

IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY AND THE ECOLOGICAL VISION OF *LAUDATO SI'*

Paul L. Younger

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it (Psalm 24: 1).

IGNATIUS BRIEFLY SETS OUT his understanding of the relationship between humans and the rest of Creation right at the start of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, in the Principle and Foundation, where he states that 'the other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created' (Exx 23). Taken at face value, these words might seem to be a simple extension of the injunction in the first of the creation myths in Genesis, where humankind is instructed to 'fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion ... over every living thing' (Genesis 1: 28). More than any other line of scripture, this verse has been used to justify ever-greater human appropriation of the earth's primary biological production. Right-wing pressure groups that claim Christian affiliation—particularly in the USA—use this single sentence to justify unremitting and carefree subjugation of nature to any and all desires of humankind. Does the Principle and Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises also take such an instrumental view of Creation? I should like to address this question here, particularly in the light of *Laudato si'*—the second encyclical of the first Jesuit pope.

Laudato si': A Brief Synopsis

The publication of *Laudato si'*, on 24 May 2015 had been much anticipated. Its focus was in many ways prefigured in 2013 in the final chapter of Pope Francis' first encyclical, *Lumen fidei*, where he wrote that,

... by revealing the love of God the Creator, [faith] enables us to respect Nature all the more, and to discern in it a grammar written by the hand of God and a dwelling place entrusted to our protection

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and care. Faith also helps us to devise models of development which are based not simply on utility and profit, but consider creation as a gift for which we are all indebted¹

Despite the wide-ranging nature of this antecedent, the press speculation that preceded publication of *Laudato si'*, and the immediate reaction of most commentators (whether favourable or not) asserted that the encyclical letter was 'on climate change'. While climate change does indeed feature prominently in *Laudato si'*, it is by no means the dominating topic: quantitative analysis reveals that wider concerns, such as poverty, life, consumerism, waste, pollution, the environment more generally, ecology and loss of biodiversity receive far more coverage.² Essentially, *Laudato si'* is a call to a comprehensive 'ecological conversion': to acknowledge that 'the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it' (Psalm 24: 1) and thus to 'recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature' and hence act so as to 'protect the world and not prey on it' (n.246). Although the term 'ecology' is widely misappropriated in contemporary culture, Pope Francis uses the term correctly, to designate the interactions between creatures, and between creatures and the environment.

It is important to note that, in contrast to all but one earlier encyclical by any Pope,³ *Laudato si'* is explicitly directed to all of humankind, rather than just to the Roman Catholic faithful. Thus its mood and content contrast markedly with Pope Francis's earlier official documents, which were exhortations directed principally at the church community.⁴ One manifestation of this contrast is that only two chapters of *Laudato si'* (two and six) deal predominantly with theology and Christian pastoral practices, while the other four deal with issues of common interest to many individuals and groups in wider society.

Chapter one reviews the multifaceted challenges of anthropogenic environmental degradation, adopting the ecological concept of 'common goods' as a means to understand the issues of injustice arising from pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. The second chapter—'The Gospel of Creation'—proposes a theological framework

¹ *Lumen fidei*, n. 55.

² Paul L. Younger, 'Laudato? Si! An Environmental Engineer Reads Pope Francis', *Open House*, 251 (August 2015), 3–4, available at <http://www.openhousescotland.co.uk/laudato-si-an-environmental-engineer-reads-pope-francis/>, accessed 10 September 2015.

³ I think of John XXIII's *Pacem in terris* (1963), which addressed all people of good will at a time when the Cold War risked tipping over into global nuclear holocaust.

⁴ *Lumen fidei* and the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (2013).

for analyzing these issues, drawing predominantly on biblical, patristic, conciliar and papal sources. In doing so, it localises ecological issues firmly within the pre-existing framework of Catholic social teaching. Within this rich narrative, Pope Francis explicitly deals with the misuse of that troublesome verse from Genesis (1:28) mentioned above. While admitting that ‘we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures’, he goes on to argue that, approaching this text in its full context and with an appropriate hermeneutic, ‘we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures’ (n.67).⁵ Rather, the full remit of humankind is,

... to ‘till and keep’ the garden of the world (cf. Genesis 2:15). ‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. ‘The earth is the Lord’s’ (Psalm 24: 1); to him belongs ‘the earth with all that is within it’ (Deuteronomy 10: 14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: ‘The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me’ (Leviticus 25:23). (n.67)

