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ARTICLE BY LEONARDO BOFF ON THE POPE'S ENCYCLICAL

JULY 24, 2015 | SNDDEN

Earth Charter International (http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1149/1/Article-by-Leonardo-Boff-on-the-Popes-Encyclical/Page1.html?utm_content=buffera7203&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

The Magna Carta of integral ecology: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the poor
By Leonardo Boff, theologian and ecologist

Before making any comment it is worth highlighting some peculiarities of the *Laudato Si'* encyclical of Pope Francis.

It is the first time a Pope has addressed the issue of ecology in the sense of an integral ecology (as it goes beyond the environment) in such a complete way. Big surprise: he elaborates the subject on the new ecological paradigm, which no official document of the UN has done so far.

He bases his writing on the safest data from the life sciences and Earth. He reads the data affectionately (with a sensitive or cordial intelligence), as he discerns that behind them hides human tragedy and suffering, and for Mother Earth as. The current situation is serious, but Pope Francis always finds reasons for hope and trust that human beings can find viable solutions. He links to the Popes who preceded him, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, quoting them frequently.

And something absolutely new: the text is part of collegiality, as it values the contributions of dozens of bishops' conferences around the world, from the US to Germany, Brazil, Patagonia-Comahue, and Paraguay. He gathers the contributions of other thinkers, such as Catholics Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Romano Guardini, Dante Alighieri, the Argentinian maestro Juan Carlos Scannone, Protestant Paul Ricoeur and the Sufi Muslim Ali Al-Khawwas. The recipients are all of us human beings, we are all inhabitants of the same common home (commonly used term by the Pope) and suffer the same threats.

Pope Francis does not write as a Master or Doctor of faith, but as a zealous pastor who cares for the common home of all beings, not just humans, that inhabit it.

One element deserves to be highlighted, as it reveals the "forma mentis" (the way he organizes his thinking) of Pope Francis. This is a contribution of the pastoral and theological experience of Latin American churches in the light of the documents of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Medellin (1968), Puebla (1979) and Aparecida (2007), that were an option for the poor against poverty and in favor of liberation.

The wording and tone of the encyclical are typical of Pope Francis, and the ecological culture that he has accumulated, but I also realize that many expressions and ways of speaking refer to what is being thought and written mainly in Latin America. The themes of the "common home," of "Mother Earth," the "cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor," the "care" of the "interdependence of all beings," of the "poor and vulnerable," the "paradigm shift," the "human being as Earth" that feels, thinks, loves and reveres, the "integral ecology" among others, are recurrent among us.

The structure of the encyclical follows the methodological ritual used by our churches and theological reflection linked to the practice of liberation, now taken over and consecrated by the Pope: see, judge, act and celebrate.

First, he begins revealing his main source of inspiration: St. Francis of Assisi, whom he calls "the quintessential example of comprehensive care and ecology, who showed special concern for the poor and the abandoned" (n.10, n.66).



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Then he moves on to see "What is happening in our home" (nn.17-61). The Pope says, "just by looking at the reality with sincerity we can see that there is a deterioration of our common home" (n.61). This part incorporates the most consistent data on climate change (nn.20-22), the issue of water (n.27-31), erosion of biodiversity (nn.32-42), the deterioration of the quality of human life and the degradation of social life (nn.43-47), he denounces the high rate of planetary inequality, which affects all areas of life (nn.48-52), with the poor as its main victims (n. 48).

In this part there is a phrase which refers to the reflection made in Latin America: "Today we cannot ignore that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach and should integrate justice in discussions on the environment to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor" (n.49). Then he adds: "the cries of the Earth join the cries of the abandoned of this world" (n.53). This is quite consistent since the beginning he has said that "we are Earth" (No. 2; cf. Gen 2.7.). Very much in line with the great singer and poet Argentine indigenous Atahualpa Yupanqui: "humans beings are the Earth walking, feeling, thinking and loving."

He condemns the proposed internationalization of the Amazon that "only serves the interests of multinationals" (n.38). There is a great statement of ethical force, "it is severely grave to obtain significant benefits making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay for the high costs of environmental degradation" (n.36).

He acknowledges with sadness: "We had never mistreated and offended our common home as much as in the last two centuries" (n.53). Faced with this human offensive against Mother Earth that many scientists have denounced as the beginning of a new geological era -the anthropocene- he regrets the weakness of the powers of this world, that deceived, "believed that everything can continue as it is, as an alibi to "maintain its self-destructive habits" (n.59) with "a behavior that seems suicidal" (n.55).

Prudently, he recognizes the diversity of opinions (nn.60-61) and that "there is no single way to solve the problem" (n.60). However, "it is true that the global system is unsustainable from many points of view because we have stopped thinking about the purpose of human action (n.61) and we get lost in the construction of means for unlimited accumulation at the expense of ecological injustice (degradation of ecosystems) and social injustice (impoverishment of populations). Mankind simply disappointed the divine hope"(n.61).

The urgent challenge, then, is "to protect our common home" (n.13); and for that we need, quoting Pope John Paul II, "a global ecological conversion" (n.5); "A culture of caring that permeates all of society" (n.231). Once the seeing dimension is realized, the dimension of judgment prevails. This judging is done in two aspects, the scientific and the theological.

Let's see the scientific. The encyclical devoted the entire third chapter to the analysis "of the human root of the ecological crisis" (nn.101-136). Here the Pope proposes to analyze techno-science, without prejudice, recognizing what it has brought such as "precious things to improve the quality of human life" (n. 103). But this is not the problem, it is independence submitted to the economy, politics and nature in view of the accumulation of material goods (cf.n.109). Techno-science nourishes a mistaken assumption that there is an "infinite availability of goods in the world" (n.106), when we know that we have surpassed the physical limits of the Earth and that much of the goods and services are not renewable. Techno-science has turned into technocracy, which has become a real dictatorship with a firm logic of domination over everything and everyone (n.108).

