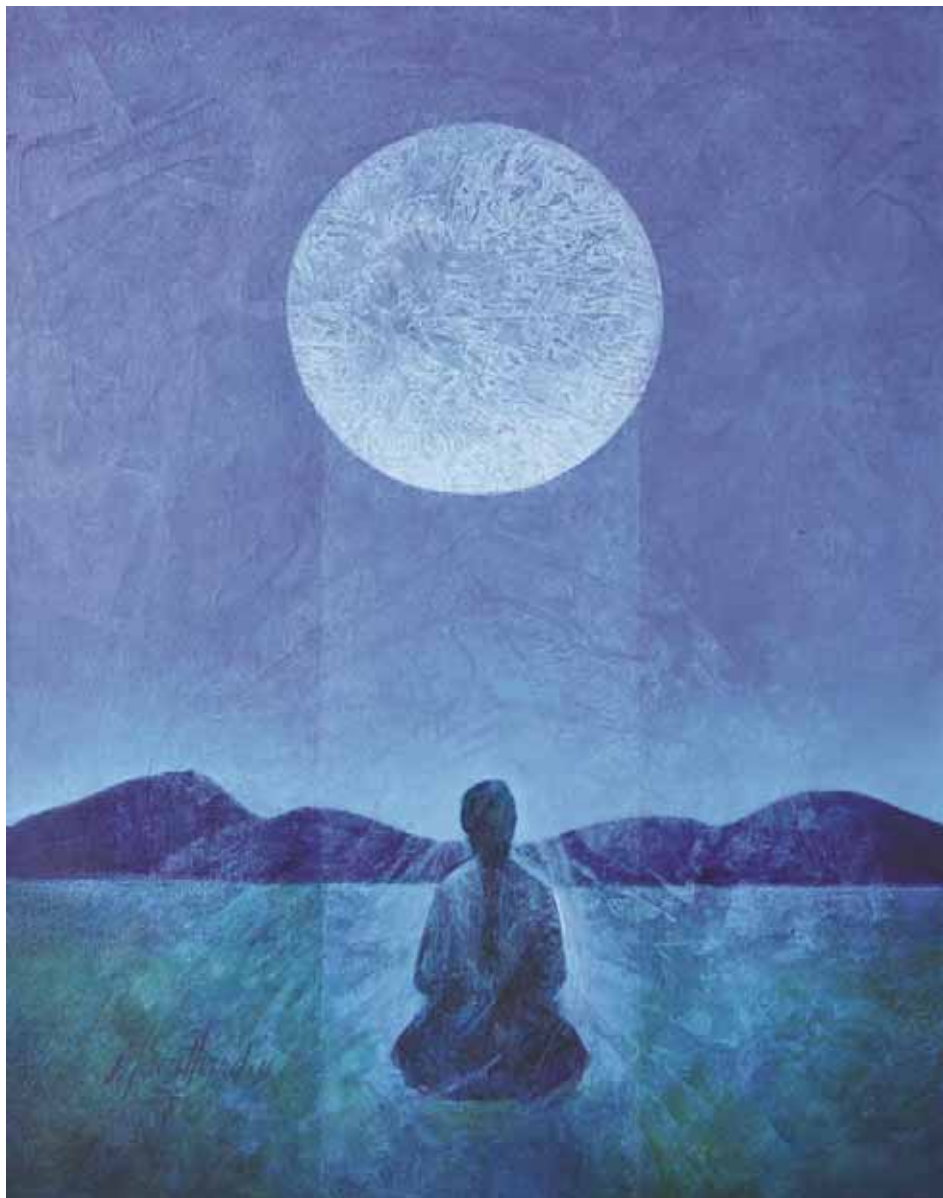


A Response to Laudato Si' –Pat Irr, osf



“Solstice Moon” by Mary Southard, CSJ, is courtesy of www.MinistryOfTheArts.org

The heart of the recent encyclical from Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, is a plea for the awakening of the human community to the plight of the poor and to the urgent need for respect and care of our common home. He calls each of us to action and to work toward a more just and sustainable world. Pope Francis immerses the encyclical in the spirit of Francis, a poor man of 13th century Assisi, who experienced personal transformation as he responded to the corruption of his day. In a world of rampant greed and selfishness, Pope and Saint Francis call us away from the individualism of overconsumption and concern for profit and toward relationality so that we can hear the cries of the poor and of Earth.

