Cherish All of Creation: Statement on Pope’s Encyclical

With Pope Francis, we hear both the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (49). CMSM represents the leaders of all the Catholic men’s religious orders in the U.S., which have a long history of walking with those in most need. Thus, we deeply feel the suffering of our “common home” and all the creatures, each of whom “have a value of their own in God’s eyes” (69, 221). In this statement, we offer insights from this encyclical for the U.S. context.

CMSM President Very Rev. Jim Greenfield OSFS says, “We religious men in the United States welcome Laudato Si’ with enthusiasm, especially as it deepens our commitment to work among people on the margins. In naming creation "our common home,” Pope Francis reminds us again that we are one family called to share and steward our natural resources. Our responsibility to care for all of our sisters and brothers beckons us to intensify our solidarity with those who are poor and most impacted by threats to the environment.” Cardinal Sean O’Malley, OFM Cap., also welcomes the encyclical stating “the moral dimensions of the environment…are solidly grounded in the Catholic tradition of social teaching.”

We begin by seeking transformation of our daily habits into the virtues of an “ecological citizenship” (211). This is “not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (217). We invite simpler living with less consumption, less air conditioning, and adjusting our eating habits. Pope Francis says “our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures…shows itself in our relationships with people and is contrary to human dignity” (92). We are all connected and each creature must be “cherished with love and respect” (42, 77). As an example we also note how eating meat often harms the environment and often the poor, as crops are taken from poor countries to help produce the meat.

We also note that those most affected by environmental destruction, especially indigenous communities, must be at the decision-making table for our religious communities and for U.S. society. Their “special place” is required as they often can better “consider goals transcending immediate economic interest” (183, 152, 146).

Often unlike the most affected, many of us are enslaved by the “technocratic paradigm,” which exalts subjects who progressively control external objects cultivating a habit and orientation of possessiveness (106). In contrast, we seek a habit and orientation of gift—seeing the gift of others and being gift in the world.

This technocratic paradigm has played out in the use of “highly polluting fossil fuels”—especially coal, but also oil and to a lesser degree, gas, which “needs to be progressively replaced without delay” (165, 26). We will do better in this area in our daily life, but our U.S. society and policies, though making some progress, must make serious adjustments and commit fully to renewable resources “without delay.”

1 http://www.thebostonpilot.com/opinion/article.asp?ID=174073
The technocratic paradigm also plays out in our financial system. For example, “saving banks at any cost” and failure to better regulate “speculative financial practices,” such as implementing a financial transaction tax, must change (189). Also, it is not “progress” to simply balance protection of the environment with financial gain, such as with common investment strategies (194).

Further, rich countries such as the U.S. continue to often control and harm poorer countries via an “ecological debt,” which many of our religious men see first-hand. For instance, “the warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming” (51). Also, these poorer countries often “fuel the development of richer countries at the cost of their own present and future.” Bishops have asked “what the commandment ‘Thou shall not kill’ means when twenty percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive (95)?” Thus, “differentiated responsibilities” require the U.S. to help by limiting “consumption of non-renewable energy” and assisting others in sustainable development. (52)

Another example of the technocratic paradigm more clearly displays the habit of possessiveness by linking the activity of fossil fuels with our financial system in the activity of war. Francis notes that Pope John XXIII’s encyclical “rejected war” (3). Further, global inequality not only leads to the premature death of many poor but also wars sparked by the shortage of resources, such as Sudan and South Sudan (48). “Might is right” has engendered immense inequality and acts of violence, such as Iraq (82). Too often power is guided by “norms of alleged necessity, from either utility or security.” However, our “freedom fades” when handed over to such violence (105). Further, “war always does grave harm to the environment” (56), such as the water, soil, air, and influx of disease. Engaging in war is not being faithful to the wisdom we are called to protect and preserve (200). In fact, “fraternal love can only be gratuitous (about gift); it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us. That is why it is possible to love our enemies” (228).

In this light, we deeply appreciate the call to an integral ecology and spirituality, including the various types of dialogues identified in the encyclical. We particularly appreciate the call to intergenerational solidarity as a basic reality of justice (159). We also highlight and return to the power of changing lifestyle as a form of healthy pressure on those who control unjust systems, such as “boycotting certain products” (206). We will adjust our houses of formation, our practice of the Eucharist, and our prayer accordingly (214, 236, 246).

We fully endorse this encyclical and we are committed to act with urgency on environmental destruction. Thus, this August at our National Assembly we will take up a resolution to adjust our conversations, ministries, and practices toward better cherishing all of God’s creation.

In light of our beautiful and bountiful country, we pray “God of love, show us our place in this world, as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth.” (246).