

Everything Is Given! From Gratitude to Vigilance

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The second cornerstone or pillar of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* can be stated as follows: "Everything is given."¹ This radical, integral gift implies gratitude and communion with all living beings; it invites enthusiasm and creativity. These three elements are found in the singing of many psalms, especially Psalm 104.

In this psalm, the psalmist places in the mouth of the praying person a hymn to the creator God who takes the figure of the gardener and the caretaker. He gives and waters the earth (v. 5), gives water to the beasts of the field, the mountains (vv.11-13), all while imposing limits on the water of the seas (v. 6). His work is profound and consistent: He makes the meadows grow for the flocks and the prairies for the farmer's bread (v. 14).

Enchanted by the work of such a gardener, the psalmist exclaims: "Send out your breath and life begins," (v. 30) as if he felt a light breeze wafting through the universe. He then makes this enthusiastic commitment: "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being." (v. 33) But, he immediately senses the danger, the power of destruction that the recipients of these gifts might use to achieve their ends; so he concludes his praise with a dreadful decree: "Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more!" (v. 35).

Making a Shift to Better See and Feel

The very title of Pope Francis' encyclical focuses on praise for creation, all the more so since it demonstrates its fragility. Beyond the necessary adjustments towards a global ecological transition that must be sought, it is a spiritual challenge and even a call for *ecological conversion*. In other words, where the psalmist wanted to drive out the evildoers, the Christian consciousness of "everything is fragile" is prophetic language in dialogue with our contemporaries.

Undergoing a conversion, the speaker was telling us, is to accept "moving or making a shift for the life of the other." That is no small thing! Giving up the security of having a well-defined and recognized place. Risking moving forward towards the unknown, since it is no longer a question of repairing what has been broken but rather the reinventing with others.

Let us focus for a moment on this call to make a shift. Virtually all we, women and men religious in Canada, first lived it in the field of community works: competent and generous lay people took over the vast majority of the works we had created; they sometimes transform them well beyond our expectations. We have thus changed our place at the table, offloading certain leadership tasks in order to walk with others. In doing so, we have discovered other ways of thinking, of seeing and of acting.

We entered into this change or shift by necessity and by conviction. By necessity when the lack of personnel made us move towards institutional succession and partnerships, but also by conviction, awakened and driven by the environmental protection movement for which the younger generations are carrying the torch. Those men and women who were already working in the name of justice and peace now include the letter "E" in their priorities and

¹ Elena LASIDA, Talk at the CRC General Assembly, Montreal, May 25, 2018.

even in their logo (for example: the Ecumenical Justice and Peace Network in Quebec is now called the Ecumenical Justice, Ecology and Peace Network or ROJEP).

Seeing the Planet from the Standpoint of the Poor

The great characteristic of Pope Francis' encyclical is to make us see the urgency of protecting the planet from the perspectives of the lives of the poor and those who are in the periphery.

For nearly half a century, scientists and environmentalists have been carrying the cry of the planet in danger in all forums, however the political commitment of our governments remains very timid; it is sometimes even contraindicated. The voice of various citizen movements is not yet strong and unanimous enough to influence decisions, because — among other reasons — a change in lifestyle is at stake, in both individual and collective terms.

Yet who will hear the cry of the poor? It is true that the poor are not the only ones who are suffering from climate disruptions, from the mountains of garbage that result from our consumption levels, however they are the first and the most numerous to bear the consequences.

Re-enchanting the World

The founding charisms of our apostolic institutes were almost always in response to a lack, to a sort of poverty that challenges us today to once again pick up and heed the cry of the poor. Religious communities are already leading the way by encouraging and supporting initiatives and experiences that the 2018 Canadian Religious Conference is being invited to pick up.

As we know, listening deeply to the call for ecological conversion also involves a change of outlook, which involves combining understanding and compassion. Isn't it time to revisit *the preferential option for the poor*, a legacy of liberation theology that arose in the Global South and took shape 50 years ago at the Medellín Conference? Let us be borne by this Breath that is leading us towards the unexpected to 're-enchant' the world.