The Pope uses the language of the Canticle from Francis of Assisi to invite us into the inner spirit of Francis of Assisi: “Praised be you my, Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth who sustains and governs us....” The hymn is a call to stand in awe and wonder before creation, to begin a new dialogue, and to develop a new lifestyle that can encourage changes in attitudes and actions.

In his letter to us, Francis of Rome moves us from the joy of praise to the painful reality that our “sister... cries out to us because of the harm

EDITOR'S LETTER

Our autumn edition focuses on *Laudato Si'*, the new Encyclical Letter from Pope Francis. We're fortunate to have a piece from Pat Irr, osf, whose community of women religious, the Wheaton Franciscans, has a spirituality rooted in the tradition of Francis of Assisi. This is the very same tradition the Pope draws inspiration and wisdom from for the Encyclical. Joan Krebs ever so powerfully shows us that *Laudato Si'* is much more than a call to care for Earth as she emphasizes the document "...from beginning to end, is about living in solidarity." John Surette, a protégé of the late Thomas Berry, imagines for us a conversation between Thomas and Pope Francis.

And now I share with you the news that I am leaving the editor position at *SpiritEarth*. The five years/ten issues I've served have been pure joy; I have been blessed to work with a generous and creative Board and many, many gifted writers, artists, and photographers, all of whom are passionate about the "great work" to which this publication is committed. And special thanks to Board member Ann Schreckenger, who has offered rich insights and beautiful written reflections over the past five years; she, too, is leaving the Board. Thank you, Ann!

I'm very pleased to announce that Sr. Judy Cauley of the Congregation of St. Joseph will take the reins beginning with the next edition. Judy's extensive work in the area of conscious evolution makes her an outstanding choice to serve as editor of *SpiritEarth*; she will introduce herself in this space next spring. Welcome, Judy!

For both environmental and budgetary reasons, beginning with our spring issue, *SpiritEarth* will be available in digital format only at:

<http://www.csjthewell.org/resources/spiritearth/>

If you presently receive the printed version of the publication, please contact Diane Pfahler at The Well Spirituality Center:

<http://www.csjthewell.org/about/staff/>

to let her know you would like to receive the email alert when each new issue becomes available online.

Blessings on every endeavor, every act of love, that guides and advances the human journey toward All-Is-One consciousness.

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SpiritEarth

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Mission Statement

SpiritEarth is a publication that expands and advances The Well Spirituality Center's mission as a regional center for telling and engaging our Sacred Universe Story and fostering the evolving role of humankind in this great drama.

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The Pope's Encyclical Letter: A Call to Solidarity —Joan Krebs

Think different. *Apple advertising slogan*

Photo by Sean Roberts

(Unless otherwise noted, italicized passages are quotes from *Laudato Si'*.)

At times I understand the Buddhist monks who immolated themselves during the Vietnam War. It was their final attempt to get people to change, convert, transform. They did it out of love, out of bonding, out of communion, and, I think, out of "Care for Our Common Home" or integral ecology—all forms of solidarity. Right now I'm at the point of wanting to bang my head against a wall with regard to how *Laudato Si'* is identified/presented: environment; climate change; political, economic, social justice concerns; ecology or even



*"If the authors of *Laudato Si'* have their way, the rest of us can no longer live comfortably by missing the forest for the trees. Solidarity as a way of life is our vocation..."*

integral ecology. Normally encyclicals are titled by their first words. In the case of *Laudato Si'*, however, someone felt compelled to add, "On Care for Our Common Home," which, of course does two things. First, in contemporary marketing parlance, the encyclical is branded. Second, perception is manipulated for linking the encyclical solidly to personally preferred topics. Wrong! *Laudato Si'*, from beginning to end, is about living in solidarity. *I urgently appeal...for a new conversation...We require a new and universal solidarity. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God.*

