



NEW FRONTIERS

Combined newsletter of JPIC Office, Rome / UN-NGO, New York

Society of the Sacred Heart
JPIC Office, Rome / UN-NGO, New York



Dear Sisters and Friends,

In this issue of New Frontiers, we highlight the special anniversary year of *Laudato Si'* which runs from 20 May 2020, the 5th anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, until 24 May 2021. This includes a yearlong series of initiatives dedicated to care for the earth.

Also in this issue, we include a reflection on our relationship with the fragile ecologies of the planet, *Laudato Si' and Covid-19: Can praises still be sung in a strange land?* This article explores the theology of *Laudato Si'* through the experience of the coronavirus.

At the General Chapter of 2016 one of the key JPIC commitments was to engage with the International Volunteers Programme. One way this has been addressed is through the use of the JPIC Database platform which enables us to exchange information about Volunteer Programmes in the Society. An update is included in this issue.

Let us remember all our provinces during this time. We are all facing experiences that are distressing and overwhelming. As Sister Barbara Dawson says in the Letter for the Feast of the Sacred Heart, "This time of a common global trauma is also an opportunity to assess what is important and what is not. It is a time to pay attention to what we are hearing from among ourselves and from the people around us, to be humble enough to learn."

LAUDATO SI'

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY YEAR

24 MAY 2020 – 24 MAY 2021



The entire material universe speaks of God's love, (God's) boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.

Laudato Si'84

The booklet is available in 6 languages (EN, ES, FR, IT, DE, PT) from: www.sowinghopefortheplanet.org

The introduction to the schedule says “The fifth anniversary of the encyclical comes in the midst of another watershed moment – a global pandemic – and *Laudato Si'*’s message is just as prophetic today as it was in 2015. ... Truly, Covid-19 has made clear how deeply we are all interconnected and interdependent. **As we begin to envision a post-Covid world, we need above all, an integral approach.**”

In promoting the anniversary, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development invites everyone to join **this “peoples’ movement”**, saying that the urgency of the situation calls for immediate and holistic responses at all levels – local, regional, national and international.

After announcing the celebrations and special projects to be launched during the anniversary year, the programme then goes on to outline the multi-year *Laudato Si'* roll-out plan, with its aim “To make communities around the world totally sustainable in the spirit of the integral ecology of *Laudato Si'*”. **The number seven** features strongly in this roll-out plan: first, it is a 7-year journey towards total sustainability. Seven types of institutions are called to make a commitment to embark on this 7-year journey towards integral ecology. These will be:

1. *Laudato Si'* Families
2. *Laudato Si'* Dioceses
3. *Laudato Si'* Schools
4. *Laudato Si'* Universities
5. *Laudato Si'* Hospitals / Health care centres
6. *Laudato Si'* Businesses / Agriculture farms etc.
7. *Laudato Si'* Religious orders

All of these goals are presented in more detail in the programme.

1. Response to the **Cry of the Earth** (greater use of clean renewable energy and reducing fossil fuels in order to achieve carbon neutrality, etc.)
2. Response to the **Cry of the Poor** (defence of human life from conception to death; attention to vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities, migrants, children at risk, etc.)
3. **Ecological Economics** (Sustainable production, Fair Trade, ethical consumption, ethical investments, divestment from fossil fuels, etc.)
4. Adoption of **Simple lifestyles** (sobriety in the use of resources and energy, avoiding single use plastic, greater use of public transport etc.)
5. Ecological **Education** (re-think and re-design educational curricula and educational institution reform in the spirit of integral ecology, etc.)
6. Ecological **Spirituality** (recover a religious vision of God’s creation, encourage greater contact with the natural world, etc.)
7. Emphasis on **Community involvement and participatory action** to care for creation at local, regional, national and international levels, etc)

LAUDATO SI' AND COVID-19: Can praises still be sung in a strange land?

By Celia Deane-Drummond

First printed in *Thinking Faith* on: 30th April 2020
Re-printed here with permission of the author

The coronavirus pandemic is highlighting in a new and acute way the vulnerability of the human race, and our interconnection with one another and with other creatures, something of which the poorest communities in the world are already well aware. Celia Deane-Drummond of the *Laudato Si'* Research Institute alerts us to the wake-up call that we are hearing to preserve and celebrate every part of our common home (1).

