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## FOREWORD

By **Janez POTOČNIK**, former European Commissioner for the Environment.

## AFTERWORD

By **Jean-Claude Cardinal HOLLERICH**, SJ, president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union.

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# BUSINESS AND THE EARTH

A reflection on *Laudato Si'*

By *Edmond Grace SJ*



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**JANEZ POTOČNIK**

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# FOREWORD

by Janez Potocnik

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It is hard to overstate the importance of the Pope Francis' message in *Laudato Si'*. He is calling on all people of goodwill to care for our common home. He insists that the primary means of doing this is through dialogue and cooperation across many different forms of human activity. Fr. Grace's thought provoking book is focused on the dialogue, which is so badly needed, with business. He argues that a proper understanding of the role of business is vital if we are to secure the fundamental conditions for human wellbeing. This new understanding is not only important but particularly urgent, as human security and wellbeing are at fast increasing risk due to environmental deterioration.

In any dialogue about our common home we must never lose sight of the big picture in all its starkness. According to the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) nearly 1 million species are at risk of extinction from human activities, and over 75% of land-based ecosystems such as forests have been "significantly altered". Apart from the moral catastrophe involved in human activity affecting other species, this scale of loss causes severe danger to humans themselves. For example, land with fewer plant and animal species is very likely to be degraded – unable to hold water or produce food. These species are not just exotic extras delighted in by eccentric scientists. They are a vital part of our food and water security. According to one recent report from the IRP (International Resource Panel) degraded land already accounts for approximately 29 per cent of land globally, putting over 3 billion people at risk today and all of us very soon. These risks are caused to a large extent by mainstream farming practices and wildlife trade.

The same IRP report tells us that past and present greenhouse gas emissions have already committed the world to an extended period of climate change with extreme weather events such as droughts and flooding. Air pollution is currently the cause of between 6 and 7 million premature deaths per year globally and will only be worsened by current incentives provided to market players. Due to polluted water, approximately 1.4 million people die annually from preventable diseases, such as diarrhoea and intestinal parasites.

The extraction and processing of resources alone (biomass, metals, non-metallic minerals and fossil fuels) caused 90% of global land-use related biodiversity loss and water stress in 2017, and over 50% of climate change impacts.

Global resource use has more than tripled since 1970, the main driver being economic activity. Material productivity –the efficiency of the use of resources– grew until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then started to decline and has stagnated in recent years as a global average, due to the structural shift of the production from more to less resource efficient countries.

The causes of these severe risks to human wellbeing are diverse at first sight but can all be traced back to one core reality. The wasteful, inefficient, and unequal consumption of natural resources is driven by economic incentives which bear no relationship to the true costs of production and, in particular, to the damage being done to our common home. Resource productivity, and hence the impact of the economy on nature, will not improve through technological change alone. We need to rethink the fundamentals driving our production and consumption models, our values and societies.

The author of this book makes the point that good business is about harnessing the resources of the earth. Down through the ages people have harnessed beasts of burden and put them to good use. You don't harness an animal without taking good care of it, respecting the limits of its capacity and making sure it is fed and adequately rested. In contemporary western culture we don't have many beasts of burden. We use machines which involve a more direct interaction with the earth's resources, but the same principle applies. We need to take care of the resources we use and of the earth on which we live. With the earth, as with a beast of burden, if we exploit we destroy and, if we destroy the earth, we destroy ourselves.

A warped understanding of business is at the core of the current unsustainable model of resource use. Business, as an expression of the human desire to achieve something worthwhile, will be a vital driver of a future sustainable model that brings health and prosperity for all. The current economic system is marked by quantity driven consumerism based on extraction of too many resources, which are processed wastefully. The inevitable result is an unequal distribution of wealth and wellbeing, benefiting the privileged, while causing climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Those most affected will be the most fragile and vulnerable in our society. The glorification of profit is the driving force in this exploitation. This legitimises greed and dishonesty with a resulting dehumanisation of the world of business.

Businesses do not operate in vacuum and cannot change in a vacuum. They operate in a system of consumer demands and market institutions, such as those defining tax and trade rules. Currently governments are negotiating climate agreements on the one hand while, on the other, they lavishly subsidise fossil fuels. The result is

that businesses have a hard time transitioning to sustainable models even when committed to change. If we want business to be of human value, then the world of business must be subject to political supervision in a manner which respects the limits of our common home and actively discourages the pursuit of profit as an end in itself.

Every business has to be profitable to survive but, in the calculation of profit, every cost must be counted. This is especially true of the wider costs to society –and to the environment. It is the responsibility to political leaders to determine the extent of these costs and to ensure that they are never overlooked. The measures of economic success which we currently use are dominated by monetary profits on the company level and the “Gross Domestic Product” (GDP) on the macroeconomic level. Business must become delinked or “decoupled” from these criteria by means of a political process which ensures that natural resource use and environmental impacts have real measurable weight in the determination of costs. Therefore, economic success can no longer be defined by quantities of production, but measures of success must be directly based on the service that businesses provide to the essential and equitable wellbeing of societies, including health and long-term impacts. An example is mobility: A decoupled business would provide a mobility function for people and communities, e.g. in shared electric vehicles and smart public transport systems. At present it is based on the mass production of cars which end up being phenomenally underutilized, mainly taking up parking space and congesting our cities –hence not providing a good systemic function.

To achieve a decoupled economy, every part in today's society and economy must work together, locally and globally. Unprecedented global interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan to build a society, which can sustain health and prosperity for all and is resilient to crises. Humanity is becoming more fragile and the frequency of crises, be they health or extreme weather related, is likely to increase. We need to be more prepared than we currently are. I would like to stress the importance of preparedness and resilience, which are essential components of sustainability, as I write this foreword in the midst of the 2020 COVID19-crisis.

This book makes a simple clear point: when the world of business is in dialogue with the full breadth of human experience it has an irreplaceable role to play in human thriving and, when it fails to do this, it becomes a force for destruction. There is a spiritual societal economic and political perspective to this dialogue. We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge and wisdom in the service of a more integral and integrating vision.

Businesses and governments need to work together, and urgently so, to redesign the short-term incentives in our economic system. It is an economic necessity, a security necessity and a moral necessity. Determined leaders are needed more than ever, on every level, who can inspire and hold to account practices in politics, business, and every part of society. People will need practical guidance as much as spiritual inspiration.

Anything, which sparks debates and action related to the questions so well conceptualised in *Laudato Si'*, is to be welcomed. And I'm convinced this book will evoke such a response.

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*Janez Potocnik is former EU Environment Commissioner and Co-Chair of the UNEP International Resource Panel.*

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## PART ONE

# SETTING THE SCENE

The 2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement<sup>1</sup> refers to climate change as “a common concern of humankind”. The European Green Deal, in December 2019 speaks of climate and environmental-related challenges as “*this generation’s defining task*”<sup>2</sup>. The encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, speaks of “*Mother, Sister Earth*” who now cries out to us. These words definitely strike a more urgent tone than in the other two statements. They are also decidedly poetic and, at first sight, disconcerting to the world of business which is necessarily focused on measurement and practicality.

Business management has to focus on the here and now but if this becomes ‘practical’ view become the exclusive preoccupation the result will be a deadening of the imagination and a corresponding loss of foresight. The impact of the ecological crisis might not be immediately evident but they will indeed be practical and they are already measurable. The challenge is primarily one of foresight and articulation. Anyone in any position of leadership will need to be able to speak coherently and convincingly about what lies ahead. This is where the more visionary approach of Pope Francis has something to offer. The shift of gear which will be necessary to meet the challenge will require an awakening of the imagination and one way of doing this is by dialogue with another realm of human experience.

*Laudato Si'* is itself the product of a very distinct background – the social teaching of the Catholic Church – but its analysis of the situation, in which we find ourselves, is consciously based on scientific research<sup>3</sup> and it speaks emphatically of the need for dialogue<sup>4</sup>. It calls for dialogue at international, national and local levels, in politics and economy, between religions and between religions and science. This book will argue that dialogue between business and the reflections of Pope Francis

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1. [https://unfccc.int/files/essential\\_background/convention/application/pdf/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf)
  2. The European Green Deal, Brussels, 11.12.2019 COM (2019) 640 final, page 1.
  3. In Chapter One “*What is happening to our common home?*” (*Laudato Si'*) Pope Francis begins as follows: “*Theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract, unless they are grounded in a fresh analysis of our present situation.*” *Laudato Si'* 17. He then goes on to give an extensive treatment to the state of scientific research on climate change, water and biodiversity before going on to deal with more obviously social and political issues.
  4. At the very beginning he makes it clear: “*In this encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.*” *Laudato Si'* 3. He uses the word repeatedly, mostly in an open ended way without specifying whom the dialogue might be with until Chapter Five, entitled “*Lines of approach and action,*” (*Laudato Si'* 164ff) refers to specific forms of dialogue.

has a part to play in the necessary reimagining of the future, including the role of business in wider framework of human society.

Part of that wider reality is the COVID-19 crisis to which Janez Potocnik refers to in the Foreword. He himself has recently published an article entitled "*The European Green Deal and a post Covid-19 prosperity, Two sides of the same coin*"<sup>5</sup>. At a more global level, the UN Environment Programme could not be more explicit: "*The transmission of diseases, like the Novel Coronavirus COVID-19, between animals and humans (zoonoses) threatens economic development, animal and human well-being, and ecosystem integrity*".<sup>6</sup> If no further reference is made to COVID-19 in this text it is for two reasons. Firstly, COVID-19 is a direct manifestation of the challenge we face from a degraded environment. Secondly, the immediate demands of this pandemic are being dealt with, with greater competence, elsewhere and in a manner which affirms the underlying argument of this book.

The Club of Rome in its 2018 report has welcomed "*Pope Francis' initiative in addressing a deep-lying crisis of values*"<sup>7</sup>. The Second chapter of the report is a critique of "*outdated philosophies*" and begins with a section entitled "*Laudato Si', the Pope Raises His Voice*". This chapter concludes by referring to "*deficits of analytical philosophy... and other traits mentioned by Pope Francis as destructive and suicidal in terms of our common home*"<sup>8</sup>.

This reflection on business and the earth has its origin in one particular event. On 25 September, 2019, a Dialogue Seminar was held in The European Parliament under the auspices of Article 17 of the Treaty for the Functioning of the European Union. The event was organised by the Jesuit European Social Centre, though the initiative and inspiration came from Willem Vriesendorp of #SustainablePublicAffairs. The theme of the Seminar was "Common Home Dialogue: an Ode to Change" and the speakers included representatives of a number of companies from around Europe with a commitment to ecological values.<sup>9</sup>

The speakers at this event came from a number of different industries, but they shared a pride in their common achievement of managing enterprises which have set high environmental standards while maintaining a healthy level of profit.

5. [The European Green Deal and a post Covid-19 prosperity | by Ellen MacArthur Foundation | Circulate News | Oct, 2020 | Medium](#)

6. <https://www.unenvironment.org/covid-19>.

7. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker and Anders Wijkman, "*Come On! - Capitalism, short-termism, population and the Destruction of the Planet*", (New York, 2018.) Preface, Loc 42.

8. Von Weizsäcker and Anders Wijkman, 2018, Ch.2.10.3.

9. See Appendix I.

Their shared interest, however, was not in finding a new "environmental" way of making money. It went much deeper than that. It was bound up with a world view expressed in the very title of the event – common home. They saw themselves and their enterprises as being part of this wider story and they were impatient with the failure of the European Union to espouse that vision.

An earlier version of this text was presented at the Article 17 Dialogue Seminar. As in other areas of activity a growing body of opinion in the business world find themselves happy to associate with Laudato Si'. They would be broadly sympathetic with its criticism of business – how multinationals abuse their power, how short-term financial gain is – "*bad business for society*"<sup>10</sup>, how business and politics have been slow to react to the urgency of the challenge we face, how business does not pay all the costs it incurs, how when states are weak business can be drawn into all kinds of criminality. They would warmly welcome Francis' call for "*an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity*"<sup>11</sup> and they are pleased to hear him describe business as "*a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world*".

Implicit in this image of "*vocation*" or "*calling*" is a challenge to the way in which the world of business currently understands itself and to how it is perceived. When Pope Francis speaks of calling he is referring to a kind of preoccupation which moves us beyond self-interest. The classical example is that of a good teacher or a nurse who are preoccupied with the good being done in the course of their work. Such people win our admiration. They are truly "noble". Of course, things can go wrong. There are plenty of lazy teachers in the world – and hard-hearted nurses – but we look to teachers and nurses with a certain expectation of selfless and inspiring commitment to their work.

Pope Francis is saying that those engaged in the world of business are at their best when they have this kind of benevolent preoccupation, but what is the distinctive preoccupation of business? In our time it is taken as axiomatic that business is driven by the motive for profit, but this understanding of business is doing great damage. Furthermore, it is untrue.

There are many reasons why people get involved in any human activity. Everyone has a mixture of motives. When "*ignoble*" motives begin to dominate in a person's life they become corrupt, whatever their activity, be it religion, politics or education or even sport. When those engaged in a particular activity cease to condemn such ignoble motives, corrupt people have a licence to act with impunity. We all can

10. Laudato Si' 128.

11. Laudato Si' 129.

easily understand how religion or politics or education can become debased, but how can this happen to business?