I've been asked to show that *Laudato Si'* leads us on an intentional, deliberate pathway that draws us into solidarity. Impossible! The encyclical does nothing of the sort. Solidarity is forest; everything else is trees. Solidarity is worldvision; everything else derives value from it. The journey of *Laudato Si'* is solely about intentional change, "a new conversation" about what "it means to be human in *this* world at *this* time. Along the way we'll *recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature*, including human companions as we aim to live this worldvision. If the authors of *Laudato Si'* have their way, the rest of us can no longer live comfortably by missing the forest for the trees. Solidarity as a way of life is our vocation for the foreseeable future and beyond. Our hashtag should read, "We are all earthlings" rather than "They are creatures; we are masters." We need to divest ourselves of a "Dilbert" mentality.

Continued on page 4

“...relatedness is the primary and ultimate ground of all that exists. Relatedness, as expressed in human language, means ‘experience’ as a condition and a value.”

—Ivone Gebara from *Longing For Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*

the Internet. Networking in its various modes is the gold standard and basis for communicating, planning, acting. The journey that the authors of *Laudato Si’* desire we take is from Gutenberg to **Think different**; from linear to lateral thought; from literal to metaphorical thinking. Paragraph 14 of the document is powerful: *I urgently appeal for a new conversation...* Note “urgently.”

The encyclical isn't about “what,” but rather “why” and “how.” It speaks to hearts before heads. Rational arguments abound, but we're continually pressured to **Think different**, to look within, to remember what we've forgotten as “dust of the earth.” (Gen 2:7) We pray as creatures for *grace to feel profoundly joined to all that is*.

Let's delve into a tale before ending. Individual blind men try to fathom the nature of an elephant. Recall: each determines it's what his touch reveals. Anyone with sight, with “eyes to see,” realizes an elephant is what he touches and infinitely more. *Laudato Si’* as solidarity is the elephant. *Laudato Si’* in its parts reveals ears, trunk, hide, tusks, tail, strength, legs, voice—none of which is the whole and all of which, in aggregate, comprises less than the whole. We're led to *...keeping in mind that ‘realities are greater than ideas.’*

We recently completed the first World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. *Laudato Si’* urges us to live solidarity: “we” rather than “I” and earthlings instead of nationalities or religious adherents. It urges us to Apple computer's **Think different** and to Francis's conviction that *Today...we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.*

Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.

Joan Krebs: Contemplative activist in the area of Spirituality of Solidarity. Associate of the Congregation of St. Joseph. Futurist. Dyed-in-the-wool educator. Old Woman burning with a life-long desire that we humans come to “feel profoundly joined with everything that is.” (Laudato Si)

Consider: “Love” is used 70 times; “solidarity” 10 times. The following words come up so often I gave up counting: “connectedness,” “relatedness,” “communion,” “bondedness,” “unity,” “harmony.” Solidarity is not a goal of a linear journey. *Laudato Si’* immerses us in chaos, challenges us now and into the future, as new humans, to **Think different**.

Consider: Although the actual phrase is not used, we are firmly planted in the Age of the Anthropocene. Whatever happens on this planet is due to human beings. No longer can we say that the world progresses solely as the result of scientific laws excluded from human responsibility. This is heavy stuff requiring deep personal and global examination.

Consider: what “a new conversation” entails in 2015. Most North Americans still walk around with and live lives encumbered by a Gutenberg brain where individualism and the resultant group-think are normative. Globally that's no longer operative. Most brains are attuned to

“Real life stories...are about a collaborative struggle for social justice that goes to the heart of what it means to be human in this world at this time in history. The context is crucial...”

