

From Pontiff to Pew (continued):

recalled the Church to an ongoing commitment to conversion, to bear witness that she is not motivated by “earthly ambition”, but seeks “a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not be served” (GS, 3).

This is not, in fact, merely a moral imperative. Pope Francis reminded us that for the Church, “the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one... We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 198).

Christian solidarity commits us to engaging with reality and also to unmasking the contradictions that characterize personal and social life in the contemporary world: for example, scientific and technological progress, which constantly offers new possibilities, but only to some, and which human beings do not always succeed in “subjecting .. to [their] own welfare”; or a clearer understanding of the “laws of society”, accompanied, however, by uncertainties “about the direction to give” them; or, again, a greater abundance of “wealth, resources and economic power”, which, unfortunately, today as in the days of the Council, leaves “a huge proportion of the world’s citizens ... still tormented by hunger and poverty” (GS 4); or a shared awareness that the future of the planet is at stake, coupled with an inability to renounce selfish consumption and the illusion that war is an effective means of building peace.

In a time marked by profound changes, giving rise to worrying imbalances, the Church is called to serve the human person, listening to and welcoming the deepest questions of their heart and the longings that dwell within them, pointing to Christ as “the key, the focal point and the goal of ... all human history” (GS 10). Therefore, in the Church, at every level and in every age, it is necessary to achieve the merciful kenosis of Christ, who “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant ... and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8).

Dear brothers and sisters, may joy and hope – gaudium et spes – be the distinctive features of a Church who proclaims and bears witness to the Gospel, drawing close to the women and men of our time.

From the Pastor's Desk

With Labor Day, summer is now *unofficially* over, and we return to the rhythm of daily life as autumn approaches. I am looking forward to the novel changes this season will bring. After much prayer and consultation, I have decided to resign as director of the Office of Ongoing Formation and Clergy Services. This decision reflects several considerations: my physical and spiritual health, my desire to devote more time to our parish's growing maintenance needs as our population ages, and my hope to return to theological study, which I have had to set aside for the past few years. Beginning in Advent, I will offer educational and spiritual opportunities that explore elements of our uniquely Catholic culture, including devotion to the Blessed Mother, the sacraments, and the Catholic approach to morality and ethics. I would also like to explore new avenues for social outreach.

Another hope of mine is to increase our parish's devotion to the Eucharist since this is indeed the source and summit of our Catholic life. This means encouraging our full, active, conscious participation in the celebration of the Mass (encouraging personal involvement in both weekday and Sunday Eucharist) as well as participation in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Accordingly, throughout the remainder of Ordinary Time, I will be addressing, in the bulletin, issues related to and flowing from these areas of parish life.

Regarding my health, since my issue with gastroparesis has been confirmed, I am one step further toward being moved from inactive to active on the kidney transplant list. I continue to deal with the issues of gout and osteoarthritis in my joints, my ankles and feet especially. I am continuing physical therapy, and I have just completed a course of radiation on my knees for osteoarthritis, and I am happy to report I have seen approximately 50% improvement (which I see as a tremendous blessing). I am so very grateful to God for the many specialists and caregivers who continue to contribute to my overall health and wellbeing. Thanks also to all of you for your continued prayerful support. As always, I pray for all your personal and spiritual needs on a daily basis.

NEW DOCUMENT ON CREATION: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

The International Theological Commission published a new document Sept. 2 calling for ecological conversion due to “sin against creation and the Creator.” More than a decade after the release of Pope Francis’ landmark encyclical “*Laudato Si’*,” the theological commission goes beyond Pope Francis’ use of the phrase “ecological sin” by proposing what it describes as more precise terminology: “sin against creation and the Creator.” The commission explained that by failing to care for “our Common Home” with sufficient wisdom and long-term vision, “we not only fail to respect God’s plan and mistreat creation, but we also harm our neighbors, especially the poorest and future generations.” “Sin against creation,” it says, “therefore, concerns our relationship with God the Creator, with our neighbors, and with creation itself, distorting the three relationships that define us.” (Although, I would argue that there is a fourth relationship that defines us, the relationship with self; however, this is not taken up in this document).

The document is divided into three chapters, describing a “threefold transformation” in culture’s relationship to nature since the 16th century: the loss of the perception of nature as God’s creation; the emergence of an increasingly anthropocentric and predatory vision in the relationship between humanity and Creation; and the spread of an ecological crisis on a planetary level.

The first chapter examines how all creation carries an imprint of the Trinity — Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit — arguing that since creation bears the Creator God’s imprint, ecological questions always have a religious dimension. It quotes St. Hildegard of Bingen’s idea of **creation as “a second Scripture,”** as well as other Doctors of the Church — St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas. The commission also develops a dialogue with some scientific and philosophical views of the cosmos, examining how the Big Bang and quantum physics are compatible with faith.

The second chapter focuses on the human person’s place in the created world, using the creation narrative in Genesis to examine how humanity was given the original task of *dominion*, custody, and cultivation of the land, placing exploitation of the land, pollution, and biodiversity within the Genesis narrative of the fall of man. (Some of the language here would have been served better by employing the concept of *co-dependance*; however, the conclusions are generally correct). Citing United Nations environmental reports, the document catalogs what it calls alarming

levels of biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, and the environmental toll of armed conflict, noting that the poorest nations and communities suffer the worst consequences despite bearing the least responsibility for causing them. **It rejects the two extremes of “predatory anthropocentrism,” or treating creation as mere property for exploitation, and radical biocentrism and “deep ecology” movements that strip humanity of its unique status within creation.** Instead, the theological commission puts forward the idea of “*situated anthropocentrism*” – an expression first used by Pope Francis which has been taken up by Pope Leo XIV that describes **the human vocation as a “steward” and a “servant of creation.”** This twofold vocation finds its zenith in the Eucharist, which the document describes as an “ecological school” from which flows “a spirituality capable of supporting and encouraging the ecological conversion that we so urgently need to undertake as a human family.”

The third chapter offers some practical guidelines and principles for “ecological conversion,” organized around different fundamental relationships of the person with God, with oneself, with creation, and with others, highlighting the importance of mindful consumption, balanced rhythms of work and rest with the Benedictine idea of “ora et labora,” respect for life, asceticism, reverence for creation, and listening to the cry of the Earth and the poor. It also surveys the contribution of other world religions to ideas of environmental stewardship.

NB: This document was published in Italian only. Therefore, my summation and commentary are the result of a translation published by a friend of mine from the Catholic Theurgical society of America. I am grateful for the opportunity to exercise some theological muscle in reflecting upon this document, since business with the parish, my health, and other recent family concerns have not afforded me the opportunity to engage in theological writing for a while now. Also, it is important that documents such as these become assessable to a larger audience than just theologians since as I mentioned earlier we all have a responsibility toward creation. It is the stage on which we live out our moral existence. We can all never neglect our care for this great gift of creation which God has given to us. Think about this the next time you take out your recycling bin and consider it a labor of love!