



# The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop

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## LAUDATO SI'

**Friar Bob Hutmacher, o.f.m.**

*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.' This sister now 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. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.*

This is the beginning of the new *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on *Care for Our Common Home*. It was released on June 18. The title alone was very pleasing to the Franciscan world because the entire 184 page document begins with *The Canticle of Creatures* by Francis of Assisi. *Laudato Si'* means *be praised*. These are the first words of the *Canticle* in the ancient Umbrian dialect that St. Francis spoke and wrote. My Legionnaire article of October 2014 covered the *Canticle* itself. This month I am going to highlight some of the many facets of the Holy Father's encyclical because it is a bold, significant document that calls the entire world to discuss, change and care about the Earth.

Even before the encyclical was given to the world it sparked controversy. Politicians were the first to criticize Francis (before its release); they bluntly told him to stay in his own sphere of religion and leave science, philosophy and political matters to those "who know something about them." Even a glance at this massive text will show how brilliantly it's written, that the concern *Laudato Si'* expresses about our planet and the actions it calls for far override any one religion or political framework. Let's take a look at a few elements of the work because it's not just about climate change; it is an expansive work of theology about the interconnectedness of humans and nature.

Pope Francis quotes from three of his predecessors: Paul VI, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Paul had referred to our planet as a "tragic consequence of unchecked

human activity." John Paul II wrote extensively about environmental issues already in his first encyclical; he called for a global ecological conversion. John Paul also challenged the world to "safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology." Benedict proposed "eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment."



Francis of Assisi is the inspiration for Francis I. He writes: *I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast.* [¶10]

Francis I brings a fresh approach to pastoral ministry by the way he lives, speaks and chooses to serve. He turned away some of the trappings of papal power and vesture but really endeared himself to people immediately by choosing a simple apartment, visiting the poor, imprisoned and sick wherever he travels, and living a very simple style of everyday life. This is a lengthy section of *Laudato Si'* but it reflects his love for the Poor One of Assisi: *St. Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the*

sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them “to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason”. His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, “from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’”. [¶11]

I’m sure you’ve seen negative press about this particular encyclical that demand Pope Francis stay in his religious sphere of teaching and that religious leaders should not meddle in scientific and political matters. Read *Laudato Si’* and it will become obvious that this man is well educated and walks in the footsteps of other Church leaders who have called the world to see that all of Earth’s inhabitants are in this together; we must all work to not only save what we have but go beyond, far beyond our present values and practices.

When Francis writes about climate change in paragraph 23, for example, it’s very clear that he knows what he’s talking about: *The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that*



*we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase*

*of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon.* [¶23]

He addresses the problems with the world’s intensive use of fossil fuels at the heart of our energy system. In sweeping fashion Francis addresses other issues like Sister Water, the biodiversity of Mother Earth’s resources, the decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society, urban sprawl, global inequality, how the deterioration of the environment and society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet.

Fr. Zachary Hayes was a brilliant theologian from our Province of the Sacred Heart. He went to Heaven last year but some of the most exciting work he did in his later teaching years was to initiate a dialogue with scientists,

one that has gone on since the Middle Ages with Franciscans like Peter Lombard and Bonaventure in the universities of Paris, Oxford and Bologna. These friars and others since have carried on this great debate with the cosmology and spirituality found in Francis’ writings and the works of Plato and Aristotle. Franciscans and ecology have been united since our very foundation, so to have an encyclical with the scope and power of *Laudato Si’* fits very well into our view of God’s creation and the present realities of our world situation.

*It cannot be maintained that empirical science provides a complete explanation of life, the interplay of all creatures and the whole of reality. This would be to breach the limits imposed by its own methodology. If we reason only within the confines of the latter, little room would be left for aesthetic sensibility, poetry, or even reason’s ability to grasp the ultimate meaning and purpose of things.* ¶199 Here Pope Francis opens that dialogue between theology and science and indicates that both areas can lead to a much fuller understanding of the mysteries of the universe.

