

Laudato Si' Values and Vision

When I first read *Laudato Si'*, I was brought back in memory to the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia, and a student in my sixth-grade catechetics class. Students were invited to identify a tree to which they were attracted, or they felt represented them. He had chosen an apple tree, very plentiful in that area. He explained he had chosen it "because it's beautiful, and it can feed people." He valued the tree as a beautiful creation in its own right, and saw it in relationship to people. In that terse and intuitive statement he captured what is foundational in *Laudato Si'*.

Much of *Laudato Si'* is indeed about the beauty and value of creation and the interrelationships of nature, human life and the life of the earth community. It is also about the failure of contemporary culture to grasp these relationships and act accordingly, resulting in the ecological disasters and societal breakdowns we experience today. But it does not stop at naming; it offers a vision that points the way forward and must involve everyone. This article will highlight the foundational values in *Laudato Si'*, and outline the vision it presents for moving forward.

Values

In this "appeal for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" (*Laudato Si'*, 14) several values are upheld as enhancing of the human spirit, society and the entire earth community. These are interspersed throughout the text, and some of them are raised in several places in the document. What follows is a summary of these values, with a sampling of related quotes from the text.

The value of Creation

Some values articulated pertain to creation itself. The valuing of creation as beauty and the revelation of God is addressed at some length. In this context, the Canadian bishops are quoted: "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine." (*Laudato Si'*, 85)

The value inherent in each creature is also upheld: "...we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes." (*Laudato Si'*, 69) Additionally, respect for the balance of life on earth is also lifted up: "This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world..." (*Laudato Si'*, 68)

The Value of the Human Person and Culture

Other values emphasized pertain to the human person and culture. The beauty and dignity of the human person in the ensemble of creation is highlighted in *Laudato Si'*, 65: "The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. *Gn* 1:26)." This shows the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone. He (or she) is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving of himself (or herself) and entering into communion with other persons. "ⁱ

The importance of meaningful work for human life is raised up: "Work should be the setting for [...] rich personal growth where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God." (*Laudato Si'*, 127)

The protection of cultural treasures is another value called to our attention: "Together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat. [...] Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense." (*Laudato Si'*, 143)

The Common Good Reiterated as Crucial

The common good, a time-honoured value in Catholic teaching, is reiterated as crucial for this time. "Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics." (*Laudato Si'*, 156) The common good includes respect for the human person, the overall welfare of society, and "calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice." (*Laudato Si'*, 157) This implies a particular concern for the most dispossessed and vulnerable.

Vision

After canvassing the significant ecological, technological and societal issues of our time, *Laudato Si'* asserts: "...we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems." (*Laudato Si'*, 61) The proposed way forward has two major aspects: 'integral ecology', the title of the fourth chapter, and dialogue at every level of society, elaborated in the fifth chapter.

'Integral ecology', the ecology fitting for our time, "...*always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*." (*Laudato Si'*, 49) "Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time, protecting nature." (*Laudato Si'*, 139)

The recognition of the interdependence of the earth community "obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan*." (*Laudato Si'*, 164) Consequently, dialogue and some form of regulation, an unpopular word to modern ears, are needed at all levels of government, international, national and local. Political and economic sectors need to consider their decisions in light of their repercussions on human fulfillment." What is needed "is a politics, which is far-sighted and capable of a new integral and interdisciplinary approach...", and which will be able "to question the logic which underlies present-day culture." (*Laudato Si'*, 197) Such a politics will require dialogue. All will have to do their part in living 'the ecology of daily life'.

Hope for the Apple Blossoms

While this path of dialogue will demand 'patience, self-discipline and generosity' (*Laudato Si'*, 201), we are reminded that our struggles and concern for the planet must never take away our hope and joy. (*Laudato Si'*, 244) What will I do now so that in 2065, there will still be apple blossoms to fill young spirits with beauty, and inspire them to feed people?

Lorraine d'Entremont, SC

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ⁱ This is quoted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 357.