This year was supposed to be a year of celebration in Rome, commemorating five years since the release of *Laudato Si'*, the papal encyclical on care for our common home. However, instead of the gratitude that ought to have characterised the marking of that anniversary, the underlying public sentiment when witnessing the unfolding events first in China, then Italy, Spain and now the UK, USA and so many other countries, is panic, horror and anxiety.

Some reporters have tried to find examples of good news in order to lift the prevailing angst and heaviness. One is that stopping or drastically reducing flying and other activities does literally clean up our air. But before making too hasty a judgment about this, we must acknowledge that vulnerable, poor communities, such as those of the Pacific Islands, are losing their economic foothold as an indirect result of Covid-19. The very factors that lead to 'ecological virtues', such as halting the carbon footprint of global exchange, also open up other threats to the means of addressing basic human need. It shows how entangled our lives are and how extremely complicated it is to try and solve threats to our common home.



www.pixabay.com

In the Western hemisphere, we have also largely forgotten what entanglement with other species means. Yes, we keep a pet dog or cat, or perhaps see an urban fox or mouse. But our interconnectedness is not just with the species that we encounter daily, but myriad creatures of the biological world of which we are part. What is significant in the case of Covid-19, like other new diseases of the last century such as SARS or HIV, is that it is zoonotic – it has jumped across a species boundary. Some scientists say it comes from bats, others from snakes, possibly through a mammalian intermediary like Malayan pangolins. Crowded 'wet' live animal markets are potential sources. Often these are illicit markets housing rare species or parts of species in some cases, as with the rhino horn, parts of some snakes or others thought to provide aphrodisiac potency to satisfy an ever-present market, including that in the Western world.

What is really surprising is that something like this has not happened on this scale before. The global market disrupts the delicate ecological balance and protection of species that often characterise indigenous communities living within fragile ecologies. There are political, social, moral and biological aspects to why Covid-19 has appeared on the global scene in the twenty-first century.

Much of the public ethical discussion about Covid-19 is about issues of justice. Who gets access to what has increasingly become a lottery in availability of healthcare, testing and personal protective equipment. Political experimentation costs lives. The most vulnerable suffer directly from this disease, but the indirect national and global economic and social impacts cut deep.

Short of finding a cure or vaccine, social distancing or isolation is the only possible way forward. We are asked to remain distant. It's a self-emptying sacrifice of love, reminiscent of Good Friday, that brings pain of absence – the pain of not being able to be present with those we love or even gather in communion for burial of the dead. Dying alone or with masked carers is not the kind of death any would wish for. It feels counterintuitive.

The more fundamental issue to consider is our common shared humanity, to which this pain points us. Evolutionary anthropology highlights our co-evolution with other species and our highly distinctive 'hyper' sociality. Cutting out the opportunity for that sociality is deeply disturbing for many people. But there seems to be no other choice.

Pope Francis argues in *Laudato Si'* that technology is a poor substitute for human relationships. He welcomes technology that is at the service of the common good, but not when it replaces social bonds. We are now finding the deep truth in what he says. Doing everything through FaceTime or other virtual tools is dissatisfying and feels odd to most people. We are now in a strange land, in spite of familiarity, where we cannot even properly weep and mourn with others. Even papal Masses and eucharistic communion, the liturgical highlight of the Christian year in the Triduum, and the material incarnate source of Christian life, are virtual. What are the spiritual lessons in this dark night, that the early mystics knew so well? The shadow of the empty tomb lingers.

So, can we still find a voice to sing praises, or would such a gesture be hollow in the wake of such an outcry of suffering? Kierkegaard believed that anxiety is the root of sin, and when we consider many aspects of this crisis, we can see that he was at least partly correct. It is from anxiety that politicians distort what is really happening in the public sphere; it is from anxiety

that desires seem to be unsatisfied and solace sought in animal products; it is through anxiety that we remain paralysed in our everyday lives, uncertain what to do; it is through anxious desires to relax that we flout social distancing regulations. But a counter to such anxiety is gratitude. In Rome, nuns continue to sing the Divine Office from their apartments and others join in. In Madrid, every evening people gather on balconies to applaud health workers going into a night shift. In the UK, many thousands clap each Thursday evening for the NHS and social care workers. Various support groups have formed all over the world to help those who are housebound or self-isolating. Covid-19 has a relatively low death rate compared with many other parasitic relationships, so perhaps we also need to be grateful for that. Indeed, the most successful parasites do not kill their hosts.