—Margaret Swedish and Marie Dennis from *Like Grains of Wheat: A Spirituality of Solidarity*

Francis the Pope and Thomas the Geologist

An Imaginary Conversation (Thomas Berry died in 2009)

—John Surette, SJ

Francis – It is a pleasure for me to have this brief conversation with you, Thomas, as I know of your deep concern for many of the topics I touch on in my Encyclical. I have written it as a means of entering into dialogue not only with Catholics but with all peoples about our common home Earth. As we engage with all the problems facing Earth and its human community in our twenty-first century, our conversations and subsequent actions need to include everyone.

Thomas – The pleasure is mutual, Francis. What you have to say is precisely what we need to hear at the beginning of this century as we are called to bring about a much needed radical change in our consciousness and conduct. When you say that the conversation needs to include everyone, I would add that it also needs to include everything —the atmosphere, waters, and soils, the bacteria, fish, plants, insects, birds, and mammals. All of these have some wisdom that can assist us in dealing creatively with our planetary crisis. Our scientists can assist us in accessing this wisdom and they also need to join their findings to the wisdom of our human contemplation, imagination, and spiritual values as we stand in awe before the wonders of our Universe and its Earth.

Francis – A truth discovered by modern science and one that I stress is that everything and everyone is connected and related. And so I speak of an integral ecology. This is an ecology that takes seriously the relatedness and interconnectedness of all the human and other-than-

human creatures on Earth and also includes their overarching context, namely Earth herself. This profound interdependence of people and planet moves us beyond our human-centered or anthropocentric view of our role here on Earth into a more participative posture and planetary consciousness.

Thomas – Your use of the word “consciousness” evokes within me one of the major insights of your Jesuit brother, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. He saw consciousness, or interiority, present in the Universe. He spoke of the “within” of things. This truth has been a major

element in my thought. I see nothing on Earth as a mere thing or object. Everything has its own within, its own interiority, its own center, identity, and subjectivity. And so the Universe is not to be understood and experienced as a collection of objects but rather as a communion of subjects. Consequently, we humans need to nurture an intersubjective relation with everything and everyone.

Francis – We humans have a false sense that all of our ecological problems have a technological solution. If we don’t have the necessary technology, now we



Photo by Tom Schemper

“Our scientists can assist us in accessing this wisdom and they also need to join their findings to the wisdom of our human contemplation, imagination, and spiritual values as we stand in awe before the wonders of our Universe and its Earth.”

Continued on page 7

we have inflicted upon her....” He points to the truth that consumerism and greed have rooted themselves in the heart of our society. And so Francis of Rome calls upon Francis of Assisi to renew our hearts through the mysteries of nature; the natural world, and not material goods, is what can satisfy our souls. In the early years of the 13th century, Francis of Assisi



Photo by Bill Fleming

addressed this same spirit of worldliness in the church and world of his day. He threw off the robes of wealth and embraced Lady Poverty, whom he met in the outcasts of society. He kissed the leper on the road and in that experience met the Christ. In the one who was ugly to his human eyes, Francis experienced a Radiant Presence with his inner spiritual eye. He invited his followers to discover this same presence in the poor, in the vulnerable, and in nature. Love of the poor Christ

transformed Francis as he prayed in the caves of Assisi. He came forth from those caves filled with joy, choosing a way of simplicity, joy, and relationship with all of life.

“Both Pope and Saint Francis invite us to ponder a living relationship with...Mother Earth...”

Eight centuries later we are urgently called by Francis of Rome to conversion of heart, requiring a new relationship with all of creation, especially the most vulnerable, including Earth. As Pope, Francis of Rome has witnessed the escalating number of poor; he has experienced those who roam the planet looking for a home because of violent political

systems and war. And he anguishes over the raping of the land by corporations seeking only profit. He urges leaders to think and act beyond personal aggrandizement and material wealth enhancement. He calls all of us to an “integral ecology,” which requires an ecological conversion based on “relationship with” rather than “exploitation of” nature’s gifts. We’re invited to move from individual transformation to global transformation and to shift from what he calls a technological paradigm to a larger paradigm. This shift is one of a new axial mentality that involves the re-interpreting and expansion of the values of the

Enlightenment: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. These values, interpreted only for individual success, are leading to the destruction of the planet.