To answer this we need to understand how business can be described as noble. What is this “*thing*” which preoccupies those engaged in business in the way that a good teacher is preoccupied by teaching and a good nurse is preoccupied by caring for the sick? Firstly, business is bound up with this earth. In particular, it is bound up with harnessing the earth’s resources in a way which promotes human thriving. The most sophisticated financial transactions or the most complex technologies are of no value except in the light of this noble purpose. Secondly the concern of business is with visible, practical outcomes, which is only possible in the light of sustained and shrewd observation of human nature. One critical focus of this observation has to be the world of money and finance. Profit is a measure of success but if it is the ultimate source of motivation for business, then the only measure of achievement is the acquisition of wealth irrespective of the means used. No realistic understanding of human nature can afford to overlook the role of greed in undermining the satisfaction of real practical achievement. This is an internal –or spiritual– challenge for anyone engaged in business and dealing with money. No one can claim to be immune to the temptations of short-term profit but the damage done goes much wider than the cheating of customers.

Everyday experience of family and neighbourhood is bound up with earning a living and with the purchase of everyday needs. Both of these activities are rooted in the realities of business which form a bridge to the wider world – not just geographically, as goods are produced in one place and brought to another, but spiritually, as we seek to build relationships of trust. This building –or undermining– of trust through business transactions is of immense influence in society at large precisely because the world of business is so pervasive a presence. The expectations generated by the world of business colour our view of all social reality and, in particular, our view of power and political leadership.

When business presents itself as being all about making money, the influence of this attitude on society will inevitably lead to cynicism and distrust. This is hardly surprising, given that the easiest way to make money, if you can get away with it, is theft! When the world of business becomes taken up with itself and loses contact with the wider human reality of which it is a part, it becomes a kind of tyranny. Just as corruption is a perennial challenge to the legitimacy of political power, in like manner greed is a constantly seeking to undermine the achievements of good business and replacing them with the ingenuity of theft.

The common ground which this reflection seeks between Catholic social teaching and the world of business, is based on the integral ecology to which the encyclical *Laudato Si’* refers. We need a different way of talking about business as a vital link between the resources of this planet and human thriving –a link which cannot exist in isolation from society and government. This link is constituted by that which motivates the entrepreneur– worthwhile practical achievement in relation both to this earth and to humanity.

This motivation calls for conscientious foresight, which attends to the destructive force of greed in human affairs. The profiteer will always be with us and indeed those whose sole aim is to make money have much to teach the rest of us about ourselves. Left to their own devices, however, they are sure to wreak havoc. Good business, on the other hand, seeks to build a climate of trust and it is aware of the importance of political structures in creating that climate. Faced with the challenge posed by the ecological crisis good business and responsible political leadership will find common ground in the cultivation of foresight.

Growing numbers of business leaders accept that profit for its own sake, with no regard for the world in which we live and no concern for the livelihood of others, is destructive. This is why growing numbers are increasingly inclined to see the sense of attending to the resources of the earth, and taking responsibility for them, as part of the way in which they do business. This commitment to care for the earth is coming to be accepted as part of the relationship of trust with customers, on which every business is based. This relationship brings its own rewards (financial and otherwise), but those who are rightly proud of such achievement face an added challenge. This growing concern for the earth is not supported by public policy. On the contrary, current regulatory regimes everywhere reward those, who prefer profit for its own sake with no regard for any healthy relationship between humanity and the earth.

In the growing demand for change, from within the business world, there is a great deal more at stake than the self-interest of “*green*” companies. Good business, and the worthwhile achievement which goes with it, only makes sense in the context of an open ended observation of human nature, but this observation will be cynical and truncated if it has no place for dialogue. To the growing numbers of people in the business world who are committed to green values, Pope Francis’ call to dialogue will make good sense, but there is more to it than that. As well as being in the world of business, they are members of the human race. Most business people have children, but that is not an essential requirement for that basic magnanimity, which makes us want to include the coming generations. This

is the kind of attitude which generates that trust without which financial credit has no foundation.

Dialogue is certainly at the heart of *Laudato Si'*, but dialogue is not an end in itself. Pope Francis has something to say which he wants us to consider. His Encyclical has an underlying framework which can be summed up in the two words "*rapidification*" and "*praise*". Both these words are easily misunderstood.

The word "*rapidification*" is not to be found in any dictionary and it is unusual for a pope to use a neologism. When Pope Francis uses this word "*rapidification*" to describe our times we can all recognise what he is talking about. His challenge to the hectic pace of contemporary life, however, is not just a general exhortation to slow down. It has a wider and older context. The words "*pride*," "*lust*," "*avarice*," "*envy*," "*hatred*" and "*gluttony*" all have a familiar place in every-day conversation. When any of these words are used we can easily identify something of the realities to which they refer. They also make up six of the seven deadly sins. It says something significant about modern culture that the seventh of these sins does not feature in the everyday conversation of our time. We seldom speak of "*sloth*".

We typically associate sloth with the animal of the same name – a slow-moving listless creature – that reflects the traditional image of laziness. The Book of Proverbs has a saying – "*as a door on its hinge so the laggard on his bed*"<sup>12</sup>. This image needs no elaboration but there is another side to sloth. When we see someone given over to frenetic activity with no time to stop and acknowledge others or to think about what they are doing, this too is the deadly sin of sloth<sup>13</sup>. Pope Francis could have said that the contemporary world is "*slothful*," but that particular use of language would have failed to get the message home.

What matters is that these two extreme forms of behaviour – inactive and hyperactive – have something in common. They are both ways of disengaging from reality. In using the term "*rapidification*" Francis is not just saying that we are going too fast and will tire ourselves out, though that may well be the case. He is criticising contemporary culture for precisely the kind of disengagement through hyperactivity which, in earlier times was condemned, as a moral failure. The pursuit of profit as an end in itself generates this kind of "*slothful*" frenzy. The underlying motive of business, however, has an inbuilt capacity to stop and observe both

12. Prov. 26, 14.

13. Aquinas describes sloth as "*an oppressive sorrow, which so weighs upon man's mind, that he wants to do nothing*". (Summa Theologia II-II Q35 A.1) The effects of this sorrow include "*idleness*" and "*drowsiness*", but they also include "*uneasiness of the mind*" which makes it "*desirous of rushing after various things without rhyme or reason*". He also refers to "*restlessness of the body*" and "*instability*"; by which he means both moving from place to place and "*changeableness of purpose*". (Q35, A.4.)

humanity and the availability of resources. Business is about the way in which we humans relate to each other and to this earth on which we live.

The antidote to "*rapidification*" for Pope Francis is contemplation – a term which does not feature prominently in the everyday business world or that of public administration – yet there can be something contemplative and deeply observant about the way in which those, with challenging decisions to make, address their task. There may be many demands on their time but they cannot afford to be permanently chasing their tails. They need to stop and think. Francis speaks of our tendency to "*demean contemplative rest*" without which human activity has no meaning.<sup>14</sup> Without contemplation we fail to notice what is happening all around us.<sup>15</sup> We cannot attend to what is happening to our common home, because we are not in touch with ourselves, never mind the world in which we live. Contemplation is often referred to as a practise but, while he is certainly not excluding this dimension, Francis is talking more about contemplation as an attitude<sup>16</sup>. The shrewd observance of human nature, which is an integral part of good business, reflects such an attitude.

In this attitude of contemplation we come to the heart of Francis' message which is conveyed in the title of his encyclical – "*Laudato Si'*" or "*Praise You*". He is borrowing the opening words of the great hymn to creation of St. Francis of Assisi. Contemplation is ultimately about the capacity to look and praise. Where does this fit into the worlds of business and public service?

The language of praise can be debased when used to flatter or kowtow and such behaviour is to be found in every sphere of human activity. Francis is speaking in a religious context, in which words of praise are particularly prone to being misunderstood. True praise is never obsequious or cringing. It is not to be confused with homage which uses the language of praise so seek the approval and favour of the powerful. The religious language of praise is easily confused with homage, but that is to misunderstand the underlying message. Nor is praise to be confused with encouragement, which seeks to enhance the confidence of the inexperienced or disabled. The use of words of praise to encourage others is a generous and noble strategy, but it lacks the element of spontaneity which is always a feature of true praise.

14. *Laudato Si'* 237.

15. Pope Francis calls on his readers to contemplate the mystery of the world (*Laudato Si'* 12), the God who created the universe (73, 225) creation itself (85, 125, 214, 238), the beauty of the world (97, 107, 112, 226) but he also speaks of the need to contemplate more painful realities such as "*the cracks in the planet that we inhabit*". (163).

16. He talks of "*a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle*". *Laudato Si'* 222.

To praise is to admire and to express one's admiration with no motive other than the joy of expressing it. Praise comes naturally in moments of intimacy and in any expression of love. It is easy to praise children and their delight in being praised is attractive. This kind of attractiveness awakens a powerful human bond. True praise brings us over a line from individuality to a shared happiness without which it is impossible to build up those relations of trust on which business and any form of human activity depends. This element of human spontaneity is the foundation of every worthwhile endeavour. Without praise all interaction degenerates into manipulative calculation in which trust is relentlessly eroded.

The core of Pope Francis message can be described as follows:

- » Let's slow down.
- » Let's look at our world
- » Let's praise what we see.
- » Let's care together for our common home.

The reflection which follows is in part a summary of *Laudato Si'* and in part a commentary on the text. It owes a lot to two sets of conversations. Firstly, over many years, I have worked closely with dedicated public servants in Ireland, ranging from those working directly with citizens to those working at the highest levels of government. Secondly, I have had ongoing conversations over the years with a number of people with a business background. These include Willem Vriesendorp and my brother Patrick, with whom I have had many conversations about the trials, triumphs and political complexities involved in producing ecological friendly cement.

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## PART TWO

# THE ENCYCLICAL

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### CHAPTER 1

## *Laudato Si'* introduction

**T**he word "praise" is never really at home in the boardroom, except in its derived forms. Encouragement of employees, for instance, may be commendable but it is always calculated, even if for a worthwhile purpose. Boards of directors are simply not designed to be capable of saying that something or someone is "**great**", simply for the joy of saying it. In the last analysis, they are a human creation and, therefore, always less than human. This is not to suggest that employees don't want to see their work being praised. They most certainly do, but this will not happen by means of management decision. Only human beings speaking from the heart can praise others, which means that the relationship of management to praise is always complicated.

In the political context, genuine spontaneous words of praise are possible, but only in the context of a personal initiative by individual leaders. It is possible for a political institution to honour someone in a public and formalised manner, but this is not the same as praise. The primary purpose in this context is to identify the institution with praiseworthy personal achievement, thereby enhancing its own legitimacy. Institutions are incapable of spontaneity.

The capacity to say "*that's great*" and to mean it in all sincerity is the basis of all ethical behaviour<sup>17</sup>. To value something –really value it– is to be happy to praise it. Without this capacity for praise we have no reason to speak of anything as "*good*" or "*great*" except in the context of our own self-interest. Those who cannot bring themselves to say that the planet on which we live –our common home– is "*great*", will find it hard to make much sense of what is about to follow. The current popular understanding of business is blind to any link between this "*greatness*" and human life on this earth. Yet, unlike boards, employees are always human

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17. Since Aristotle the root concept of ethical theory has been "*the good*". The framework of praise in *Laudato Si'* cannot be fully encompassed in the tradition of objective analysis. We must analyse, but we must also engage with the ethical challenge of caring for our common home. The philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand distinguished between the "*seeing*" and "*feeling*" of values. The "*seeing*" goes beyond a mere "*taking cognisance*" to an "*inner acquaintance*" with the issues but it remains on the level of intellect. The "*feeling*" is about being genuinely affected by these issues and coming to "*a deep emotional involvement with them*". *The moral Philosophy of Dietrich von Hildebrand*, Martin Catjamil & Vlastimir Vohanka, p33 Washington DC, 2019.

and, while customers are often large organisations, human lives are affected by every business transaction.

Another form of speech which has no real place in the boardroom, can be seen in the opening words of Pope Francis' encyclical. When he speaks of the earth as our sister, he is engaging in a certain kind of discourse. When he speaks of her crying out because of the harm we have inflicted on her, he is leading us further down this path. He wants us to see the earth as vulnerable like ourselves and he wants to see this from the perspective of solidarity. He is calling out in a way which brings us face to face with our shared vulnerability but in doing this he is also seeking to awaken our hope in a fragile future which needs our care. He is striking the note of pathos<sup>18</sup>.

This kind of discourse may be out of place in the boardroom, but pathos is very much a part of political leadership. Politics, unlike the joint stock company, is not an invention of lawyers. It is, and always will be, a dimension of human life and, like anything pertaining to humanity, neither politics nor pathos can be taken for granted. In our time the note of pathos has been strikingly silent. This is an impoverishment because, without pathos, there can be no appeal to generosity. When political leaders focus exclusively on the interests of their electorate, they deprive themselves of the capacity to legitimise public life. If it is all about self-interest political leaders cannot claim that they are motivated by any sense of public service. In these conditions it is inevitable that public trust in public life will be eroded. In a world dominated by a vision of business being motivated above all by profit this development is inevitable.