God's grace is continuously at work in unselfish acts of self-emptying, love and sacrifice, even in the midst of the pandemic.

Let's also consider those millions of microorganisms living within us that help us stay healthy and live long lives. Not all microorganisms are parasitic; some are mutualistic. Our microbiome is complex. Further, let us consider those other living species who share our common home, and celebrate and protect the life and health that they and we have, while we have it.

We need to try and understand this virus as a newcomer in an existing panoply of creatures who are associated with us – some kill, yes, but many do not. We can mourn in deep solidarity with those who mourn, but anxiety will not help those left behind. The next time a cloud of anxiety rises up within us, let us reflect that the flowers, birds, trees and other living creatures around us even in an urban environment are not in lockdown. Stop to listen to the birdsong. Their praises cannot be stamped out, in spite of our mortality and disease. The Christian hopeful message of Easter cannot be suppressed. God's grace is continuously at work in unselfish acts of self-emptying, love and sacrifice even in the midst of the pandemic.

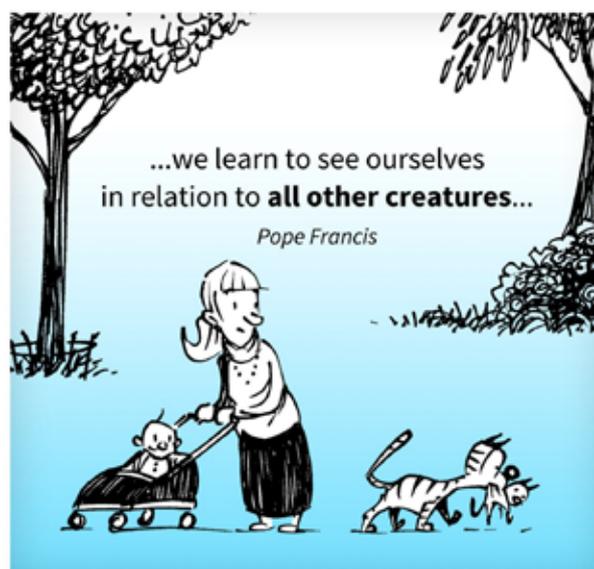
Before we knew about evolution many theologians had trouble squaring belief in God with those creatures that seemed to us to be immoral or positively evil. But there is nothing explicitly evil about Covid-19. It is doing what it is made to do: multiply in its hosts, keeping many alive to pass it on to new hosts. It does not ‘intend’ to kill. We use anthropomorphic language of ‘battle’ and ‘starvation’ in our relationship with the virus as it helps us to deal with its dark and negative consequences on our lives. Rather like climate change, it is portrayed as a horrendous ‘natural evil’, but its impact is a consequence of our daily decisions and relationships, many of which may seem to us to be innocuous but have devastating consequences for other innocent parties. It is a moral, political and natural phenomenon, but also has theological meaning.

Covid-19 is teaching the human race important lessons that it first learnt in the crucible of its early emergence in deep time. Our lives are entangled with each other and with other species and this is the source of both our unique strength but also our vulnerability. We will best honour those who have suffered and died by learning to take our interconnectedness with God, each other, and other creatures much more seriously. Further, even the deepest and darkest suffering is

not beyond the reach of God’s mercy and grace, thus providing an occasion for change and renewal.