An expanded interpretation might look something like this:

- ◆ Life includes a relationship with the entire global community and the ability to listen to the crises of humanity and Earth.
- ◆ Liberty would require responsibility for this global community of life and its thriving.
- ◆ Pursuit of Happiness would be defined as more than material goods. Consumerism would shift to a spirit of sharing.

This shift in values and consciousness is essential, though such shifts in the foundations of culture are always painful and slow. Yet, I believe this is what Francis of Rome is addressing. We are at a new threshold. Some call this moment in history the Anthropomorphic Era because humankind is causing the sixth largest extinction of living creatures in the history of the planet. This red flag calls us to see a broader view of our planet as interconnected, inter-relational, and as a holistic system. It cannot be abused in one area without affecting the whole. We are already seeing that

Earth cannot be used for the accumulation of wealth by the few without severe results; we see the consequences: climate change, the melting of the ice caps, the loss of species, and the displacement of peoples.

Both Pope and Saint Francis invite us to ponder a living relationship with our Sister, Mother Earth, who has woven this web of life over 4.6 billion years.

We are at the beginning of a "great work." We have stardust in our bodies, and we have ventured into space. Now we are responsible for the continuation of life on this planet. We have begun to see the growth of new values, a sense of care for the common good, and a deeper sense of cooperation replacing that of competition. But we continue to be challenged. We are looking at the need for an "ecological conversion." Patriarch Bartholomew says it well as he calls us to "replace consumption with sacrifice, greed with a spirit of generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing...." From an Ecological Summit in Istanbul, we are challenged to look at "the world as a sacrament of communion...for the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail of God's creation." Mother Earth awaits our response.

S. Pat Irr is a Wheaton Franciscan. She ministers through Tau Center in Wheaton, Illinois, as a spiritual director and a core staff member. Pat trained and ministered at The Institute for Spiritual Leadership.

Francis the Pope and Thomas the Geologist continued from page 5

presume that we will have it in the future. Technology is obviously good for us in many ways, but our technocratic mentality is not good when it is perceived as the main answer to the ongoing diminishment and degradation of Earth and its life systems. Technology definitely has its dark side, its limits.

Thomas – A new age is slowly emerging here on Earth. The question is whether it will be a "technozoic age" or an "ecozoic" age. At the present time, I would say that the technozoic seems to be the preferred option for us humans. If this continues, humans in the future will live in a culture in which they are free from most of the constraints that Earth's life systems place upon us. This is not good news for us because of our very nature as Earthlings. We are not on Earth but we are of Earth. Our future vitality is tied to our working toward a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth and not on our relentless seeking to diminish the relationship through our technology with its dark side. We cannot go into the future without technology, but it must be a technology that is synchronous with Earth, its energies, dynamics, and creativities.

Francis – I ask, what kind of Earth do we want to leave to our children and grandchildren later this century? Do we love them enough at the beginning of the century that we will stop our relentless assault upon Earth and her life systems? If we don't stop, at worst Planet Earth will become uninhabitable for them. At best, by mid-century they will be living on a compromised planet where life will be more difficult and where hope and meaning will be harder to come by.