Monopoly and cartel in its various forms may present itself as a form of "business" but ultimately it is destructive of the market process and of liberty. In ancient Rome, those who conquered distant lands returned with untold riches. This enabled them to subvert the political process and the longstanding liberties

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18. Hannah Arendt associates pathos with newness and freedom and, in particular, with revolution (For an analysis of her thought, James Miller, *The Pathos of Novelty: Hannah Arendt's image of freedom in the modern world*, *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World* (ed. Melvyn A. Hill) New York, 1979). Arendt does not directly address the question "What is pathos?" I would suggest that it is bound up with the fragility of the future. A couple about to get married inhabits the realm of pathos. Certainly there is hope. There is also celebration. Family and friends gather at the wedding to cheer them on. As the marriage vow itself acknowledges, however, things might turn out for worse, but the couple and those who come to celebrate with them not only want the best for them, they long for it. The image of Mother-Sister Earth crying out may strike a very different and more disturbing note, but as with the couple at the wedding, those who respond to the cry of the earth inhabit the realm of pathos where determination is fuelled by a passionate longing. Pathos awakens in us a sense of longing which is focused on something vulnerable and other than ourselves, with a future in which we have a part to play. To live in the realm of pathos is to allow that sense of longing to take the form of a determination for selfless action.

of the republic.<sup>19</sup> In our time those who have brought the fruits of modern science to society have reaped unprecedented financial reward and those who now enjoy the consequent wealth are like the generals of ancient Rome. Their wealth has outgrown the political structures which have made its acquisition possible. The generals of ancient Rome destroyed the democratic process because they had enough money both to hire thugs and to bribe every single voter. They did, however, manage to hold up a vision of the greatness of Rome which commanded allegiance in Rome and throughout the empire for centuries. With what vision of glory will the multinational companies, who are conquering the world today, seek to legitimise their power? We are living in a political environment in which the profiteer reigns supreme while those who have a genuine interest in the provision of goods or services to promote human thriving have yet to find a compelling voice. Wealth is a sign of achievement. Its origins may lie with earlier generations and its source might be dubious and even brutal, but where there is money someone, at some time, has been effective in what they set out to do. Money, therefore, is a sign of success –achieved or inherited– and this is the source of its glamour. The Canadian economist Keith Galbraith speaks of "the oft noted public impression that intelligence... marches in close step with the possession of money"<sup>20</sup>. Money has its own hypnotic power. Those who don't have it are easily overawed by those who do and they in turn too easily take the deference of others as a measure of their own ability. This means that the world of business –for good or ill– will always be influential and, within this world, there will always be a struggle between the profiteer, who will always want more, and the entrepreneur, who seeks an achievement of real value. As of now, the profiteer has much of the power and the political legitimacy. This has a pervasive influence on the way those in the business world see themselves and on the way in which they are seen –and honoured– by those in public service.

Money is not a commodity. It does not just sit there waiting to be used as if it were some mineral in the ground. It is bound up with networks of relationships and credit; those networks will always impinge on the political process which, in the last analysis, determines how wealth is managed. Just as the managers of wealth cannot ignore public life and political leadership, no government can afford to ignore that astute observation of human nature on which the business world and wealth is based. The challenge facing political leaders in dealing with the world of business and finance is to distinguish between those insights which reflect a

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19. For a compelling account of this process see Lily Ross Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*, London, 1971.

20. *A Short History of Financial Euphoria*, Penguin, p. 106.

genuine wisdom and those which are motivated by self-interest. The management of wealth requires good judgement but it is no guarantee of virtue.

Unlike in ancient Rome, wealth in our world was not accumulated by marching armies – though colonial exploitation has played its part – but primarily through the initiative and creativity of business. Yet the success of that achievement, as with all success, can breed complacency and resistance to change. The recently emerged globalised wealth is in danger of undermining initiative and creativity in one area of critical importance to all our futures. A powerful lobby is determined to resist an effective response from the business world to the ecological crisis. It is doing this merely by doing nothing and, by its sheer scale and power, sitting in the way of change.

The bottom line is that all of us – including future generations – are vulnerable. If phrases such as “*an ecological catastrophe*” or “*the urgent need for radical change in the conduct of humanity*”<sup>21</sup> or “*our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation*”<sup>22</sup> have taken on a jaded air, it is because human contact with situations where these words ring true, is easily avoided. Without some kind of human contact and human story, these words might make us uncomfortable, but they will have little effect. Conversion does not happen through words on a page.

When we see someone lying and groaning on the street, something is wrong if we simply walk by without a second glance. If we see a child crying in public and obviously lost, there is something wrong if we don't at least stop and wonder what should be done. Empathy is an unremarkable feature of daily life. The word “*neighbour*” sums up this reality. Neighbours respond to each other's pain with a concern which is taken for granted. This concern defines what it is to be a neighbour and, when it is missing, the callous behaviour which results can be readily described as “*inhuman*,” humanity is more than a zoological label. Truly human persons are “*good*.” They are admirable because they include others in their concerns. They are generous. Fundamentally, for all its latter day complexity, the world of business belongs in this context of neighbourhood. If it does not find some expression at that level then it may be profitable but the satisfaction of providing something of worth will be missing. The satisfaction of acquisition for its own sake, however, will endure – i.e. the satisfaction of the thief.

21. Paul VI, Address to FAO on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its Institution (16 November 1970), 4: AAS 62 (1970), 833.

22. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Message for the Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation (1 September 2012).

The word “*humanity*” carries with it that sense of vulnerability and hope which we associate with pathos. The unpredictability of our world makes us vulnerable and hope enables us to rise above that unpredictability. The fragility of hope makes us seek out solidarity which is why we respond to a shared vision. The more that vision is shaped by generosity, the more likely it is to generate the energy needed to make it a reality. Political leaders in recent years have failed to grasp their fundamental responsibility to articulate this sense of generous and inclusive vision. The effect on the world of business is that the creation of wealth has been replaced by the accumulation of profit as an all-consuming objective.

A passage in Pope Francis's encyclical is headed “*My appeal*”:

***The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.***<sup>23</sup>

This kind of talk is in contrast to the “*hard nosed*” language to which those in the world of business, finance, and public administration are often drawn. Such tough talk has a role to play; it makes us alert to the problems which lie ahead, but the language of Pope Francis is not the language of business. It is the language of a religious leader, but it is also the language of pathos which in our time is so strangely absent from political leadership.

The way the world of business understands itself will always have a pervasive influence on politics. When business is presented as a self-contained world where the only measure of reality is profit, people will inevitably come to see government in a similar light. How could they not? Every day experience is pervasively shaped by the world of business and when people seek to understand how government works this will always be the closest model at hand. It is inevitable in the current climate that government is seen as a product for which we pay rather than what it truly is – the foundation of an orderly and peaceful existence without which the very possibility of paying for anything would be beyond our reach.

Of course, this world of profit-making can only see any talk about the crying out of sister earth as bizarre and absurd, yet the fact remains that we are all human and we are all vulnerable. A more magnanimous – i.e. generous – view is needed. It does not really matter who said these words which follow. They have a weight of their own:

***I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since***

23. Laudato Si' 13.

*the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.*<sup>24</sup>

This conversation will have to look beyond the symptoms of the problem to its deepest causes both in the individual person and in international policy. It will have to look to the link between human inequality and the fragility of the planet, to the way in which technology shapes our thinking and to the responsibility of policy makers at every level. In particular, it will have to look at the way people do business, from the street trader to the global corporation.

These issues will not be dealt with once and for all. They will have to be reframed and enriched again and again and Pope Francis encyclical provides a context for that reframing, in which the starting point is his call is call to care for our common home. It is not an abstraction. It can only be our home if we can see it, hear it, taste it, touch it, love it and praise it.

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24. Laudato Si' 14.

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## CHAPTER 2

### What is happening to our common home?

**T**he above question can be asked with different tones of voice. It can be a request for information, an expression of curiosity or an opening up to a truly painful reality. This opening up is impeded by the process of “*rapidification*” referred to by Pope Francis<sup>25</sup>. Rapid and constant change is a feature of modern life and it reflects an attitude which seeks to avoid being changed by what we see. The situation is urgent and yet, if we are to understand what is happening, we need to slow down. The compassion on which openness to any human situation depends, cannot develop in a “*fast*” world. This is a world in which the profit motive version of business can indeed thrive, but there is an emptiness about this frantic money making—a lack of human satisfaction.

This emptiness is in denial of a painful reality. The scientific consensus is clear—about pollution, public health, global warming and rising sea levels— but, according to Francis, the painfulness of it all can only be appreciated if we attend to animal life in general and, in particular, to the shockingly diverse effects on the human race in different parts of the world. Those who depend on subsistence economies based on agriculture, fishing, and forestry, are unable to adapt. They share with us the same humanity and they have an economy of worth which contributes to the human thriving of those involved. When animals migrate, these are the people who find themselves most deeply affected. They are left with no choice but to follow the migrating animals, yet they are not recognised as refugees. They may not be fleeing from warfare, but they are fleeing from the violent effects of human activity. Their enforced flight does have effects—including economic effects— elsewhere. Furthermore, those with the most resources—and living on the same planet—are often masking the problem and concealing the symptoms. We need to look at what is being done to water, to forests, to entire ecosystems, animal populations, the Amazon and Congo basins, glaciers and coral reefs. This is primarily the task of government and cannot be left to the market. The market, if not disciplined by effective government, will only wreak havoc and undermine those business people who seek worthwhile achievement and who are motivated to ensure that resources are harnessed effectively. Farming is fundamental to every economy and it is one sphere of human activity where the profit based vision of “*business*” is crowding out the traditional respect for the land as a resource to be cared for. Huge global economic interests are trying to undermine the inherited wisdom of

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25. Laudato Si' 18.

agriculture throughout the world by a heedless exploitation of resources. These interests have the capacity to undermine the sovereignty of entire nations.<sup>26</sup> Indeed they often work with the collusion of corrupt national leaders and exploit the passivity of those with a blinkered view of national interest.

Good business, by providing something of genuine worth in a context of work justly rewarded, has a role to play in tackling these problems and this is true not only in agriculture but in the management of all resources. It will have a crucial role in meeting the challenge ahead but it will also meet resistance from two different directions –from those who want no change and those who are innately suspicious of all business.

Ineffective government, particularly in poorer countries, has led to the unruly growth of many cities with urban chaos, poor transportation, visual pollution and noise affecting human lives. *“We were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal and deprived of physical contact with nature”*<sup>27</sup>. There has been a *“silent rupture in the bonds of integration and social cohesion”*<sup>28</sup>. There may be talk of justice and compassion and human fellowship but words on their own count for little, especially when they go hand in hand with *“a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature”*<sup>29</sup>. Emotion is a function of relationship and, where there are no networks of human encounter, the very possibility of compassion is absent, though empty sentimentality will always distract those who have little appetite for truth.

The attitude of good business is invariably in contrast to sentiment. It is focused, quite literally, on down to earth reality. It does not shy away from difficulties. Nor does it seek to exploit. It is aware of practical limits and, with that awareness, it treats the resources of the earth with respect. It seeks ways in which humanity can thrive through work and ingenuity and is duly rewarded in ways which build up mutual trust and interdependence. Good business accepts responsibility, but it cannot survive in conditions where the ultimate responsibility of government for managing the resources of the earth is not adhered to.

The European Green Deal provides a useful example of government seeking to exercise that responsibility. It speaks of how the reform of carbon pricing will

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26. Laudato Si' 38.

27. Laudato Si' 44.

28. Laudato Si' 46.

29. Laudato Si' 47.

encourage *“changes in consumer and business behaviour”*<sup>30</sup>, of how the EU's energy supply needs will be *“secure and affordable for consumers and businesses”*<sup>31</sup>, of how minimum requirements will be set *“to prevent environmentally harmful products from being placed on the EU market”*<sup>32</sup>, of how measures will be introduced which will encourage businesses *“to allow consumers to choose, reusable, durable and repairable products”*<sup>33</sup>, of how the transition from carbon intensive industries will involve *“significant structural changes in business models”*<sup>34</sup> and of how businesses will be supported in developing *“standardised natural capital accounting practices”*<sup>35</sup>.

All these proposals are necessary and they express a clear stance on the role of government in supervising the world of business, but they also mark out lines of battle to which those opposed to change will bring their considerable resources.

The words which follow carry their own weight:

*Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded*<sup>36</sup>.

*The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation*<sup>37</sup>.

The reality is painful but this pain does not communicate itself in a mechanical way. Listening to stories of suffering humanity can result in complex reactions, some of which are defensive and rooted in denial. These rationalisations need to be named and overcome, but the reality cannot be ignored. The ultimate measure is about how this or that project contributes to human thriving. Those on the ground, digging and dealing and in touch with the needs of the local neighbourhood, have insights to offer. Ultimately, however, this measuring of worth has to be political, through a properly functioning democratic process.

When international political and economic discussions refer to the most vulnerable people on the planet –the majority– it often seems to Pope Francis that this is

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30. EGD, p.5.

31. EGD, p. 6.

32. EGD, p. 7.

33. EGD, p. 8.

34. EGD, p. 16.

35. EGD, p. 17.

36. Laudato Si' 25.

37. Laudato Si' 48.

done *“as an afterthought... almost out of duty”*<sup>38</sup>. He sees opinion makers and centres of power as being too often removed from the poor. This lack of physical contact, he says, can lead to a numbing of conscience –a remoteness– which is compounded by a kind of *“green”* rhetoric. It talks of the planet and of plants and animals, but is oblivious to the suffering of our fellow human beings.

When the issue of population growth is raised, this is often a way of avoiding any reference to the extreme and selective nature of consumerism. It can easily serve to justify the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which could never be universalized. An ecological debt has been accumulated by the wealthier countries in their lavish exploitation and use of resources. The foreign debt of some countries is used to control them, but there is no equivalent use of the ecological debt. In this ecological debt the creditor is in no position to threaten the debtor with foreclosure and there is something grotesque about the situation which is unfolding in relation to climate change and its effects in different parts of the world.