The great illusion, dominant today, lies in believing that techno-science can solve all environmental problems. This is a misleading idea because it "involves isolating the things that are always connected" (n.111). In fact, "everything is connected" (n.117), "everything is related" (n.120), a claim that appears throughout the encyclical text as a refrain, as it is a key concept of the contemporary paradigm. The great limitation of technocracy is "knowledge fragmentation and losing the sense of wholeness" (n.110). The worst thing is "not to recognize the intrinsic value of every being and even denying a peculiar value to the human being" (n.118).

The intrinsic value of each being, even if it is minuscule, is permanently highlighted in the encyclical (N.69), as it is in the Earth Charter. By denying the intrinsic value we are preventing "each being to communicate its message and to give glory to God" (n.33).

The largest deviation of technocracy is anthropocentrism. This means an illusion that things have value only insofar as they are ordered to human use, forgetting that its existence is valuable by itself (n.33). If it is true that everything is related, then "we humans are united as brothers and sisters and join with tender affection to Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother river and Mother Earth" (n.92). How can we expect to dominate them and view them within the narrow perspective of domination by humans?

All these "ecological virtues" (n.88) are lost by the will of power and domination of others to nature. We live a distressing "loss of meaning of life and the desire to live together" (n.110). He sometimes quotes the Italian-German theologist Romano Guardini (1885-1968), one of the most read in the middle of last century, who wrote a critical book against the

claims of the modernity (n.105 note 83: *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, *The decline of the Modern Age*, 1958).

The other side of judgment is the theological. The encyclical reserves an important space for the "Gospel of Creation" (nos. 62-100). It begins justifying the contribution of religions and Christianity, as it is global crisis, each instance must, with its religious capital contribute to the care of the Earth (n.62). He does not insist in doctrines but on the wisdom in various spiritual paths. Christianity prefers to speak of creation rather than nature, because "creation is related to a project of love of God" (n.76). He quotes, more than once, a beautiful text of the Book of Wisdom (21.24) where it is clear that "the creation of the order of love" (n.77) and God emerges as "the Lord lover of life" (Wis 11:26).

The text opens for an evolutionary view of the universe without using the word, but through a circumlocution referring to the universe "consisting of open systems that come into communion with each other" (n.79). It uses the main texts that link Christ incarnated and risen with the world and with the whole universe, making all matters of the Earth sacred (n.83). In this context he quotes Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955, n.83 note 53) as a precursor of this cosmic vision. The fact that Trinity-God is divine and it related with people means that all things are related resonances of the divine Trinity (n.240).

The Encyclical quotes the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church who "recognizes that sins against creation are sins against God" (n.7). Hence the urgency of a collective ecological conversion to repair the lost harmony.

The encyclical concludes well with this part "The analysis showed the need for a change of course ... we must escape the spiral of self-destruction in which we are sinking" (n.163). It is not a reform, but, citing the Earth Charter, to seek "a new beginning" (n.207). The interdependence of all with all leads us to believe "in one world with a common project" (n.164).

Since reality has many aspects, all closely related, Pope Francis proposes an "integral ecology" that goes beyond the environmental ecology to which we are accustomed (n.137). It covers all areas, the environmental, economic, social, cultural and everyday life (n.147-148). Never forget the poor who also testify to the living human and social ecology ties of belonging and solidarity with each other (n.149).

The third methodological step is to act. In this part, the Encyclical observes the major issues of the international, national and local politics (nn.164-181). It stresses the interdependence of social and educational aspects with the ecological and sadly states the difficulties that bring the prevalence of technocracy, creating difficulties for the changes needed to restrain the greed of accumulation and consumption, that can be re-opened (n.141). He mentions again the theme of economics and politics that should serve the common good and create conditions for a possible human fulfillment (n.189-198). He re-emphasizes the dialogue between science and religion, as it has been suggested by the great biologist Edward O.Wilson (cf. the book *Creation: How to save life on Earth*, 2008). All religions "should seek the care of nature and the defense of the poor" (n.201).

Still in the aspect of acting, he challenges education in the sense of creating "ecological citizenship" (n.211) and a new lifestyle, based on caring, compassion, shared sobriety, the alliance between humanity and the environment, since both are umbilically linked, and the co-responsibility for everything that exists and lives and our common destiny (nn.203-208).

Finally, the time to celebrate. The celebration takes place in a context of "ecological conversion" (n.216), it involves an "ecological spirituality" (n.216). This stems not so much from theological doctrines but the motivations that faith arises to take care of the common home and "nurture a passion for caring for the world" (216). Such a mystical experience is what mobilizes people to live in ecological balance, "to those who are solidary inside themselves, with others, with nature and with all living and spiritual beings and God" (n.210). It appears to be the truth that "less is more" and that we can be happy with little. In the sense of celebrating "the world is more than something to be solved, it is a joyous mystery to be contemplated in joy and with love" (n.12).

The tender and fraternal spirit of St. Francis of Assisi is present through the entire text of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The current situation does not mean an announced tragedy, but a challenge for us to care for the common home and for each other. The text highlights poetry and joy in the Spirit and indestructible hope that if the threat is big, greater is the opportunity for solving our environmental problems.

The text poetically ends with the words "Beyond the Sun," saying: "let's walk singing. That our struggles and our concerns about this planet do not take away our joy of hope" (n.244).

I would like to end with the final words of the Earth Charter which the Pope quotes himself (n.207): "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."

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