

TIPL Guest Column that appeared in Knoxville News Sentinel, June 27, 2015

As submitted by Louise Gorenflo

Laudato Si (Praise for the Earth), Pope Francis' encyclical for all people, calls out climate change as the overriding moral issue of our time. This profound contemplation elucidates the harm our economy, science, and technology have inflicted upon creation and then opens the way to healing.

The Pope says that all of creation cries out in great suffering for the end of our brutal dominion. We sacrifice the natural world to glorify our species and possess whatever we can commodify. We knowingly pollute our air, water, and land for personal benefit, destroying the very natural systems that we depend upon for our own survival. "The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instances than ourselves."

The encyclical of Pope Francis is not so much a plea to change the world as it is an urgent call to investigate our attitudes and beliefs that drive us to consume all of creation and spit it out as waste. The rapid advancement of science and technology, which has put enormous power to destroy creation in the hands of a few, has not been balanced with the development of our care for each other and creation. "The most amazing technical ability, the most astonishing economic growth, unless they are accompanied by authentic social and moral progress, will definitely turn against man."

The Pope asserts that there can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. Those individuals and societies most responsible for afflicting the greatest harm on nature and the poor have the greatest responsibility for changing our ways. "The time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth."

The Pope challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing, and limiting our power, moving away from self-worship to genuine care for each other and for nature. Just because we know we have the science, technology, and wealth to do something does not mean it should be done. We need to investigate the potential consequences of our collective actions upon others and nature. "Our aim should be leaving in our wake a better world and a higher quality of life for all, the definition of true progress."

The Pope wrote this encyclical for everyone, and I greatly encourage you to read it as you will find it filled with great wisdom and insights, no matter what your faith. Read it as a contemplation, and take time to comprehend his message. Upon my first reading, I felt a great despair as the Pope describes the extent to which people have already devastated nature and degraded the quality of life of everyone. Truly, we need to transform our relationship with nature and others, yet it seems so improbable that our culture and society has the capacity to change its mad destructive rush.

Yet, all the Pope asks us to do, individually and with others, is to be obedient within our lives to what we already know creation needs for healing and to do this in a way that benefits all and with great love.

In Knoxville, we are surrounded by opportunities to practice what we know in our hearts is true. Tennessee Interfaith Power & Light, which has the mission to offer a spiritual response to the challenges of climate change, encourages you to work through your own faith groups to make real the message of the Pope. Join with others in the community to increase the quality of life of the poor by working with them to obtain the basic needs of food, shelter, employment, health care and justice. Think about how driving cars is our daily most polluting activity. Let us learn to measure the value of Knoxville not by economic indicators but by the well-being of all of its citizens and the health of that corner of creation in which we live.

“Appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. Find satisfaction in fellowship with others, in service, in developing your gifts, in contact with nature, in prayer and contemplation. In this way, we can learn to live a lot on a little.”

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