In Pope Francis’ view wealth and technological ingenuity have struck up a mutually reinforcing alliance which centres all on its own interest. Its response to the ecological crisis is to legitimise itself with superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy and perfunctory expressions of concern, while regarding any real attempt at change as a nuisance. In spite of this people have a growing ecological sensitivity, but they have not succeeded in changing their harmful habits of consumption, in part because of the powerful commercial influence on everyday life. A Greek chorus in praise of business as profit is part of this toxic influence.

The blinkered pursuit of financial gain is easily understood as a manifestation of greed, but it is also a form of the deadly sin of sloth. Slothful persons, in their desire to do nothing, are more than willing to deny their adult responsibilities: *“trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen”*<sup>39</sup>. Meanwhile the round the clock frenzy of financial markets continues. It might be no harm if they stopped every so often.

This merry-go-round of the worship of money wields much power in our world, but they are also a form of flight from reality. It is driven by two illusions which need to be confronted. The first is based on the idea that technology, without need for ethical considerations or deep change, can solve the problem; this avoids the challenge of dialogue with other spheres of human wisdom. Our common

home is a human responsibility and not a technological challenge. The second idea is that the worth of human beings is a function of their contribution to the economy. Implicit in this thinking is the assumption if that there are too many people on the planet the numbers should be reduced. It follows that that some have the right to do the reducing this right is determined by their self-interest. Both these solutions see human beings as objects to be managed rather than as intelligent beings open to persuasion and capable of heroic generosity. Honest debate is needed. Hope would have us recognise that we can work for something better, but there are signs that we are near breaking point. Part of any turning back from the brink will be a way of thinking which seeks to enable human flourishing within the limits of our resources. We, as citizens who share the same home, have a responsibility to live in a way which ensures that all of us draw benefit from the resources of our common home. This has been the noble motivation of the world of business –or trade– from the dawn of time.

38. Laudato Si’ 49.

39. Laudato Si’ 59.

## The Gospel of creation

In this chapter the reader will be taken to areas far removed from business and public policy. There will be talk of the sabbath, the psalms and even “the caress of God”. The reader will be invited to read the hymn of St Francis of Assisi after which Francis’ encyclical is named. Dialogue depends on a willingness to entertain the unfamiliar and seemingly irrelevant. It involves an openness to being disconcerted and to having one’s assumptions challenged. As if to emphasise this element of strangeness –or weirdness– the chapter begins with a reflection on pain.

Words on their own will not put us in touch with the pain of our fellow human beings or the degradation of our common home, but they can produce a certain unease. To live a conscientious life is to welcome this unease as a sign that we are going in the right direction, both externally in the sense of attending to others and internally in the sense of being willing to face challenging questions. Conscience faces the awkward question, is ready to meet awkward people and is willing to explore awkward situations. Conscience seeks what is right, while accepting that it has no guaranteed claim to be right. The sign that this seeking is genuine is that the conscientious person is resigned, with good humour, to living in perpetual discomfort. This good humour is hallmark of the virtue of patience and it is the sure sign of wisdom –that attitude which is always ready to learn more. This discomfort of conscientious living is part of the sharp challenge of reality which good business is always willing to embrace.

In dealing with the complexity and multiple causes of the ecological crisis the healthy conscience has a vital role to play. It will open us to that dialogue, without which we will walk, blind and divided, towards catastrophe. Faith convictions are a form of conscientious living and they can be a powerful source of motivation in times of crisis. The nature of the crisis, which we face, is such that no branch of science and no form of wisdom, including those offered by both religion and business, can be overlooked. Interaction among people of diverse faith options and none, who share a passion for the earth and its people, can only be a source of enrichment for all. Likewise, without the insights of good business in its observation of human nature, our response to the crisis is impoverished.

When Pope Francis presents the biblical story of our relationship with the earth, he is speaking in this context of open-ended dialogue<sup>40</sup>. He poses certain questions.

40. *Laudato Si'* 65-75.

Why did God say in the book of Genesis that creation was “very good”<sup>41</sup>? How could the Creator have a special love for each human being? In particular, he asks, how can God know us before he even formed each of us in the womb<sup>42</sup>? These questions are addressed to his fellow believers, but he clearly wants this dialogue to be overheard by those who do not share his beliefs. He is not claiming any special status for the Catholic Church in this dialogue. Quite the contrary, he believes that a deep human respect for the beliefs of others will give us a healthy curiosity about them and will incline us to be more relaxed about sharing our own beliefs. This is part of the enriching dialogue which we all need.

Pope Francis is bringing the spiritual heritage of the Catholic Church to bear on a challenge, which will affect his fellow Catholics in every aspect of their lives and which will require all people, no matter what their fundamental beliefs, to find a new kind of solidarity. The nature of the challenge we face is that we must pledge our deepest motivations, and to welcome a similar pledge from others, to a cause which we all must face together. The business world, if it is to keep its bearings as a form of human achievement, cannot ignore these issues. No one in the business world would want to ignore them, if they really seek to understand human nature.

Moments of deep crisis can open up a sense of the transcendent. The First World War veteran and avowed pacifist, Vera Brittan, spoke of the “*glamour*” and “*magic*” of warfare as something fundamentally dishonest and yet she wrote that the challenge facing pacifism was to impart to rational thought “*that element of sanctified loveliness which, like suburb sunshine breaking through the clouds from time to time, glorifies war*”<sup>43</sup>. This reality is certainly far removed from the board room but those who gather in that place of business cannot afford to dismiss this aspect of human experience.

It is also far removed from the complexities of modern government but this is part of the reason why more and more people have less and less trust in politicians and bureaucrats. The political philosopher Walter Bagehot distinguished between the “*dignified*” and the “*efficient*” parts of government. The dignified parts, in his view, are more important. They are designed to “*excite and preserve the reverence of the population*”. These parts give the government its force and attractiveness. “*The efficient parts only employ that power*”<sup>44</sup>. This awakening of reverence is the prelude to the solidarity on which all government depends. It is what Pope

41. Genesis 1,31.

42. Jeremiah 1,5.

43. Vera Britten, *Testament of Youth*, Virago Press, p. 292.

44. Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1873), p. 44.

Francis is seeking to achieve when he talks about “praise” and “gratitude” and “our common home.” Our political leaders –except for those who have learned to thrive on tribalism and hatred– often seem at a loss when it comes to this awakening of solidarity.

This perspective of praise and wonder, which the young Vera Brittan and her contemporaries experienced in their youthful eagerness, is to be found in all the great spiritual writings of humanity. If Pope Francis, in his exploration of this theme, confines himself to reflecting on the bible this is because he is at home with these writings and he is happy to make us welcome. He has no desire to use it as a prison to lock us into his perspective or to close out other religious texts in which others are more at home than he is. He repeatedly insists on the central importance of dialogue in every conceivable direction.

The great religious texts such as the Koran or the Upanishads speak to the universal human experience of worship which, in one way or another, we all share. We all value –give worth(ship) to– certain fundamental realities which shape the way we live. Worship can be deeply destructive when it is focused on destructive realities, but worship often goes hand in hand with gentleness, generosity and service.

The book of Genesis has often been translated to read that God gave us “dominion” over the earth. Another and, according to Francis, truer reading is that God told Adam to “till and keep” the garden of paradise. We can draw from the bounty of this garden, but we must also protect it for future generations. “The earth is the Lord’s” and so the Law of Moses does not permit land to be sold in perpetuity<sup>45</sup>. This is not just a romantic idea. It is a reality of fundamental significance in a world where humanity finds itself interdependent and called to share resources which we can no longer presume to be limitless.

When Sabbath is described as a day of rest, not just for us but for “your ox and your donkey”<sup>46</sup>, this is to remind us that no resource can be taken for granted. To say that all creatures and the earth itself are valued by God, each one “with its own particular goodness and perfection”<sup>47</sup>, is a call to be still and to notice that what we see and use is good. It did not just happen. It is loved and a blindness to this love will leave us blind to the earth and the true value of what it has to offer.

The bible links the very lives we live to the earth itself. God tells Cain that the voice of Abel “is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from

the ground”<sup>48</sup>. These are strange words. How can someone be “**cursed from the ground?**” We all live on the same ground or earth and when death strikes, it strikes us to the earth to which we all return. In Noah’s day we are told “the earth was filled with violence”; but it took only one good man, acting on that same earth, to restore hope. After the flood renewal went hand in hand with respect for the rhythms of nature.<sup>49</sup>

The business motivation would readily recognise itself as being “down to earth” and, while this might not be readily understood in the light of the rhythms of nature, these realities now need to become part of the realism of business. How the business world understands its role in relation to the earth and its resources will be of crucial significance in the years to come.

Those rhythms which play their part in the unfolding of the story of Noah are also bound up with Sabbath rest. This was more than a weekly cycle. Every seven years this sabbatical rest was to be extended to the land itself which was to be left fallow. Every seven “weeks of years” –fifty years– was the Jubilee, in which the land with its fruits could be availed of by everyone<sup>50</sup>. The idea of Jubilee might never have been acted on but it makes way for an attitude which ensures that business does not dominate and destroy the earth through its –inevitably– limited perspective.

The psalms, Israel’s great anthology of poems, are full of praise for creation and for God. When the people of Israel were deported to Babylon, their whole world was uprooted. They overcame this up-rootedness by speaking of God as the creator of the universe. Until then God was seen as the God of a people, Israel, but now he was seen as Lord of the world and praised wholeheartedly. The role of business is always to bring us down to earth, but if it imprisons us in a “practical reality” which precludes the capacity to dream and celebrate, then it becomes a form of blinding to wider realities.

The bible speaks of nature as something to be studied and understood in terms of the seasons and the different forms of life. Creation, by contrast, is a gift –the result of a decision in which God’s love is the moving force<sup>51</sup>. Gratitude for creation goes hand in hand with a responsibility for nature and, in this responsibility, we leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress<sup>52</sup>. Our intellect, like creation, is a gift and we are free to use it by helping the world evolve positively

45. Laudato Si’ 67.

46. Laudato Si’ 68.

47. Laudato Si’ 69.

48. Genesis 4:9-11.

49. Genesis 6:5-9; 17, Laudato Si’ 7.

50. Genesis 2:2-3, Exodus 16:23; 20:10, Leviticus 25, Laudato Si’ 71.

51. Laudato Si’ 76, 77.

52. Laudato Si’ 78.

or by being unhelpful and adding new ills. Yet God can also bring good out of evil. The Holy Spirit can loosen the knots in human affairs.

Pope Francis speaks of nature as God's art and we are part of it. "It is as if a shipbuilder were able to give timbers the wherewithal to move themselves to take the form of a ship"<sup>53</sup>. Each of us can enter into dialogue with others and with God but, when we turn nature into a source of profit and gain, the underlying message is one of might-is-right. Francis sees this message of might as being in contrast with what Jesus had to say about not lording it over others<sup>54</sup>. The power of multinational organisations in the world today has that capacity to lord it over the world and to gather power to itself in the way that communist governments once attempted to do and with the same kind of outcome – a small group holding the power and the privilege and the vast majority living standardised lives of drudgery. Communism failed because those in power lost touch with their fellow human beings.

Pope Francis speaks of everything on earth being "as it were, a caress of God"<sup>55</sup>. Certain moments in the life of Jesus have invested particular places with a rich and deep meaning for his followers ever since, but the same is true of each one of us when we look back at our own memorable moments. It all forms part of our own relationship with the earth, which is so full of "superfluous" detail – the shape of this particular branch, the sound of that river, the smell of those flowers, the crack in that wall, the sound of this particular voice, the taste of that piece of fruit. We do not live or relate to others or to God in a sterile vacuum and the business motive, with its concern for worthwhile achievement and attention to the human experience, will not ignore this.

Francis, in talking in this manner about Jesus, is trying to slow us down, by offering differing perspectives on the same reality<sup>56</sup>.

*"From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe"<sup>57</sup>.*

*"To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully"<sup>58</sup>.*

53. Laudato Si' 80.

54. Matthew 20:25-26, Laudato Si' 82.

55. Laudato Si' 84.

56. Laudato Si' 86-87.

57. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Social Affairs Commission, Pastoral Letter You Love All that Exists... All Things are Yours, God, Lover of Life" (4 October 2003), 1.

58. John Paul II, Catechesis (30 January 2002); Insegnamenti 25/1 (2002), 140. Laudao Si' 85.

*"To contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice"<sup>59</sup>.*

*"I express myself in expressing the world; in my effort to decipher the sacredness of the world, I explore my own"<sup>60</sup>.*

*The goodness of God "could not be represented fittingly by any one creature"<sup>61</sup>.*

*"God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient"<sup>62</sup>.*

Francis then offers his own perspective: "When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them"<sup>63</sup>. This movement of the heart to praise finds "magnificent expression" in the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi:

*Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
who is the day  
and through whom you give us light.*

*And he is beautiful and radiant  
with great splendour;  
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.*

*Praised be you, my Lord,  
through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear  
and precious and beautiful.*

*Praised be you, my Lord,  
through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather  
through whom you give sustenance  
to your creatures.*

59. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, Reverence for Life. A Message for the Twenty-First Century (1 January 2000), 89.

60. Paul Ricœur, *Philosophie de la Volonté*, t. II: *Finitude et Culpabilité*, Paris, 2009, 216.

61. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 47, art. 1.

62. Laudato Si' 86.

63. Laudato Si' 87.

*Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
who is very useful and humble  
and precious and chaste.*

*Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night,  
and he is beautiful and playful  
and robust and strong.*

According to Francis, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil “almost as a physical ailment”, and the extinction of a species “as a painful disfigurement”<sup>64</sup>. This statement is certainly provocative. How many of us can truly say that we feel so intensely about the desertification of the soil and the extinction of species? Has Pope Francis felt this “physical ailment” and “painful disfigurement”? Maybe. Maybe not. And, if so, to what extent? We might try to find out, but the question misses the point. He is pleading with us to stop and be aware of this reality. He is not offering himself as a model but he is pointing to someone whom he reveres and whose name he took as Pope.