The third chapter of *Laudato si'* examines the disordered tendencies in individuals and society that give rise to ecological degradation, most notably blind faith in (unspecified) technological fixes and the tendency to anthropocentrism in our dealings with nature. Chapter four explores many facets of what an ‘integral’ ecology might look like, with environmental, economic, social and cultural dimensions. An ‘ecology of daily life’ is advocated, in which the renewal of urban environments is undertaken in a manner that prioritises the needs of the poor, minimising the many environmental blights on their health and quality of life, such as those associated with overcrowding owing to inadequate housing, and with air pollution arising from unregulated transport. The principle of the

⁵ See Jeremy Cohen, ‘Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It’: *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989), 314: ‘In the case of Gen 1:28, modern scholars have retrojected contemporary concern with dominion over nature onto scripture’s call to “fill the earth and master it”, assuming that here lies the source of western ecological attitudes ... but ... this study ... has revealed otherwise’.

common good is reiterated here, along with discussion of concepts of intra- and inter-generational justice. The final two chapters set out some parameters for action, both at the level of policy-making (chapter five) and at the level of individual lifestyles, not least the ways in which these are influenced by education and spiritual development (chapter six). The encyclical closes with two remarkable prayers: the first is written for use in interfaith contexts by any monotheistic believer, while the second is specifically Christian in language.

To summarise, *Laudato si'* constitutes a radical call to what Pope Francis terms 'ecological conversion', in which our personal and collective encounters with Jesus are realised in a 'vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork' (n.217). This 'entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works' (n.220). However, personal conversion is insufficient: the 'problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds' (n.219). Yet,

... on many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views. But we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Hope would have us recognize that ... we can always do something to solve our problems. (n.61)

Besides citing his own earlier papal statements, Pope Francis refers to only two other Jesuits in *Laudato si'*: Juan Carlos Scannone, who has illuminated many of the ways in which the urban poor of Latin America are developing their own ecology of justice; and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the acknowledgement of whom feels like a healing touch for those geoscientists and spiritual writers who have long regarded him as a prophet unfairly rejected by the elders of his own people. Franciscan and Dominican sources are cited far more frequently than Jesuit ones. So just how 'Ignatian' is the spirituality advocated by *Laudato si'*?

Ignatius and the 'Gospel of Creation'

Ignatius himself clearly drew huge spiritual inspiration from the natural world. In the summary of his experiences dictated to Luis Gonçalves da Câmara, Ignatius relates how, during his convalescence in Loyola, he

derived great consolation, and an impetus to serve the Lord, from his habit of gazing at the sky and the stars.⁶ Subsequently, one of his most profound and memorable spiritual experiences occurred while he was staring into the Cardoner river near Manresa.⁷ Thus it is unsurprising that natural imagery is frequently invoked in the *Spiritual Exercises*. This tendency reaches its acme in the 'Contemplation to Attain Love' in the Fourth Week, in which retreatants are encouraged to reflect repeatedly on the action of God in nature, thus:



God Creating the Stars, by Sano di Pietro,
fifteenth century

- in the second point, to consider '... how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence ...' (Exx 235)
- in the third point to consider '... how God labors and works for me in all the creatures on the face of the earth; that is, he acts in the manner of one who is laboring. For example, he is working in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, and all the rest—giving them their existence, conserving them, concurring with their vegetative and sensitive activities, and so forth.' (Exx 236)
- in the fourth point, to consider how everything that is good emanates from God in an indivisible manner, '... as the rays come down from the sun, or the rains from their source' (Exx 237)

These lines echo the Principle and Foundation (Exx 23), in that they identify God working for the good of humans through all other created things. This is an undeniably anthropocentric interpretation of nature. Intellectual assent to this point is not possible without accepting that the love of God is abundant to the point of profligacy: that all

⁶ *Autobiography*, n. 11.

