



Laudato Si' and religious life

A prophetic approach

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A way of reading *Laudato Si'*

- Francis notes, at the end, that the encyclical is a 'reflection which has been both joyful and troubling' (246)
- Joy – Francis' most typical expression
 - In this spirit, "we need to start from gratitude and with praise towards God, not from a focus on the issues. 'Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.' (n.12)"

(Pedro Walpole, 'Do not be afraid: *Laudato si'* and Integral Ecology', *The Way*, 54/4 (October 2015), 9-22, pp. 13-14)
 - Not naïve optimism
 - Rather, a critically positive aspect

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A way of reading *Laudato Si'*

- Troubling
 - These parts "imbue the encyclical with a prophetic character inasmuch as they are styled as a warning, or as an effort to draw our attention down from the clouds of abstract ideas and ideological polemics in order to take an honest look at the concrete state of affairs in which we find ourselves. To that end, they contain some rather provocative expressions – such as the easily and often quoted, 'The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth' (n.21)."

(John Bayer, "'A Voice Crying in the Desert': *Laudato si'* as Prophecy", *The Way*, 54/4 (October 2015), 68-81, p. 70)
 - Not pessimism
 - Rather, a critically negative aspect

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What is Francis doing?

- John Bayer:
 - "I suggest he wants to be understood as a pastor serving in a prophetic role: that is, in the role of one calling us back to reality and exhorting us to conversion." (p. 70)
- The dual role of the prophet:
 - "Look, today I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, to uproot and to knock down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:10)
 - The prophetic task is to denounce, and to announce
 - To make us take a good look at what is wrong, and to change it for the better

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Prophetic speech and prophetic action

- “Pack your bag like an exile’s bundle, by daylight, while they watch, and leave like an exile in the evening, while they watch. While they watch, make a hole in the wall and go out through it. While they watch, shoulder your pack and go out into the dark; cover your face so that you cannot see the ground, since I have made you an omen for the House of Israel.” (Ezekiel 12: 4-6)
- “Walking the talk”
- “Putting your money where your mouth is”

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Two prophetic investment strategies

- Engagement with fossil fuel companies
 - Shareholder activism to encourage them to diversify their portfolio
 - Moving towards net-zero carbon
- Looks like a call to conversion – a prophetic announcing
- What of the call to reality?
 - To do this, engagement must be combined with a threat of divestment
 - “Investors opting to pursue engagement with fossil fuel companies must adopt strong targets and timescales in line with the Paris Agreement goals, with divestment being the certain response if these targets do not dictate a company’s investment strategy.”

(Operation Noah, *Fossil Free Churches: Accelerating the transition to a brighter, cleaner future* (London: Operation Noah, May 2018), p. 13.

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Two prophetic investment strategies

- More divestment-centred
 - “We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay. [...] Politics and business have been slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world.”
- (Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 165)
- Again, a twin strategy:
 - “It is time for Churches to get out of the problem and get into the solution by divesting from fossil fuels and increasing their investment in renewable energy and clean technologies.” (Operation Noah, *Fossil Free Churches*, p. 15)
 - Call to reality – fossil fuels are not the future of energy generation
 - Call to conversion – the shift to zero carbon is urgently needed

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Aiming for 1.5°C – we can still do it

- “Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us.”
- (Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 205)

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