He wants us to understand that humanity is intimately linked with nature and that all talk about communion with nature is unreal if it is accompanied by contempt for our fellow human beings. “When our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one”<sup>65</sup>.

Our connection with nature is bound up with the human need for a home –and for ownership of that home and the goods which we place there. Ownership includes the freedom to trade with others but that freedom can never be allowed to dominate. The Christian tradition has never recognised the right to private property as absolute or inviolable and it is not in accordance with God’s plan that the earth be used in a way that it benefits only the few. Pope Francis quotes the Bishops of Paraguay: “Every campesino has a natural right to possess a reasonable allotment of land where he can establish his home, work for subsistence of his family and a secure life”<sup>66</sup>.

The natural environment is a patrimony of all humanity. It is the responsibility of everyone, but Pope Francis gives this sense of responsibility a twist. Quoting the bishops of New Zealand, he asks what does the commandment “*thou shalt not*

*kill*” mean when “twenty per cent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate which robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive”<sup>67</sup>?

Into this stark and disturbing picture, Pope Francis, introduces the figure of Jesus and his way of speaking about God’s care for all creatures. “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God”<sup>68</sup>. “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them”<sup>69</sup>. He worked with his hands, he ate and drank, told stories and earned a living. His life was simple and yet, even for those who do not believe in him as the Son of God, his presence in our world endures and is powerful.

Pope Francis waxes lyrical about Jesus at the end of time. “The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence”<sup>70</sup>. It is not necessary to share his beliefs to have a sense of fraternity with what those beliefs mean in his life. We are all guided by deep longings, which make us stop and wonder, and there is something about our relationship with the earth which puts us in touch with that depth. When that depth is missing much evil results.

64. Laudato Si’ 89.

65. Laudato Si’ 92.

66. Address to Indigenous and Rural People, Cuilapán, Mexico (29 January 1979), 6: AAS 71 (1979), 209. Laudato Si’ 94.

67. New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, Statement on Environmental Issues (1 September 2006). Laudato Si’ 95.

68. Luke 12:6.

69. Matthew 6:26.

70. Laudato Si’ 100.

## The human roots of the ecological crisis

For two centuries wave after wave of change has transformed so much for the good. Pope Francis takes the view that it is only right to be excited by the possibilities which continue to open up. Technology and science have improved the quality of human life. They have also brought a new form of beauty. He speaks with admiration of the arresting form of the aircraft and the skyscraper.<sup>71</sup> Humanity has always intervened in nature but, as the benefits brought by technology have increased, our relationship with nature has become increasingly confrontational. Talk of an infinite supply of the earth's goods is a lie and nature is protesting at our failure to see this<sup>72</sup>.

Technology brings undoubted benefits, but those who control its development have the power to control our lives. They have the power to alter social possibilities for their own convenience. Technology tends to absorb everything into its ironclad logic with no concern for its impact on humanity and, in particular, on those who are excluded by the way in which it is used. Leaders in this world of technology can certainly accumulate enormous wealth, but this is often the wealth of conquest rather than what the ancient Romans called "*negotium*" and what we call trade or commerce. When wealth is used to dominate others it is no different from any other form of oppression. Furthermore, to argue that the market can resolve this issue is to overlook the fact that, by itself, the market cannot guarantee human development and social inclusion. When the market is monopolised by the wealth – and self-interest – of one small group, the poor are denied access to basic resources not by any wicked plan or strategy, but simply by being unseen and unnoticed.

By catering to different tastes the market can bring about a segmentation of experience and a narrowing of horizons – and choices. This in turn leads to a fragmentation of knowledge and a loss of that appreciation of the whole. It undermines our ability to solve those more complex problems, which require a willingness to dialogue between differing perspectives and interests. The sense of initiative on which good business is based thrives on the curiosity which dialogue awakens.

We need a new way of looking at things – a lifestyle and a spirituality – to generate resistance to manipulation of our thoughts and emotions by technology. Self-referring "*business*" talk often serves only to stifle the resistance which has

71. Laudato Si' 103.

72. Laudato Si' 106.

already begun to emerge. "*An authentic humanity... seems to dwell in the midst of our technological culture, almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door*"<sup>73</sup>. There is a growing awareness that scientific progress is not to be equated with human progress, as megastructures and soulless apartment blocks reflect a world of drab monotony<sup>74</sup>.

Francis repeatedly stresses the need to slow down and look at the world in a different way so as to recover the values which have been swept away by our modern world with its unrestrained delusions of grandeur<sup>75</sup>. He speaks of the technological mind, which sees nature as a cold body of facts. Its vision of mastery over the world fosters the impression that the protection of nature is of concern only to the faint-hearted. If we feel nothing in common with a poor person, a human embryo or a person with a disability, how can we value other forms of life? When we set ourselves in the place of God, he says, we provoke a rebellion in nature<sup>76</sup>.

The renewal, which is so badly needed has to begin with ourselves. We have unique capacities of knowledge, will and freedom, but what makes us fully human is our openness to others. The capacity to bargain, which requires both intelligence and mutual respect, is part of that freedom, but underlying that capacity is an adaptability, a sense of give and take which reflects a generous view of the world. Without this attitude engagement with others degenerates into a self-centred calculation of advantage in which mutual suspicion becomes the order of the day and human relations are soured. Our relationship with the environment cannot be separated from that open attitude of freedom. Francis insists that the same is true of our relationship with the Creator. When human beings place themselves at the centre of reality they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and their own self-interest. Once this happens, there is nothing to prevent the most inhumane and callous behaviour<sup>77</sup>.

Spirituality can rightly be described as "*soft*" and "*nebulous*," if it fails to bring us to authentic holiness<sup>78</sup>. Yet without a significant number of people of authentic

73. Laudato Si' 112.

74. Laudato Si' 113.

75. Laudato Si' 114.

76. Laudato Si' 117.

77. Laudato Si' 122.

78. Rudolf Otto's "*The Idea of the Holy*" was first published in German in 1917 and has never been out of print since. It is now available in 20 languages. He speaks "*das heilige*" or "*the holy*" as "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*" – the terrifying and fascinating mystery. In his analysis of the word "*tremendum*" he speaks of "*religious dread*" (or "*awe*") (Oxford UP, 1952, p. 14) and of "*a consciousness of the absolute superiority or supremacy of a power other than my self*" (p. 21) but also of an energy "*which is urgent active compelling and alive*" (p. 24).

spirituality no law will ever prevent the destruction of the environment. When the culture is devoid of any sense of spirituality or vision, the legal system is seen as an obstacle to be avoided and there is no sense of the dignity and rights of the person. When that dignity is a feature of everyday life it is natural for people to initiate proposals. They strike deals and build up networks of credit which open up new possibilities.

A tendency to exploit is an unavoidable part of the world of the “*bargain*” –i.e. of business– and, if it is not held in check, the satisfaction of worthwhile achievement which motivates all good business will be undermined by the obsession of the profiteer. When this happens the exploitation of labour is inevitable. Exploitation may be motivated by greed, but it also feeds the vice of pride as the exploited are treated with contempt. That same pride leads to a further degradation of human solidarity and a blindness to any sense of sharing a common home with others. Once this blindness prevails, the result is inevitable –the brutal dominance of a small group.

In order to live on this earth we must work. Underlying all work is our interaction with what is other than ourselves –both other human beings and the earth on which we all depend. To be denied work is to be denied this opportunity of interaction. Monasticism started off as a flight from urban decay that began with prayer, but labour soon became part of it<sup>79</sup>. There is more to work than effort. Work is meant to produce something of value –something good and worthy of praise. When our work is done we can stand back and contemplate it just as we contemplate nature– no matter what the product. Even something as uninspiring as a bag of cement can be invested with a deeply human meaning by those involved in its production. They all need an income but there is something perverse in thinking of their work solely in terms of the money to be made.

That bag of grey powder could end up as part of someone’s home. It might help build a bridge which enables people to travel more easily through a local district. It might become an attractive architectural feature. There is something innately human in finding meaning in one’s work or business venture. This search for meaning is a form of contemplation. We stop and wonder and allow our imaginations to be nourished. Work should be a setting for personal growth that draws on our creativity, on our eagerness to plan for the future and to care for the environment, on our relationships with others and on that sense of our dependence on a greater reality which is associated with the holy<sup>80</sup>. A commercial venture, from which

79. Laudato Si’ 126.

80. Laudato Si’ 127.

this element of personal growth is excluded, might make money but it will also be indifferent to the wider concerns of humanity.

Work is also bound up with the wider world of finance and credit. Those who manage this world (and political leaders responsible for its supervision) have a role to play in providing an answer to a fundamental question: what is worthy of credit? Projects that will free humanity from pollution and greenhouse gases must currently contend with the resistance of those who are determined that their own investments in destructive industries will flourish. A battle is being fought, a kind of poker game, between the continuing influence of those who insist that business is all about profit and the emerging world view in which business is a means and not an end in itself<sup>81</sup>. These two visions are mutually incompatible.

Short-term profit, which is the driving force of greenhouse gas industries, has its own particular logic of exploitation. Part of that logic is its willingness to pose as the champion of those who depend on such industries for employment. The loss of a job leads to an erosion of social capital and the resulting isolation undermines that sense of trust and responsibility on which both human dignity and public order depends. Without this dependency of so many on green-house gas industries for their livelihoods, the ecological challenge would be primarily a question of calculation and logistics.

The European Green Deal represents one attempt to meet this challenge of just transition<sup>82</sup>. It speaks of an investment challenge which requires “*mobilising both the public and private sector*.” There will be a Just Transition Mechanism, including a Just Transition Fund, which will strive to protect “*the citizens and workers most vulnerable to the transition*.” The overall plan is clear and necessary, but its implementation will meet with the inevitable determined resistance and the resulting conflict will reshape the political landscape. Neither the struggle nor the outcome will not be confined to Europe.

Another mechanism of short-term profit at the expense of vulnerable people is industrialised farming. Small scale food production systems feed the greater part of the world’s population using a modest amount of land and producing less waste. In spite of this, the self-serving power of big business prevails in regional and global markets. The talk is of free trade but to speak of freedom, while real conditions bar many from access to it, is an exercise in doublespeak which brings

81. Laudato Si’ 128.

82. EGD 2.2.1.

both business and politics into disrepute<sup>83</sup>. Humanity's most vital resource is fertile land and its effective use is a matter of immense political significance.

A talent for scientific research and innovation is a blessing both for the individuals concerned and for those who benefit from their work, but it is also a form of power and will, therefore, always have a tendency to corrupt. Scientific progress is never an end in itself. It needs to be considered in the light of ethical considerations<sup>84</sup>. Very often these considerations are in relation to side effects. For instance genetically modified cereals give an inbuilt advantage to large scale producers at the expense of those who do not have fair access to information<sup>85</sup>. Another example of failure to examine side-effects is to be found among some ecological movements. While rightly demanding that certain limits be imposed on scientific research, *"they sometimes fail to apply those same principles to human life"*<sup>86</sup>.

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## CHAPTER 5

### Lines of approach and action

In spite of all the crass indifference to humanity and the earth, which is associated with a dehumanised vision of business, there is a growing conviction that our planet is our home and that humanity is one people living in this common home. There is a growing awareness that something has gone wrong in this home of ours. Pope Francis speaks of "the cracks in the planet" and of how those cracks have *"profoundly human causes"*<sup>87</sup>. A common home makes us interdependent, so we cannot share this home while behaving like strangers to each other. We have shared responsibilities and we need to plan a shared future. Those, who have not been duped by vested interests, already know that fossil fuels need to be replaced and public debate has elicited a variety of committed and generous responses. Many civil society organisations have emerged to awaken public consciousness and within the world of business and finance there is a growing awareness that the balance sheet as we currently know it is not an adequate reflection of the reality in which every business must function.

The obligation of polluters to pay costs is accepted in theory, but poorly implemented in practise, though there have been real achievements. The ozone layer issue was dealt with effectively through the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol, but the same cannot be said of the protection of biodiversity<sup>88</sup>. Certain countries place their national interest and the short term profits of influential investors above the global common good. This is, first and foremost, a failure of political leadership. People motivated by a spirit of genuine entrepreneurship have no defence against the profiteer if there is no effective regulation of the market's use of natural resources.

Effective regulation of the market in a context of global governance and the internationalisation of environment costs remains to be achieved. The gap between those who have benefited from industrialisation and those who have had to pay such a high proportion of the costs is brutal. Carbon credits do not allow for the radical change which present circumstances demand. The priority for poor countries has to be the elimination of poverty but, often amidst the direst poverty, there are some who enjoy a spectacular income based on granting political favours to multinational companies. Those companies are invariably based in countries which have grown rich at the cost of on-going pollution of the planet. The advantage of

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83. Laudato Si' 129.

84. Laudato Si' 131,132.

85. Laudato Si' 134.

86. Laudato Si' 136.

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87. Laudato Si' 163.

88. Laudato Si' 168, 169.

abundant solar energy, one clear alternative to the current global dominance of carbon fuels, will require the financing of infrastructure at global level in a manner suited to varied local conditions<sup>89</sup>. It will also call for a framework of law in which worthwhile business initiative can thrive.