⁷ *Autobiography*, n. 30.

of the created universe has been called into existence simply to let a limited number of creatures on a tiny, insignificant planet experience that love.⁸ The Psalmist marvelled at this profligate love:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? (Psalm 8: 3–4)

Carlo Carretto, in the first chapter of his book *The God Who Comes*, memorably uses the modern understanding of the cosmos to express how the immensity of God's love is reconciled with the deeply personal manner in which that love is manifest to humans:

God has always been coming; God is always coming. This evening, as I gazed at the sky, I saw the heavenly body farthest from the earth and still visible to the naked eye: the nebula of Andromeda The pale light of the nebula, which reached my eye this evening, left there a million years ago at the speed of 187,000 miles per second. From that time, and doubtless from before then, God has been coming to meet me⁹

Summarily disregarding any such interpretation, the evangelical 'new atheists' use the same observations of the vastness of the universe to ridicule Christian claims of human 'specialness'.¹⁰ The dichotomy between the interpretations of Carretto and Dawkins is not amenable to scientific resolution. Rather, it highlights the key insight that the marvels of nature, in and of themselves, are profoundly ambiguous, and that their full interpretation is therefore dependent on the faith perspective of the beholder.¹¹

There is, of course, no doubt over the stance of Ignatius of Loyola on the spiritual significance of nature: our experience of nature is integral to God's exuberant outpouring of grace into our lives, and our task is to recognise this for what it is and respond to it. It is in precisely this sense that Ignatius states that 'the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in

⁸ Even if life on other planets has reached the same level of consciousness as humankind, and is thus also fitted to experience God's love directly, those planets are certainly few and exceedingly far between. See, for instance, Simon Conway-Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

⁹ Carlo Carretto, *The God Who Comes*, translated by Rose M. Hancock (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 3–4.

¹⁰ See, for example, Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006), 134–151.

¹¹ See Alistair E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

prosecuting the end for which he is created'. Acceptance of this basic premise is indispensable in Ignatian spirituality, for so much of what follows in the *Spiritual Exercises* is predicated on it.

Yet there is an undeniable tension between the notion of creatures being created for the benefit of humans and existing for their own sake. This tension is explicitly discussed by Pope Francis in *Laudato si'*, where he notes:

In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, 'we can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful'. The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: 'Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things.' (n.69)

The use of the characteristically Ignatian word 'disordered' in the last sentence here offers us the key to resolving any perceived tension between the perspectives of Ignatius and Pope Francis. This resolution is, to paraphrase Ignatius himself, to be found more in deeds than in words: in the time-honoured practices of Ignatian spirituality as set forth in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

Ignatian Practices and Ecological Spirituality

Immediately following the statement that 'the other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created', Ignatius goes on to say that 'it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it'. The 'end' to which this limited use of the 'other things on the face of the earth' is directed is spelt out by Ignatius as follows: 'Human beings are created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by means of doing this to save their souls'. Only in so far as their use might advance us in that spiritual quest can we take advantage of other created things. And any such use must be as sparing as possible:

To attain this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not

forbidden. Consequently, on our own part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters. (Exx 23)

A range of structured reflections are provided by the Spiritual Exercises which nurture this 'indifference' (perhaps better expressed as 'detachment') in the retreatant. The aim is to remove 'disordered' tendencies, especially 'disordered' attachment to material possessions, to the prestige that goes with them and to the power that such prestige often confers. It is with precisely this same understanding that Pope Francis warns against 'any disordered use of things' (n.69). It scarcely needs stating that if all inhabitants of our finite planet followed the Ignatian recommendation to use the good things of the earth only as sparingly as would be consistent with 'praising, reverencing and serving God', then we would face no ecological crises.

Pope Francis makes much the same point at greater length in *Laudato si'*, where:

Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that 'less is more'. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures (n.222)

This could equally serve as a succinct summary of the way of life that pursuit of the Spiritual Exercises seeks to promote. The strength of the Exercises is that they do not merely exhort the adoption of a 'prophetic and contemplative lifestyle' but provide many techniques for opening ourselves up to the grace we need to achieve 'spiritual detachment'. Of particular relevance to the issues covered by *Laudato si'* are two of these techniques: the application of the senses and the daily examen.

Within the formal framework of the Exercises, the application of the senses is presented principally as a means of extracting as much meaning as possible from *lectio divina* on prescribed scripture passages. It involves the imaginative consideration of the sight, smell, taste, touch and sound of specific scenes described in the scriptures. As it is fundamentally difficult to imagine realistically if you do not yourself pay attention to the experience of the senses in daily life, the development of this technique gradually leads to a more conscious appreciation of 'the small things' in daily life, 'cherishing each thing and each moment' so that we are 'serenely present to each reality ... open[ing] us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment'. Supporting this practice is the daily examen, in which we reflect on the many ways in which God got through to us during the day. The overall experience is that we gradually become accustomed to 'find God in all things' or, perhaps more accurately, to 'allowing God to find us in all things'.¹² In doing so, the 'application of the senses' expands from an imaginative practice during periods of prayer to become an everyday habit that gradually transforms our consciousness.

