

Everything Is Connected! So, What Are We Waiting For?

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A few weeks ago, I derived a good deal of pleasure from watching the documentary film *Qu'est-ce qu'on attend?* ("What are we waiting for?"). Filmed in 2015, this documentary highlights the eco-responsible activities of the residents of the small town of Ungersheim (2,200 inhabitants) in Alsace. Nearly 10 years previously, they had decided to embrace a lifestyle aimed at reducing their ecological footprint to a minimum. Everything was connected to that: agriculture, housing, transport, economic life, citizen democracy, mutual aid and long-term vision.

Everything is connected! That is the refrain running through and punctuating the encyclical *Laudato Si'* offered by Pope Francis in 2015. According to Elena Lasida, Doctor of Social and Economic Sciences and mission head at Justice and Peace France, this expression is one of the encyclical's three pillars. The other pillars are *Everything is given!* and *Everything is fragile!* By affirming that everything is connected, the Pope thus gives priority to the relational dimension in the reflection developed by *Laudato Si'* and reiterates that all created reality carries the image of the Trinitarian and relational God.

The Real Challenge

The foundation of the encyclical is clearly a relational and communion anthropology. For those of us living in a culture that uses or manipulates relationships (including human relationships) by placing them at the service of immediate satisfaction or profit, this is a counter-cultural statement; relationship becomes the purpose or goal, the criterion of judgment for our actions and our results. Confronted with the global economic system — in which the goal is profit and where relationships are nothing but means to an end — this is a real challenge.

In economics, Elena Lasida reminds us that decisions must involve the entire community; they cannot be reserved to just a few initiates. She invites us to become the artisans of an economy of communion, for example by using part of our financial resources to support projects whose purpose is communion and the creation of relationships (in microcredit, for example)?¹

Taking Risks with the Other

Everything is connected! Creatures, including human beings, are linked together to form systems, which are in turn interconnected to one another. There is a connection between nature and the human, between the environment and the human and between all the dimensions of life: institutions, culture, politics, economy, etc. This statement may seem somewhat banal to us, but in reality it is a cultural revolution that leads us to establish links of **interdependence** between ourselves as well as with all that is given and fragile. It leads us to reject links of independence, of appropriation, or of sometimes-violent submission.²

Becoming aware of the bonds of interdependence that unite us exposes the illusion of absolute autonomy and puts an end to the partitions that separate and isolate us from one

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1. For example, during the summer of 2018, my community chose to invest a few thousand dollars in a community garden project on our property. The 30 units were quickly used.
 2. See in particular *LS* 16, 70, 91, 92, 117, 120, 138, 142 and 240.

another. The Bible, recalls Elena Lasida, introduces the notion of covenant or alliance, which is always linked to co-responsibility. In the covenant, each partner agrees to take risks with the other and to assume success as well as failure.

A Global Approach Needed

The ecological crisis is not a crisis like the others, but a crisis that now enables us to wonder in a global way about our way of being in the world, that is to say, our economic model, our way of living together, our international relations, our lifestyles, our conception of the future, and our reason for living. It is a crisis that allows us to understand the other crises and to regain a true posture in creation. It is an economic, political, social and spiritual issue.

“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature,” writes Pope Francis.

Finding Innovative and Unprecedented Solutions

Laudato Si' draws up a global vision of the world and questions the very foundation of our being-in-the-world. The ecological crisis does not appear as merely a problem of managing natural resources. It questions the meaning of our individual and collective life and we do not need to wait to begin sketching out a “new imagination for a good life,” to use the expression of Elena Lasida.

At a time when we are facing natural disasters, famines, wars, the greatest number of displaced people since the end of the Second World War and an increasingly scandalous gap between the rich and the masses of poor, we must, more than ever, work together to find innovative and even unprecedented solutions. To do this, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* offers us three solid pillars: Everything is connected! Everything is given! Everything is fragile!