When powerful companies dump contaminated waste or set up offshore polluting industries, there is no way to hold them to account without a set of global regulatory norms backed up by powerful enforcement agencies. The ocean, in particular, needs a system of governance, not just to care for the ocean itself, but to supervise ocean going traffic. The mind-set which resists any talk of global warming and pollution also stands in the way of eliminating poverty and inequality<sup>90</sup>. The spurious championing of national independence is a betrayal of the very people it claims to protect by resisting the very structures which alone can meet the real challenges faced by humanity, whatever nation they might belong to.

The power of the nation state is weakening, because the economic and financial sectors have outgrown the capacity of national governments to control them. The efficiently organised international institutions needed to remedy this weakness will require fair appointment procedures agreed upon by national governments, along with effective means of sanctioning rogue leadership posturing in the name of nationhood.

Establishing the rule of law at global level will call for the setting up of courts, with trials and enforceable judgements. Our understanding of crimes against humanity needs to be developed in the light of the damage being done to our common home. This is the only way to meet “*the urgent need of a true world political authority*”<sup>91</sup>. Without these institutions there will be plenty of talk about “*business*” but the reality will be one of globalised monopoly where responsible human initiative is actively discouraged and crushed.

Without the rule of law, at international level, in relation to the management of the earth’s resources corruption will thrive and politicians will be bought. Without it there are no structures in place to promote best practise and to ensure that the spirit of liberty which is needed for creative initiative. The rule of law, with its respect for due process, is a standing challenge to the cynicism of power politics, which seeks to belittle any farsighted agenda as foolishly idealistic. If the world of

business is bedevilled by greed, the world of politics is bedevilled by pride –the sense of conceited superiority which comes from knowledge and power.

In one of his earlier encyclicals Pope Francis introduced a maxim – “*Time is greater than space*” – by which he meant that a well-designed enduring process was of greater value than the raw use of power even if it is effective in the short term<sup>92</sup>. The combined influence of political corruption and of cynicism has rendered the world order largely powerless and it is up to individuals and groups to instil a greater sense of responsibility, community and love for the earth.<sup>93</sup> No one has the right to say that they have no responsibility. One very significant way in which people can exercise this responsibility is through healthy business initiative. The unconscionable power of the world of business in recent times has resulted in a complacency which fails to see how pollution and global warming are a source of general impoverishment. It will take ingenuity to shift the centre of gravity of global wealth away from industries which foster pollution and towards investment based on a worthwhile future, but this is precisely the kind of challenge which will enable the creative entrepreneur to thrive.

It is vital that this kind of innovation be encouraged, but at every step we are dealing with people’s livelihoods, their future, and that of their families. We need to keep in on-going touch with human vulnerability and, in this, indigenous peoples provide a test case. Not only are they clearly vulnerable but they have something to say about themselves and our world. Their respect for place, for the earth and for tradition is more than an exotic curiosity. It is a measure of their respect for the planet<sup>94</sup>.

Enterprises, which respect the environment and are capable of thriving precisely because of that respect, need to be encouraged by public policy. Public and civic institutions have a vital role to play in challenging the mind-set of short-term gain, but they must also beware of standing in judgement on those who are trapped in an evil structure through no fault of their own. Self-righteousness is not a strategy and will only drive people into the arms of the cynical elite which dominates present day politics and economics. “*A healthy politics is sorely needed, capable of reforming and coordinating institutions, promoting best practises and overcoming undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia*”<sup>95</sup>.

89. Laudato Si’ 170-172.

90. Laudato Si’ 175.

91. Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 67: AAS 101 (2009). In this passage he is paraphrasing “*my predecessor Blessed John XXIII*”. Laudato Si’ 175.

92. *Evangelii Gaudium* 222-224.

93. Laudato Si’ 179.

94. Laudato Si’ 179.

95. Laudato Si’ 181.

We need environmental impact assessment as part of the planning process from the beginning and the local population should have a special place at the table, because they have a unique knowledge of the resources available in their particular part of the planet. It is not enough to speak of “*interventions*”; we need policies worked out by all parties and we need to develop a sustainable economy in which all are free to participate. Some projects can result in great harm because of failure to study the local situation with the help of local people<sup>96</sup>. This is particularly true of mining. The technical value of minerals may only be fully known to a small group of scientists and financiers, but, in determining the conditions under which those minerals can be harnessed, failure to dialogue with a local population is an act of brutality and a violation of human dignity.

Just as the use of resources is bound up with places, the same is true of the disasters which result from the abuse of those resources. When the prospect of disaster looms it is a crass insult, to those whose lives are imperilled, to demand full scientific certainty of what lies ahead. Too much is at stake<sup>97</sup>. The burden of proof should not favour those who insist on the priority of their own self-interest. When people’s lives and homes are of greater significance than the delay of a business opportunity.

In cases where it is difficult to reach consensus, honest and open debate is essential if informed decisions are to be reached. This, in the short term, may not be convenient for decision-makers or for those who fear for their lives and their families, but it is necessary in the long run if the indifference of those who worship their own self-interest is to be defeated. Clearly if the danger is urgent the decision must be urgent, but the legitimacy of the decision-making process will be undermined if it is purely reactive. The fundamental strategy must be to ensure that particular interests or ideologies won’t prejudice the common good<sup>98</sup>.

The market process has always needed political supervision, now more than ever. Monopolies and unfair trade practises enable people to shrug off their wider responsibilities. The only difference in our time is that those responsibilities include care for the environment. Challenging monopoly is never a simple matter because, when supervision is too intrusive, it undermines initiative and the availability of credit. The ultimate beneficiaries of a well-supervised market are the public; they are also the ultimate victims of its failure, as in 2007 when banks were saved at their expense. The response to that crisis was a missed opportunity in developing

a new economy attentive to ethical principles in which irresponsible behaviour is held to account<sup>99</sup>. If the political process concerns itself solely with the practicality of business and the economy, political leaders are in effect abdicating their role.

It is the function of public life and political leadership to look to the future in a spirit of generosity. This is necessary not only for the generations to come but for the benefit of those now alive. Without a sense of forward vision, justice will always lack that sense of distance and impartiality, without which there can be no clear focus on wrongful situations in the here and now. Those who are obsessed with maximising profits thrive under these conditions and their obsession makes it impossible for them to stop and reflect on the environmental damage which they will inflict on future generations. Their profits are the result of opportunities made possible by legal structures, which were not designed with current realities in mind. The joint stock company, for instance, has been of great service to humanity but, like any great innovation, it changes society and that change gives rise to new challenges. It is not designed to attend to the complexity of ecosystems or the real value of things for persons and cultures or the concerns and needs of the poor.

This can only sound naive and pathetically earnest to those powerful people whose human experience had been truncated by corporate life, but the power of these corporations to institutionalise people has become a threat to humanity. Political leaders, who allow their need for finance to place them in the grip of this toxic reality, may be realistic in the pursuit of power, but that achievement will be of no positive consequence. It is no accident that the standing of politics and political leaders has been steadily eroded in recent times.

Timidity in challenging short term profit is the enemy and talk of “*fighting climate change*” is misguided. The real struggle is with human behaviour. People need to be persuaded that, far from being a remote ideal, a sustainable economy directs energy along new channels –reusing and recycling, improving energy efficiency, offering possibilities to create and innovate, protecting the environment and creating more sources of employment. Political leaders who can convince people, in a spirit of hope and solidarity, that this kind of creative future is attainable will break the logjam we now face. This creativity would be a “worthy expression of our most noble human qualities within a broader concept of quality of life”<sup>100</sup>. Part of this creativity is the initiative of those who accept the financial risk of harnessing the resources of the earth in a manner which promotes both humanity and the care for our common home.

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96. Laudato Si’ 183.

97. Laudato Si’ 186.

98. Laudato Si’ 188.

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99. Laudato Si’ 189.

100. Laudato Si’ 192.

The behaviour of those who consume and destroy can only be remedied by more sober lifestyles. In the task of protecting nature, short term gain is not something to be placed in the balance. The profitability of a firm is, in itself, of no worth, because self-interest in the here and now is what has caused the problem in the first place. There will be no gain of any kind in a world laid waste. Measures based on deference to wealth simply delay the inevitable disaster. Talk of sustainable growth is simply *"absorbs the language and values of ecology into the values and categories of finance and technology and the social and environmental responsibility of business gets reduced to a series of marketing and image-enhancing measures"*<sup>101</sup>. The cost of sustainability needs to be seen as an investment in medium term economic benefits and the cost of pollution needs to be measured and charged to those responsible. If the environment is not valued as a good on which humanity depends, those responsible for pollution will seize on this language as an excuse for paying only a fraction of the costs involved.

If the political process is to be effective and respectful of human dignity, it must respect the principle of subsidiarity, which nurtures the freedom to develop those capabilities which are present at every level of society. It also demands a greater sense of responsibility from those with greater power. This principle applies to the economy as well as political structures. When the joint stock company was first developed it was to encourage initiative, but we have long since reached the point in which many multinational corporations are more powerful than nation-states. These structures have the power to crowd out personal initiative and their self-preoccupation discourages efforts to help the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life.<sup>102</sup> Monopoly only serves those who monopolise. Big business does not favour investment in smaller projects focused on caring for the earth, because it does not see or value such entities. Despite their ecological benefits, they are no match for the favoured giants of greenhouse gas producing industries.

A strategy for real change needs to be able to face the problem of corruption because, when business is too dominant and political institutions are ineffective, corruption and organised crime become just another way of making money. This will have to be based on a dialogue which includes civil society and, in particular, the many groups campaigning for change. Real change, however, will not come about without a reshaping of the relationship between government and the world of business in a manner which develops reliable ways of determining which ventures benefit society and which do not. Business itself will have a necessary role in this

but this role can only be positive if an authentic voice for the care for the earth is able to emerge from this world of *"negotium"* in which bargains are made, value is established and credit is maintained. While this voice has to be independent it will only be possible when political leaders play their part in supervising the market in a manner which protects the environment.

Empirical science clearly has a part to play in the care for our common home and in the fostering of business initiative, but this does not provide a complete explanation of life and reality. No science can explain aesthetic sensibility and its appeal to humanity; nor can it explain reason or argument. Nor can we dismiss certain writings simply because they arise in the context of religious belief<sup>103</sup>. The majority of those who live on this planet profess to be believers and this should be a motive for those of us, who have a religious faith, to join with others in caring for our home<sup>104</sup>. This should also command the respect of reasonable people who seek to understand the human experience with an open mind.

Our relationship with our common home is not pragmatic. Words such as *"love," "compassion"* and *"mercy"* may be universal in their use, but for religious believers – most of the human race – these words have deep roots in their particular traditions. The term *"mercy"* is of particular significance in the context of ecology. It is an attitude which comes into its own in response to wrongdoing and chaos. In Christian theology it has long been bound up with God's omnipotence<sup>105</sup>. Power is normally associated with the ability to crush and destroy, but the power of God is quite different<sup>106</sup>. When Jesus speaks, in the Sermon on the Mount, of the gentle inheriting the earth he is saying that the power of the gentle will prevail because other forms of power can only destroy and, unchecked, will end up by destroying this earth on which we live. Ultimately, however, brutal power is self-destructive.

Many scientists are people of faith who see their beliefs as a calling to openness towards the inexhaustible richness of reality, but their faith has no bearing on their scientific discipline. Scientists are called on to make scientific arguments but this

103. Laudato Si' 199.

104. Laudato Si' 201.

105. According to Aquinas, God's power is primarily revealed in mercy. Summa Theologiae I Art.30 Q.4.

106. Pope Francis has publicly acknowledge his indebtedness to a book by Walter Kasper, *"Mercy, the essence of the Gospel and the key to Christian life"*. New York, 2014. In the opening chapter he refers to Pope John XXIII and how he describes mercy as *"the most beautiful name and the most beautiful way to address God"*. (p. 6). He quotes Pope John's words at opening of Vatican II describing how the church has opposed *"the errors of every age. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity"*. (Documents of Vatican II, ed. Walter M. Abbott, New York 1966, p. 716.) Kasper also notes how both John Paul II developed this theme (pp. 7-9).

101. Laudato Si' 194.

102. Laudato Si' 196.

is not true in the realm of political struggle. Here one must look to those deeper realities which awaken a sense of generosity and vision – the realm of pathos which touches the heart and has the power to transform human behaviour.

The American Declaration of Independence carries the names of a group of elected political leaders who pledged to each other “*our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor*”. They wanted the world to know that they saw this document, which carried their names, as something of the utmost value. In our time all the great religions are committing themselves to care for the earth and they have declared that commitment in terms of their most dearly held beliefs.

In contemporary culture any declaration, which explicitly refers to a person’s deepest and most cherished beliefs, is too often viewed with suspicion and distaste. In the public sphere reference to personal faith is discouraged and yet, if we want to value the passion which someone brings to a particular cause, what better way is there of doing so than by inviting them to declare the source of that passion – that ‘*sacred honor*’ – in their most deeply held beliefs? To regard the expression of religious faith, in this context, as something unseemly, instead of being a genuinely human pledge of sincerity, is perverse and intolerant.

Any religion can be turned into a vehicle of fanaticism, and the resulting violence has left deep scars on human history. It is also true that the great religions have shaped human civilisation in a much more benign manner than the atheistic regimes of the twentieth century. Religious leaders in our time are increasingly aware of the need to dialogue on a shared concern for nature, for the poor and for the building of networks of respect and fraternity. The sciences also need to dialogue, as do the various ecological movements in relation to their ideological conflicts. The world of business and finance cannot afford to absent itself from this process. To do so would damage not only the credit on which the world economy is based but, more alarmingly, it would be a betrayal of the human value – and necessity – of business in harnessing the resources of the earth. We must look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which requires patience, self-discipline and generosity. We need to bear in mind that the realities among which we live are greater than the ideas which we cherish in our own minds.