To quote from Fr. Zachary’ work *A Window to the Divine: a Study of Christian Creation Theology*: “God’s creative love freely calls from within the world a created love that can freely respond to God’s creative call. That created love is embodied in Christ in whom all of creation finds its purpose. That is why a cosmos without Christ is a cosmos without a head...it simply does not hold together.” This universe is meaningful and purposeful because it is grounded in Christ, the Word of God.” One cannot profess Franciscan values without Christ as the Center; hence, all of creation is in union with God, drawn into God by the power of Christ and our own membership in his Body. We cannot, then, view Mother Earth and her natural wonders as expendable because to negate or destroy any part of creation would be to negate or destroy a part of what God has loved into existence through Christ.

I believe Chapter 6 of *Laudato Si’* will challenge every reader and the entire population of the world: ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION. Francis writes: *The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity* [¶216]. He offers many suggestions as to how we can do this so we are motivated as inhabitants of one planet to be more passionate about protecting our world. He states quite clearly that we cannot commit to a new way of life by merely holding up lofty doctrines; we must inspire one another with an interior impulse which *encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity*. Francis reminds us that personal conversion entails recognizing our sinful past (e.g. how we have destroyed so much of our rain forests) and a desire to change.



From the dialogue between theology and science along with this concept of ecological conversion, our Pope then masterfully weaves everything together in a magnificent synthesis of life issues. *How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, he asks...if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties?* He, like his namesake from Assisi, sees the interconnectedness of all creation. How can we be concerned about endangered species or the loss of the polar ice cap without also acknowledging the value of the poor, a human embryo, those with disabilities and the unborn? Everything is connected. The Poverello of Assisi knew it, this pope knows it, we are called now to acknowledge and profess the interconnectedness of God's creation.

St. Therese of Lisieux (quoted in the encyclical) invited people to practice little ways of love like a smile or any small gesture that sow friendship and peace. I often about what a rude world we've created here in our own country where manners and language have sunk below the water line. Therese's advice? We all know how effective a smile can be with a grumpy checker at the store...or holding a door...or coming to complete stop when a traffic light turns yellow. Simple things but they do melt hearts and can eventually reach into the civic and political arenas to bring civility. We can safeguard and preserve Mother Earth's riches without becoming obnoxious or self-righteous. We can construct green buildings and cities while being people of peace. We can promote the common good of clean air by doing our share to reduce emissions. We can all be attentive to recycling.

Cardinal Weurl of Washington, D.C. responded to journalists and politicians who blasted the pope with harsh and divisive words. He said on a news shows recently that "what the pope is saying is 'why don't we all discuss this? Why don't we come to the table ...listen... and see what we really ought to be doing as a human family?'" Jesus talked with his disciples to help them learn of the ways of the Kingdom. Francis guided Clare into the Mystery of Gospel life. Pope Francis leads us to a fuller understanding of creation and how we, as a world community, can civilly discuss and promote concrete ways to save our planet and its natural treasures. *The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to*

*the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that "realities are greater than ideas".* [143]

Given the Christocentric view of creation within our Franciscan spirituality, philosophy and theology, I was thrilled to see how Pope Francis concludes *Laudato Si'* with a magnificent passage about the Eucharist: *The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God.* [¶236] Such a statement is as breathtaking as any by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin or our own Zachary Hayes! I love the fact that Francis sums up the power of his encyclical with the greatest gift we have as believers, the Source and Summit of the Church's prayer: the Eucharist.

Go to [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) and the entire text of *Laudato Si'* appears immediately. Please make this encyclical part of your ongoing formation as a Catholic and a member of our Franciscan family. Pope Francis gives a number of ways to concretely better our planet for the common good and will help you learn even more about the boundless love of our God. May it inspire all of us to enter that dialogue and then put these wonderful words into actions that benefit all creatures on Mother Earth and beyond. As always, thanks for all you do to support the friars of St. Peter's and may God bless you with peace and everything that is good.

P.S. I moved back into the friary here at St. Peter's June 1, so now you know where to reach me. Our ministry of Chiesa Nuova for the arts will continue when we find a new dwelling. Please pray for us!

*Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm*

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## 2015 Travels with Fr. Bob Hutmacher, ofm

**Sept. 28-Oct. 9**

### **The Majesty of the Swiss Alps and Beauty of Italy's Lake Region**

Como, Tremezzo, Bellagio, Isola Bella, San Moritz,  
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