

By Daniel R. DiLeo

In the spring of 2008, I was a junior sociology major at Cornell discerning a vocation to the Jesuits. This process placed my lifelong Catholic faith on the forefront of my mind more than ever before, and, while I ultimately felt called to marriage and family life, it prepared me to recognize climate change as a moral issue for Catholics.

One day in development sociology, my professor pointed out that the poor are disproportionately harmed by climate change despite historically contributing least to the problem. At that moment, I began to see that climate change is as much about justice and human flourishing as it is non-human creation.

In general, ecological degradation most harms the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized. This is because these persons

and communities lack the economic, political, and social capital needed to address the structural causes, immediate effects, and future threats of ecological deprivation. In particular, the most severe geophysical and humanitarian consequences of climate change (for example, drought, flooding, food and water stresses, population displacement) are being – and will continue to be – acutely experienced by the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized in the United States and around the world.

My professor's reference to the disproportionate climate-related suffering of the poor and vulnerable certainly caught my attention. What he pointed out next, however, set the trajectory of my life and career path: the poor and vulnerable are least responsible for causing the climate

change from which they suffer most. For example, according to the World Resources Institute and World Bank, the world's five wealthiest countries in 2007, as measured by total GDP, were responsible for more than half of all historical global carbon emissions since 1870. At that time, the U.S. alone was responsible for 28.8 percent of historical global carbon emissions.

Given the obvious ethical dimensions of climate change, and with a heightened awareness of my Catholic faith, I began to wonder if the Catholic Church had said anything about climate change. I started doing research and quickly discovered the church by that time, 2008, had repeatedly identified climate change as a moral issue (for example, Pope John Paul II's 1990 and 1999 World Day of Peace messages; the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' 2001 *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*). Excited by these teachings, I began working on climate change from a Catholic perspective and have never looked back.

## St. Francis, Pope Francis, and "Laudato Si"

Shortly after he was elected bishop of Rome, Pope Francis explained that he chose his papal name to honor St. Francis of Assisi and his concurrent concern for the poor, peace, and creation. In view of the pope's namesake, it is unsurprising that "Laudato Si" integrates care for creation with care for the poor within the context of climate change. In doing so, "Laudato Si" gives the most authoritative and succinct Catholic account to date of the dynamics I recognized at Cornell.

First, Francis recognizes that environmental degradation disproportionately harms the poor. He quotes the Bolivian Bishops' Conference, which observes that "both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest" (No. 48).

In particular, Francis observes that climate change harms the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized persons and communities more than all others (No. 25). Additionally, the pope points out that much global "warming is caused by huge consumption on the part of rich countries" (No. 51). As such, Francis says that rich nations owe an ecological debt to poor nations (No. 51).

In order to redress the injustices of ecological debt, Francis highlights the importance of the common good, solidarity, the preferential option for the poor, and the universal destination of goods (No. 158, 93). Moreover, the pope insists that

"there are differentiated responsibilities" between rich and poor nations regarding climate change (No. 52).

Specifically, he says, developed nations should "significantly limit their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assist poorer countries to support policies and programs of sustainable development" (No. 52). Concomitantly, Francis says poor countries must address international disparities and corruption (No. 172). Additionally, he says poor nations must employ "less polluting forms of energy production" with the help of rich nations (No. 172).

In order to adequately address ecological degradation and climate change, Francis calls for integrated socioeconomic responses (No.139). This is because "we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is simultaneously social and environmental (No. 139). In particular, we must "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (No. 49, emphasis in original).

## Jesuit Higher Education

"Laudato Si" challenges all people of faith and goodwill to better care for creation and the poor. In response, Jesuit colleges and universities might respond in several ways to the call of the first Jesuit pope.

Catholic theological ethics distinguishes between charity and justice. The former focuses on local action while the latter seeks systemic change in society. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops refers to these complementary dynamics as *The Two Feet of Love in Action* and insists that adequate responses to socioeconomic and environmental challenges require both modes of social engagement.

Animated by a spirit of charity, Jesuit colleges and universities could affirm the importance of Francis' "integral ecology" through programs like the Interdisciplinary Minor in Environmental Ethics at Marquette University. Additionally,



Catholic Relief Services' *I am Climate Change* campaign  
<http://www.iamclimatechange.org/>

institutions might devote resources to places like the Center for Sustainability at St. Louis University and encourage faculty to produce scholarship that leads to action like *Healing the Earth*, a free textbook on ecology published by the International Jesuit Ecology Project at Loyola University Chicago (see story, p.10) Finally, schools might sign and pursue plans with in accord with the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment. As of April 2016, 12 Jesuit schools had already done so.

In conjunction with such local activities, Jesuit colleges and universities can also pursue ecological justice through faithful citizenship-based support for policies to address climate change. This step was taken by College of the Holy Cross, Fordham University, Le Moyne College, Loyola University of Maryland, and University of San Francisco in April 2016 when they signed onto an amicus curiae brief submitted to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia offering faith-based support for the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan. Furthermore, schools might support Catholic Relief Services' climate change policy work by founding CRS Ambassador chapters like those at Boston College, College of the Holy Cross, Fairfield University, Loyola University Maryland, and University of Scranton.

## Conclusion

The world is charged with the grandeur of God, and "Laudato Si" has the potential to inspire people of faith and goodwill to better conserve the grandeur of our common home. As resourced institutions of higher education rooted in Catholic mission, Jesuit colleges and universities have a particular opportunity – and responsibility – to share and act on the first encyclical on ecology from the first Jesuit pope.

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# Hopkins and Francis on the State of the World: A Poet's Reflection

By Paul Mariani

It was a Jesuit priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who wrote some of the great Franciscan poems of all time, so that he and Pope Francis, a Jesuit who took the name of Francis, share that link in common. It follows, then, that Francis should begin "Laudato Si'," his letter to the world, fittingly delivered on Pentecost Sunday 2015, by quoting from St. Francis' "Canticle of the Creatures":

Praise be to you, my Lord,  
through our Sister, Mother Earth,  
who sustains and governs us,  
and who produces various fruit  
with colored flowers and herbs.

And so he begins his encyclical, "On Care for Our Common Home," with Francis, reminding us that "our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us." And so, in the name of the church, in the name of our shared humanity, Pope Francis reminds us that the very earth "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."

Hopkins, who loved God's creation much as St. Francis did, wept over what humans were doing to

the English and Welsh countryside and – by extension – to the entire world. Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do. You have showered them with love. You have given them this beautiful world, both on the cosmic as well as on the microcosmic level, if they only had ears to hear its music and the eyes to see what is there before them, if they would only take the time to look.

But look at what? Hopkins's poems tell us what is there before us, just as Fr. Francis did and Pope Francis has been doing. "Look at the stars!," Hopkins urges us in "The Starlight Night,"

Look, look up at the skies!  
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in  
the air!  
The bright boroughs, the circle-  
citadels there!  
Down in dim woods the diamond  
delves! the elves'-eyes!  
The grey lawns cold where gold,  
where quickgold lies!  
Wind-beat whitebeam! airy  
abeles set on a flare!  
Flake-doves sent floating forth at  
a farmyard scare!

This is Van Gogh's "Starry Night" in a language rinsed and refreshed, words with a sense of deep wonder and awe behind them. Do