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## CHAPTER 6

### Ecological education and spirituality

**T**he word “*virtue*” sits uncomfortably in the everyday conversation of our time but the combination of attitudes and habits to which this word refers is an intrinsic part of the struggle to protect our common home. Good business has an innate understanding of this reality but the origin of that understanding does not lie in the world of business. It lies in those deep human experiences which form our sense of what is right and wrong. It has always been a struggle for humanity to keep these deeper realities in view and virtuous living is about the struggle to do just that and to act accordingly. In this chapter Pope Francis is very much focused on the forming of right attitudes and towards the end of the chapter he appeals strongly to his fellow Catholics to avail of the riches offered by their spiritual heritage.

We know we have to change, but we remain paralysed and the source of our paralysis is a kind of amnesia. We forget our common origin and mutual dependence and we have little sense of a future shared by everyone. People are trapped in a compulsive consumerism in which the only freedom is the freedom to consume. “*When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases*”<sup>107</sup>. Greed is not just about wanting more and more. It is about insisting that we have a right to more and more and being outraged when we don’t get it. When greed takes over any sense of the common good disappears. The inevitable outcome is corruption and violence, but “*no system can completely suppress our openness to what is good true and beautiful, or our God given ability to respond to his grace at work in our hearts*”<sup>108</sup>.

Pope Francis quotes from The Earth Charter, which was launched in The Hague on 29 June, 2000, after a consultation process lasting more than ten years. “*As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life*”<sup>109</sup>. The Charter has been formally endorsed by thousands of organisations, including UNESCO and the IUCN (World Conservation Union).

Pope Francis’ encyclical echoes the Earth Charter’s note of hope, but this note is a call to mobilisation. We face a challenge. The measure of this challenge is

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107. *Laudato Si’* 204.

108. *Laudato Si’* 205.

109. *Laudato Si’* 208.

not in the task to be done, however, but in how to confront and overcome the moral failure of humanity. *“When there is a general breakdown in the exercise of a certain virtue in personal and social life, it ends up causing a number of imbalances, including environmental ones. That is why it is no longer enough to speak only of the integrity of ecosystems. We have to dare to speak of the integrity of human life, of the need to promote and unify all the great values. Once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment”*<sup>110</sup>.

*“Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them”*<sup>111</sup>. An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation by reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals. We are speaking of an attitude of the heart.

Awareness of the challenge, unaccompanied by action, can only serve to weigh us down if we lack the courage to act. On a personal level, the challenge is to develop new habits of daily life and new patterns of purchase which ensure for others, whom we may never meet, a dignified livelihood. Changes of lifestyle can bring healthy pressure on decision makers. It can also affect the profits of businesses, positively as well as negatively. One real sign of hope, in countries which need to make the greatest changes, is that young people who are well acquainted with extreme consumerism and affluence, have arrived at a new ecological sensitivity. Effective environmental education includes a critique of the myths of individualism, unlimited progress and the unregulated market. It also promotes a new vision of the good life, including work and trade, both of which are intrinsic to every human society. This vision will include ecological balance and inner harmony and the need to make the leap to the transcendent.

The good habits underlying this vision will not come about simply by providing information. Children who are reared on a solid grounding in virtue will have no difficulty living the selfless ecological commitment which is being called for. For this family life is vital. *“In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life”*<sup>112</sup>. Family life teaches us to control our aggression and greed and to pay attention to the everyday details of life with others. *“There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions and it is*

*wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle”*<sup>113</sup>. The habits which result from this process have no glamour, but they reflect a *“generous and worthy creativity”*<sup>114</sup>. They call forth a goodness which inevitably tends to spread. Christian communities have a role to play in this process through grateful contemplation of God’s world and in their concern for the needs of the poor and their care for the environment.

This emerging culture of care for the earth will not be sufficient of itself to bring about change. Institutions with power to penalise will be needed because, without the force of law, the goodwill on which this culture depends has no defence against unscrupulous opportunism. Yet the personal qualities of self-control and the willingness to learn from one another, along with the need to stop and appreciate beauty, are all essential if we are to rethink our relationship with nature. Francis quotes his predecessor, Benedict XVI: *“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”*<sup>115</sup>. There is no escaping the need for a profound inner conversion which, when based on our most deeply rooted beliefs, becomes evident in our relationship with the world around us. Conscience calls us to examine our lives and to acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation. The purpose of this *“sense of sin”* is not self-laceration, which serves no useful purpose, but to cultivate gentleness.

Gentleness is not weak. It does not lash out, but it is never deterred by hostility and violence. It keeps its focus on the good to be done and, for that very reason, it is attractive. It inspires solidarity. An ecological conversion is gentle because it inspires greater creativity and enthusiasm and solidarity as we set about undoing the harm being done to the world around us and to those who have suffered because of that harm. For believers there is something gentle in the way each creature reflects the divine and Christians are called by what we see to live in that fraternity with creation which St Francis so radiantly embodied. We are called to enjoy and appreciate small things, free from obsession with consumption. Sobriety is liberating. Conceited individualism is an impoverishment. We are enriched by fraternal encounters, by service and by contact with nature in prayer.

In the concluding passages of *Laudato Si’* it becomes very clear how aware Pope Francis is of his responsibility to encourage those who share his Christian faith. He wants believers to understand that the call of Christ to his followers is a call

110. *Laudato Si’* 224.

111. *Laudato Si’* 225.

112. *Laudato Si’* 213.

113. *Laudato Si’* 211.

114. *Laudato Si’* 211.

115. Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry* (24 April 2005); AAS 97 (2005), 710. *Laudato Si’* 216.

of love which includes care for our common home, not just as a duty but as a joy. These closing words are also a declaration of Francis' own faith. In these closing words of signature he is pledging his *"Life, Fortune and Honour"*.

He speaks of how each creature reflects something of God and he quotes Jesus' saying about the birds of the air that *"not one of them is forgotten before God"*<sup>116</sup>. Christianity encourages a lifestyle which is capable of *"deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption"*<sup>117</sup>. *"No one can cultivate this sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself"*<sup>118</sup>. *"We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness"*<sup>119</sup>. One expression of this attitude is grace before and after meals, a practise by no means confined to Christianity. This practise reminds us of our dependence on both the creator and on those who provide us with food and affirms our solidarity with those in greatest need<sup>120</sup>.

Integral ecology is lived through simple daily gestures inspired by a love which reaches beyond personal relations. It has a pervasive influencing in shaping *"macro-relationships, social, economic and political"*<sup>121</sup>. Society is enriched through the presence of those who live in this way and through all kinds of organisations which this love makes possible. The task of business, in harnessing the resources of the earth in the service of human thriving, is most definitely part of this story. *"These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences"*<sup>122</sup>.

Francis speaks of how the universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely, and of the mystical meaning to be found in a leaf<sup>123</sup>. For Christian believers the sacraments connect us to the earth and to each other – the pouring of water, the anointing with oil, the laying on of hands. In the Eucharist the Lord reaches our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. It is our source of light – motivating our concerns for the environment, inspiring us to be stewards of creation<sup>124</sup>.

Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is a day which heals our relationship with God ourselves and the world. We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work – its meaning. Contemplation protects human action from becoming machine-like; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else. Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others.<sup>125</sup>

The Trinity created the world with each of the three persons playing a part. As the relational aspect of the world reflects the three-fold nature of God, in like manner a human person matures to the extent that they enter into relationships. This interconnectedness flows from the mystery of the Trinity<sup>126</sup>. Mary, in grieving for her son, enters into his love for the crucified of this world. Yet she is also *"clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet"*<sup>127</sup>. She is the Queen of Creation, of which she is a part, through giving birth to her son and standing in solidarity with him.

*"At the end we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor13:12), and able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe... Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all"*<sup>128</sup>.

*"In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God, for "if the world has a beginning and if it has been created, we must enquire who gave it this beginning, and who was its Creator". Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope"*<sup>129</sup>.

He concludes with a *"prayer for the earth"*<sup>130</sup>.

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116. Luke 12:6.

117. Laudato Si' 222.

118. Laudato Si' 225.

119. Laudato Si' 226.

120. Laudato Si' 227.

121. Laudato Si' 231.

122. Laudato Si' 232.

123. Laudato Si' 233.

124. Laudato Si' 235, 236.

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125. Laudato Si' 237.

126. Laudato Si' 240.

127. Laudato Si' 241.

128. Laudato Si' 243.

129. Laudato Si' 244.

130. See Appendix II.

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## PART THREE

# CONCLUSION

**P**ope Francis is clearly motivated by his faith in Christ in writing the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In speaking of the earth as our sister "*crying out*," in his attention to the findings of scientists, in his love of the home which we all share and in his condemnation of inequality and indifference to the most vulnerable he is inspired and impassioned by his faith in a crucified Christ, who is willing to surrender all for the sake of humanity. As a religious leader he takes with the utmost seriousness his responsibility to encourage his many followers in the faith which they share with him. Yet neither his faith nor his responsibility as a pastor are his central concern in this encyclical.

He begins by calling to mind the cry of the earth and he then goes on to recall how, "*more than fifty years ago, with the world teetering on the brink of nuclear crisis*" his predecessor addressed his reflection on peace not only to the Catholics but to "*all men and women of good will*"<sup>131</sup>. At the heart of his concern is humanity – what has happened to us and the kind of future which awaits us if we don't stop and pay heed. He wants to stop the crazy merry-go-round of a world which has no idea where it is going and the only way to do this is to listen to each other, to learn from each other and to let ourselves rediscover a sense of what is truly worthwhile. His eagerness for dialogue is due to his realisation that all the resources of humanity must be brought together to face this crisis. Without this gathering through dialogue we will career blindly into disaster. This call to dialogue is open ended and intended to include everyone. He is calling for dialogue to become an inbuilt attitude in the emerging global culture of humanity. At one point he speaks of it as "*the source of our nobility as human persons*"<sup>132</sup>. He does however single out a need for particular forms of dialogue between science and religion, between Catholicism and philosophical thought, between scientific-technical language and the language of the people, between indigenous communities and the managers of big projects, between the various sciences, between the various ecological movements. Chapter five – "*Lines of approach and action*" – sets out a strategy of dialogue as an intrinsic part of the political process at international, national and local levels. Politics and economics need to engage in "*frank dialogue in the*

*service of life, especially human life*"<sup>133</sup>. Dialogue is needed between religion and science and among different religions as well as different sciences.

In all these calls for dialogue there is no reference to business except indirectly as part of the economy. He does refer to business on many occasions and the picture presented is ugly – source of pollution, hoarder of water supply, destroyer of wealth and beauty, dumper of toxic waste, denier of employment, corroder of social capital, purveyor of doublespeak, deceiver of the vulnerable, promoter of compulsive consumption, destroyer of the environment. In spite of all this he calls for "*an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity*" and refers to business as "*a noble vocation*"<sup>134</sup>. This reflection on business and the earth seeks to develop this idea of business being noble and creative, as part of the dialogue Francis calls for so emphatically.

Much of what is wrong with our planet is bound up with what is wrong with business, precisely because the primary concern of business is with the resources of the earth. These resources can be exploited for the profit of a few, at the expense of the many and of the planet itself, or they can be harnessed to promote human thriving. The word "*harness*" is normally used in relation to a beast of burden. Anyone who puts a harness on a horse, a donkey, a mule or an ox will know that a harness is of little use on an animal which is not cared for. The metaphor of the earth as a beast of burden is a helpful one.

The noble motivation of business is bound up with the harnessing of the earth's resources for the common good, but this harnessing only makes sense if the earth is cared for. Good business is driven by the prospect of achieving something of human worth with these resources or of facilitating, in some financially measurable way, such achievement. The nature of this achievement is that it involves financial risk and to be viable it must be profitable for those involved. People need income and, for society in general, some need to have both the willingness and the resources to invest. Profit is necessary but if profit is not the result of a risk knowingly taken it is of no moral worth. It is certainly rewarding, but the fundamental motivating force of good business is to achieve something worthwhile with the resources of the earth. Such achievement is profitable not just for the achiever but for society at large and when this is lost sight of the so-called profits of business will turn, eventually but literally, to ash.

Business must always be practical if it is to be viable. It must be focused on human behaviour as it is both in devious ingenuity but also in its most noble aspiration. Part

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131. *Laudato Si'* 3.

132. *Laudato Si'* 119.

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133. *Laudato Si'* 189.

134. *Laudato Si'* 129.

of this focus has to be on the world of money and finance, which is a powerful and pervasive manifestation of human behaviour. One irrepressible feature of the world of money and finance is the deadly sin of avarice – better known as greed – which concerns itself with the accumulation of wealth without any regard for how it is created or for the effect of this accumulation on others. Another more positive feature, without which the world of finance and much else would collapse can be described as “*solicitude*”<sup>135</sup>. This virtue is bound up with foresight but it goes further than looking ahead and forestalling problems. Solicitude a concern for the good of others. It is a form of solidarity which makes itself felt through thoughtful planning. The sense of achievement which motivates business at its best is very much bound up with solicitude.

The business motive will always be constrained by issues of conscience such as honesty and solicitude, which in our time must include care for the common home and for humanity. The greed of the profiteer, by contrast, is devoid of constraint which means that, in an unregulated market, questions of conscience are laughed out of court. In present circumstances the inability of the political process to take effective responsibility for managing the resources of the earth at a global level is a standing invitation to the profiteers to do their worst.