Ignatian spirituality abounds with examples of such practices, very often in relation to the beauty of nature. 'Beauty' is a recurrent theme in *Laudato si'*; indeed the addition of 'beauty' to 'justice and peace' is arguably the greatest contribution that *Laudato si'* makes to the lexicon of Catholic social teaching.¹³ *Laudato si'* makes it clear that when we cultivate our appreciation of nature, we align our vision with the 'gaze of Jesus', who 'was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder' (n.97).

Of all the figures in Christendom to have fully grasped this truth, no one did so more thoroughly or eloquently than the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. His poetry throbs with a profound delight at the myriad ways in which God makes himself manifest to us through the beauty of creatures, both animate and inanimate. Hopkins's sustained 'application of the senses' reached such degrees of profundity and sophistication that it exhausted the descriptive ability of existing poetic techniques, prompting him not only to bend the meanings of nouns and

¹² See Gerard W. Hughes, *God in All Things: Earthing Our Spirituality* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003) and Paul Coutinho, *Ignatian Mysticism* (Rockville: Now You Know Media, 2010), 5 CDs.

¹³ See Paul L. Younger, 'Groaning with Creation: Ecological Spirituality in *Laudato si'*', *Open House*, 252 (October 2015), forthcoming.



The Paradise, by Roelant Savery, 1626

verbs, but to introduce entirely new terms, most notably ‘inscape’ and ‘instress’. Frustratingly, Hopkins never formally defined these terms. But, as they have been understood by many scholars, and as they have entered the vocabulary of other writers, ‘inscape’ is that internal and external essence of an entity that can objectively be seen, touched, heard and/or described, whereas ‘instress’ refers to the mystical experience that a given ‘inscape’ stirs within us; our emotional response to another creature, which will often defy description.¹⁴

The significance of this for spirituality is simple yet profound: from the faith perspective, the inscape of every creature is God-given. For non-human beings, fulfilment of their ordained inscape is intrinsic. Thus Thomas Merton wrote:

A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying him The more a tree is like itself, the more it is like Him No two created things are exactly alike. And their individuality is no imperfection. On the contrary, the perfection of each created thing is not merely in its conformity to an abstract type, but in its own individual identity with itself. The forms and individual characters of living and growing things [and] of inanimate beings ...

¹⁴ See Evelyn Wilson, ‘Gerard Manley Hopkins and Transcendence’, lecture given at the 2003 Hopkins Literary Festival, Newbridge College, Co. Kildare, available at www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/lectures_2003/transcendence.html, accessed 24 September 2015; Dennis Sobolev, *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2011), 27–42.

constitute their holiness in the sight of God Their inscape is their sanctity. It is the imprint of His wisdom and His reality in them ... The little yellow flowers that nobody notices on the edge of that road are saints looking up into the face of God¹⁵

By contrast, human beings have the ability to resist the realisation of their individual inscapes: to be other than God intends them to be. The essence of the spiritual quest, as Ignatius and so many of his followers have realised, is to abandon the false self and fully embrace the personhood that God desires for us.¹⁶ In respecting our own inscape we cannot withhold respect from the inscapes of all other creatures. This is the firm foundation of an authentically Ignatian ecological spirituality. It does not lead to an empty sentimentalism of nature, but to a passionate advocacy of care for creation, as expressed so eloquently by Hopkins:

What would the world be, once bereft
of wet and of wildness? Let them be left.
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet¹⁷

That present-day son of Ignatius, Pope Francis, now calls us to renew our own spirituality so that such passionate advocacy becomes an integral part of our mission as Christians, moving from instress to action, making common cause with all people of good will who seek a better future for 'our common home'.

Paul Younger holds the Rankine Chair of Engineering at the University of Glasgow, where he is also professor of energy engineering. He was formerly pro-vice-chancellor for engagement and founder-director of the Institute for Sustainability at Newcastle University. He has worked extensively with community groups on water supply and pollution remediation projects worldwide, and is currently helping develop large-scale renewable energy systems in Ethiopia. Under the direction of the Ignatian Spirituality Centre, Glasgow, he recently completed the Spiritual Exercises under Annotation 19.

¹⁵ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (London: Shambala, 1961), 31–32.

¹⁶ James Martin, *Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints* (Mahwah: Paulist, 2006).

¹⁷ Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Inversnaid', in *Poems and Prose*, selected by W. H. Garner (London: Penguin, 1953), 51.