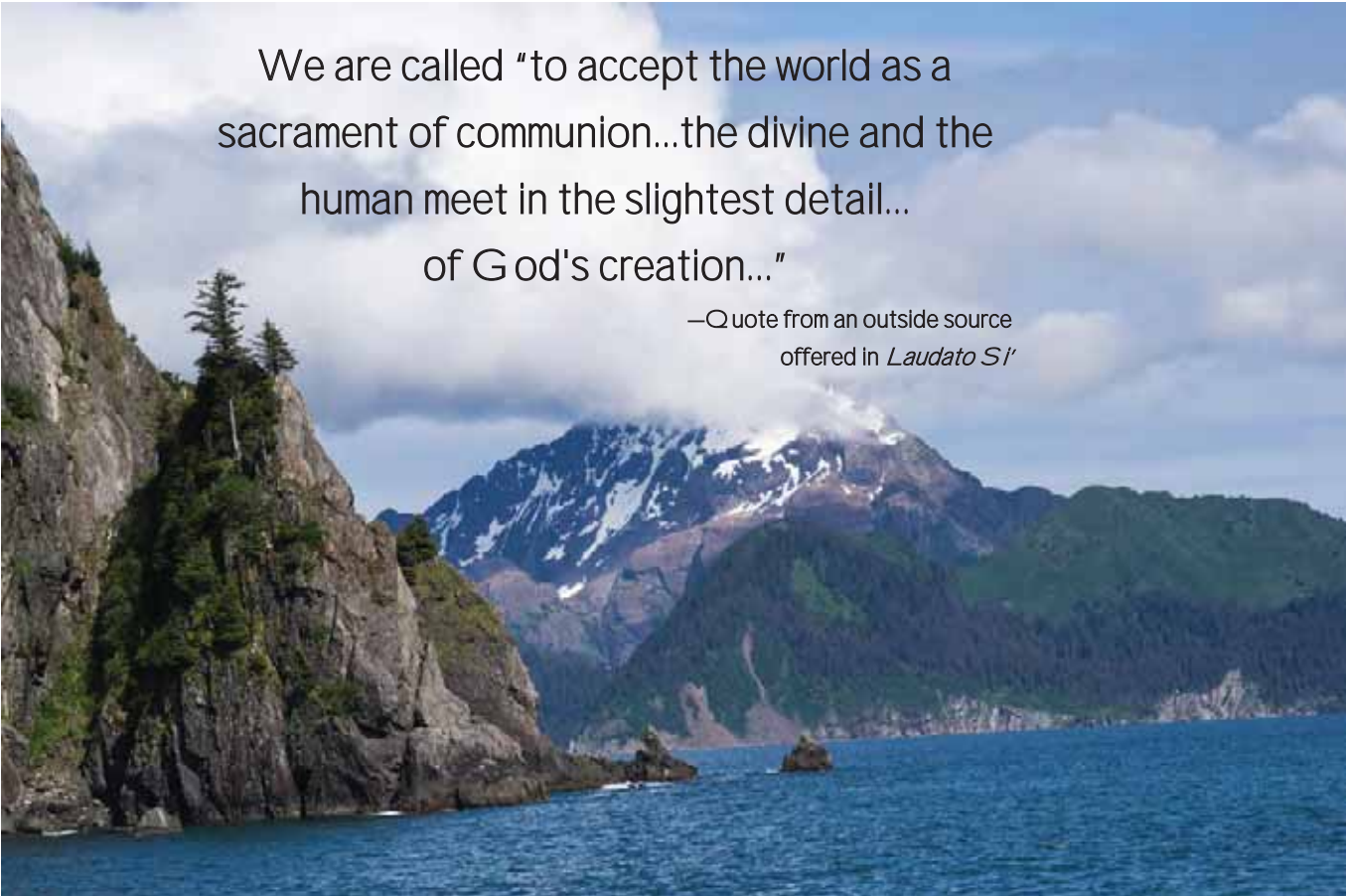
Thomas – I thank you, Francis, for your comprehensive, insightful, and challenging Encyclical. It invites us to care for Earth and her humans, and to care is to love. I hear you saying that love is primary. Leaving a vibrant Earth to our children and grandchildren is the most caring and loving gift we can give them!

Francis – Thank you, Thomas.



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We are called "to accept the world as a
sacrament of communion...the divine and the
human meet in the slightest detail...
of God's creation..."

—Quote from an outside source
offered in *Laudato Si'*