This global management of resources cannot be an exercise in communist central planning. If everything is controlled from the top down, the initiative and ingenuity of good business will lie buried beneath the heedlessness of untrammelled power, but parameters do need to be set. Pope Francis says nothing about how business might function at its best, but he is clear about the environmental responsibility of business and about the need of the political process to monitor the environmental impact of business<sup>136</sup>.

Business has a political responsibility, because the way in which business leaders articulate their relationship with money has a pervasive influence on society, both in the everyday behaviour of individuals and groups and in the way they understand government. When profit is celebrated as the end goal, everything is understood – by everybody – as a matter of self-interest. Government, like everything else, is seen as a product to be paid for by “*my taxes*” and the problems of society are viewed as a financial burden on tax payers rather than a challenge to our humanity. In this kind of situation the nobility of business at its best has been pushed offstage.

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135. Thomas Aquinas’ comment is thought provoking: “*A man is said to be solicitous through being shrewd [solers] and alert [citus], in so far as a man through a certain shrewdness of mind is on the alert to do whatever has to be done.*” (Summa Theologia II-II Q.47 A.9)

136. Laudato Si’ 182, 183, 194.

One symptom of the distorted role of business in today’s world is the eye-boggling financial rewards enjoyed by some corporate bosses. They are a monument to the impotence of political leaders in this age of democratic decay, because the underlying problem in this scenario is political.

One example of this tendency is Bob Iger, the chief executive of Disney, who received a total payment of \$65.6 million (€57.7 million for the year 2018). Abigail Disney, granddaughter of Roy, the co-founder and business manager of Disney Productions, has publicly spoken of the “*naked indecency*” of the Disney CEO making 1,424 times the median pay of a Disney worker. It is time, she said, “*to call out the men and women who lead us ... about how low we are prepared to let hard-working people sink while top management takes home ever more outrageous sums of money.*” Expecting corporate boards to do so is, she said, unreasonable because “*they are almost universally made up of CEOs, former CEOs, and people who long to be CEOs*”<sup>137</sup>.

Former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs has added his own comment to this conversation:

*In America in 1965 the ratio of chief executives’ to workers’ pay was 20:1. Today it is 312:1. There might be less raising of eyebrows if the chief executives were entrepreneurs, creating their own business, taking their own risks, investing their own personal savings. But they were not. They were risking their shareholders’ money and their employees’ future*<sup>138</sup>.

A similar development has taken place in the realm of political leadership. As elections demand ever increasing amounts of marketing technique and finance, the attention of political leaders becomes transfixed by the next election. They look to a self-absorbed world of business not just for money but, more insidiously, for legitimisation, because they are at a loss for any real alternative to the prevailing short term perspective. The Caesars of our time have bought the conscience of politics not with bribes or anything overtly corrupt, but by sweeping political leaders off their feet with the glamour of money. Public life has been neutered and as long as that remains the case any talk about the noble calling of business will not get very far.

Ultimately it is a question of hope and of our fundamental beliefs. Only if we can allow ourselves to be challenged and inspired by a generous vision of humanity harnessing the earth will we have the motivation to look beyond short-sighted convenience – or despairing cynicism – to a world where conscientious effort is rewarded and generosity can thrive.

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137. Jonathan Sachs, “*Morality: Restoring the Common Good in Divided Times*” (London 2020), p. 8.

138. Sachs, p. 8.

## AFTERWORD

by Jean-Claude Cardinal Hollerich

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For Grace finished writing this book before the current pandemic reminded us that disasters don't just happen "elsewhere" –far from our own world. Consumerism and the good life has distracted us from a disturbing challenge which we know is there but, until now, could safely overlook. Let us labour under no illusion: today we are not experiencing "a great exception." Crises like these will come back and will only be the beginning of the ecological crisis towards which our way of life is advancing.

This book is about that crisis. It addresses itself to the world of business and invites both the worlds of business and of public life to consider the insights of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. These insights are firmly rooted in the Christian faith, but they are offered in a spirit of dialogue with all men and women of goodwill. The faith dimension is the underlying passion of Pope Francis and he is calling on his fellow Catholics to respond with him to the challenge we now face, but the ultimate object of his faith-based passion is the building of human solidarity in caring for our common home.

The word "dialogue" is used repeatedly in the text of the encyclical. There are calls for dialogue with other religions, with scientists, politicians, social movements, as well as at global, national and local levels. No form of human wisdom is to be ignored. The author of this book is seeking to develop this dialogue with the world of business as part of what the European Green Deal calls "this generation's defining task." Edmond Grace offers two thought provoking insights. First, the entrepreneur is motivated by a desire to achieve something of real worth; profit is a measure, not the motive. Secondly, how business leaders see their role has a powerful influence on public life and on society.

Pope Francis describes business as a "noble" calling<sup>139</sup>. This noble energy of the entrepreneur is constantly being undermined by a very different and destructive energy which sees the accumulation of wealth as an end in itself. In ancient times avarice or greed was seen as vice and its influence on human behaviour continues in our time, especially in relation to money and wealth. It is a constant challenge both to the individual entrepreneur and to the way in which business functions in society and this wider social dimension of greed is not just a problem for business;

it is a problem for government. The lamentable role played by business in the ruthless exploitation of the earth in recent times is due primarily to a failure of political leadership. People who are genuinely motivated to create wealth have no recourse when political structures fail to hold the profiteer to account.

The result of this failure is that our entire society has been swept up into a merry-go-round of money making for its own sake. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* talks of "rapidification"<sup>140</sup>. The author of this book relates this theme to another ancient vice –sloth– which takes two forms. On the one hand there is that mindless inactivity, which we all recognise as laziness, but there is also a hyperactivity which seeks to blot out any reflective engagement with reality. This is what Pope Francis is talking about when he talks of "rapidification" –a dizzy world where everyone is like a spinning top and no one takes responsibility for anything.

Profit is one measure of profitability and success, but the measure of what is worthwhile comes through a conscientious engagement with the entire spectrum of human wisdom. The creative entrepreneur has to be able to stop, observe, contemplate and learn. When business people lose touch with this wider engagement they soon find themselves in an unreal world, usually impelled by greed. The phenomenon of the financial bubble is a symptom of this failure to engage and it has taken its toll again and again in human history –with an overheated economy fuelling absurd profits in the pursuit of illusions.

This wider engagement also requires that business leaders articulate a self-understanding of the human culture of which they are a part. Apart from family life nothing has such a pervasive influence on the everyday experience of human beings as the world of business. When people go to work, when they shop, when they engage with the media, when they travel and even when they go to hospital, their experience is shaped by the varying aspects of business management. This can either be a blessing in the service of the common good or a curse, exploiting and destroying what is good. The world of business will always be powerful and business leaders will always have immense influence on all our lives, through the way they express themselves and their understanding of what they do.

The true test of this book will be seen in how it is received in the world of business and in the political process of the European Union, but it does invite both these worlds into dialogue with the wider perspective offered by the "*Laudato Si'*" encyclical. Central to this perspective is the note of praise which is reflected in the very name "*Laudato Si'*" or, in English, "Praise you!" The Book of Genesis tells us

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139. *Laudato Si'* 129.

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140. *Laudato Si'* 18.

that God looked at creation “and indeed it was very good”<sup>141</sup>. The underlying note in these words is one of spontaneous praise. The Creator is delighting in what has been created and we, as creatures in God’s image, can identify with this experience, because we too can stand back and admire the fruit of our work. Every form of human creativity is driven by this longing to achieve something of real worth and business is a form of creativity. When an enterprise is taking shape, invariably after much struggle, with a productive process for goods or services, with people employed and customers satisfied and telling others of their satisfaction, this has to be a source of deep satisfaction for those who were there at the start, even as they continue to struggle with challenges which never let up.

This is why Pope Francis describes business as “noble.” When he calls for “an economy which favours productive diversity and business creativity”<sup>142</sup> he is honouring that impulse whereby the entrepreneur sets out to achieve something real and admirable. This honour is more than a matter of words. When this motive of worthwhile achievement is lost from view in the framing of public policy, it results in the despoliation of our common home and the impoverishment of the many to the advantage of the few.

Ultimately the moral health of business is the responsibility of political leaders and, if they are to exercise that responsibility they need to be alert to two pitfalls. First, as with entrepreneurs, they need to be conscious of the capacity of money to corrupt. The dangers of bribery are all too clear. The raw power of wealth in furthering the interests of a privileged few is also obvious, but there is a more subtle and more insidious danger. We human beings are so easily impressed by money and we too often give those who have it a legitimacy which they do not deserve. One of the major challenges for political leaders and public servants is not to succumb to this all too human tendency. This is especially true, when well-resourced interests present themselves as providers of employment to large numbers of voters, who are anxious about their future in a carbon intensive industry.

Concern for the livelihood of people employed in these industries is a matter of justice. When that concern is used as a bargaining chip by those whose only god is their own interest, it is incumbent on political leaders to devise a strategy to outflank this cynical manoeuvre. Carbon intensive industries play a prominent role in the public perception of business in our time and as a result, their influence is pervasive and powerful. Political leaders will be unable to challenge this influence unless they actively seek out an alternative voice from within the business world

141. Genesis 1:31.

142. *Laudato Si'* 129.

—one which looks to the responsible use of the goods of this earth rather than profit for its own sake.

The second part of this strategy concerns the relationship between public life and the citizen, especially those whose jobs are at stake in any transition. A citizen is, most emphatically, not a customer and when political leaders treat them as such —as people with interests and votes and nothing more— the whole fabric of solidarity on which public life depends will slowly and inevitably unravel. Politicians who see their role simply as winning elections and exercising power are no better than business people who glorify profit for its own sake. Politics, like business, is most certainly a noble calling but, unlike with business, politicians have no supervision except their own conscience. This is why politics at its best is associated with greatness and, at its worst, with disaster.

When the vote becomes no more than a transaction —my vote for your favour— people have no means of looking beyond their own self-interest and every reason to suspect political leaders who claim to serve the people and not themselves. When the only appeal is to self-interest, any thought of the altruism of others makes little sense. In such circumstances those working in carbon intensive industries will have no means of looking beyond their immediate need of a job, which they will always be anxious to hold, and the grip of their employers on their fearful attitudes will remain strong. There will be no way of awakening in them a sense of human solidarity. They will be unable to imagine the future which their children and their children’s children will inherit nor will they be able to entertain the hope that the dislocation of change might be worthwhile.

Political leaders will always need to look to issues of organisation and finance and to a clear headed understanding of people’s anxieties and fears, but none of these factors will be sufficient to meet the crisis which now confronts us. The greatest challenge for political leadership in our time is to evoke that sense of pathos, which combines an awareness of shared vulnerability with a longing for solidarity and concerted action.

The power of pathos lies in its capacity to awaken in people a longing to be generous. It needs a use of language which rises above economic practicalities but that alone will not suffice. What matters is the conviction that those, who call us to generosity, are living the reality of which they speak. With regard to the ecological crisis it is not just a question of a change of lifestyle but of making that change visible. Nor is it a question of trying to be a paragon of virtue but of allowing one’s struggle to change to be seen. When such human vulnerability is

evident, the call to generosity will strike a chord and there is something in human nature which is genuinely happy to respond to such a call.

At the heart of this call to generosity is the notion that there is something good –something worthy of praise– in the story of humanity. This good which we seek in common is worth striving for because it leaves out no one in its achievement and calls on the participation of everyone in its pursuit. It calls individuals beyond purely personal interest, local communities beyond parochial concerns and nations to a sharing of sovereignty. This movement will be inspired by a sense of human solidarity among all the peoples of the earth. It will be a source of pride and joy for everyone, but this will only happen if the true calling of politics is honoured by those in public life. Their task is to cultivate in citizens a sense of generosity, which inspires in them a longing to care for something which is truly worthy of praise –our common home.

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## APPENDIX I

### ARTICLE 17 ▶ **DIALOGUE SEMINAR**

*European Parliament, 25 September, 2019*

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At the invitation of **Mairéad McGuinness, MEP**, Vice-President responsible for dialogue with churches, religious and philosophical organisations.

#### CO-CHAIR

- **Edmond Grace SJ**, Secretary for Ecology, the Jesuit European Social Centre.
- **Willem Vriesendorp**, Director, #SustainablePublicAffairs.

#### SPEAKERS

- **Emilio Braghi**, Chairman of European Aluminium and President, Novelis Europe.
- **Lynette Chung**, Head of Corporate Sustainability Strategy & Advocacy, Clariant.
- **Claude Fromageot**, Director Sustainable Development, Yves Rocher.
- **Sharla Halvorson**, Climate Lead, Food and Agriculture, Inter IKEA.
- **Eva Karlsson**, CEO, Houdini.
- **Matti Lehmus**, Executive VP, Renewables Platform, Neste.
- **Eric Molinie**, Secretary General, Dalkia.
- **Philipp Offenber**, Adviser, Energy Union and Climate Action, Mobility, Circular Economy and Industrial Strategy, European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC).
- **Stefan Savonen**, Senior Vice-President, Energy and Climate Sustainability, LKAB.
- **Yann Le Tallec**, Director Government and Public Affairs EMEA, Lego Group
- **Myriam Tryjefaczka**, Head of Public Affairs and Director of Sustainability for Europe, Tarkett.

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## APPENDIX II

### ► PRAYER FOR THE EARTH

*Pope Francis' conclusion to Laudato Si'*

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*All-powerful God,  
you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.*

*You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.*

*Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.*

*Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.*

*God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned  
and forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.*

*Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty,  
not pollution and destruction.*

*Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.*

*Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognise that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.*

*We thank you for being with us each day.*

*Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.*