(1) I would like to thank Séverine Deneulin and Austen Ivereigh for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

Celia Deane-Drummond is Director of the *Laudato Si’* Research Institute, Campion Hall, University of Oxford. Her most recent book is *Theological Ethics Through a Multispecies Lens, Evolution of Wisdom Volume 1* (Oxford University Press, 2019); *Shadow Sophia, Evolution of Wisdom Volume 2* (Oxford University Press, 2021), in press.



www.mutts.com

© 2015 Patrick McDonnell



RSCJ INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS

The Covid-19 pandemic has taught us a few lessons, but most of all it has emphasised our global interconnection. The Society is onto it! In this article, we highlight the development of the International Volunteers Programme (IVP) and its interconnection with the online JPIC database. New features on the JPIC Database are helping us to access the resources of IVP. The IVP Commission has worked out a system to help those Provinces who are open to receiving volunteers in their projects or programmes. The provinces that have existing volunteer programmes and can offer to send someone to help you (Volunteers Availability) , have provided information on the JPIC database.

Here is how to find out more:

- 1** Open the rscjinternational.org intranet website and click on JPIC Database (in the left hand column)
- 2** Under the 'Home Page' click on 'Search' then click on the 'Province' tab and you will see 'International Volunteers Program' in the drop down menu
- 3** In the International Volunteers Program section, you will see several provinces who have entered information about their Volunteer Programs.

There are already some provinces offering to host volunteers that have given information to the JPIC database.

Enjoy exploring this and find out how you can add to it! This IT-interconnection is new and in its running-in period. Please try it and let us know how it goes.

As always, help is available! If you have any trouble or if you need some orientation, please ask. Yolanda can help you. You can write to her in Spanish, French, English or Italian. Yolanda Jimenéz Delgado - Assistant to JPIC jpicasist@rscjroma.org And if you have any user-friendly improvements to suggest, we would really appreciate it.

The partnership of JPIC and the International Volunteer Programme by means of the JPIC database is another step towards engaging with the International Volunteer Programme. We hope to express the mission of the Society, through the efforts of the RSCJ and the family of the Society, as One Body.

El corro luminoso

En vano queréis
ahogar mi canción:
¡un millón de niños
la canta en un corro
debajo del sol!

En vano queréis
quebrarme la estrofa
de tribulación:
¡el corro la canta
debajo de Dios!

Gabriela Mistral. Chilean poet

The Shining Host

In vain you try
To smother my song:
A million children
In chorus sing it
Beneath the sun!

In vain you try
To break my verse
Of affliction:
The children sing it
Under God!

Gabriela Mistral. Chilean poet

Mary Frohlich rscj

From a series of reflections by the faculty of Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, Mary Frohlich, RSCJ, Associate Professor of Spirituality reflects on a quote from *Laudato Si'* # 225: "Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18ZuzeA1vJM>

Manu Chao

www.manuchao.net

Manu Chao is a French-Spanish singer and social activist. He has particularly been supporting Latin American people fighting mining and water pollution and has been defending indigenous peoples' rights. A number of his songs also cover migration issues. In recent years, he has also focused his activism in Asia.

All Creatures Great and Minute

All creatures great and minute,
this crowned invincible invisible,
a fellow earthling with a bite!

We feel your presence and might.

Your traceless waves have quaked the earth.

Spiked, you ride far, weightless, unthought-of,
agile, and laying your million traps, on land and in air
making us home-bound slaves. We live behind facades.

Yet we still pray, we still smile, we still hope,

we still awake to another day,

we look heavenward Strong.

Solome Najjuka RSCJ. Gaba, Uganda. 2020

SPECIAL DAYS

June - September 2020

| Month | Day | Event |
|-----------------|-----|---|
| June | 19 | 2020 Feast of the Sacred Heart |
| June | 20 | World Refugee Day |
| July | 11 | Feast of St Benedict |
| July | 18 | Nelson Mandela International Day |
| July | 30 | World Day Against Trafficking in Persons |
| July | 31 | Feast of St Ignatius of Loyola |
| August | 6 | Remembrance Day of the Destruction of Hiroshima by Atomic Bomb |
| August | 9 | International Day of the World's Indigenous People |
| August | 12 | International Youth Day. International Youth Day began in 2000 and was organised by the United Nations to celebrate the contribution that young people make in education, employment, conflict resolution and social justice to name a few. |
| August | 22 | International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief |
| August | 24 | Anniversary of Medellin Conference (1968 Colombia) |
| August | 29 | International Day against Nuclear Tests |
| August | 30 | International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances — St Rose of Lima |
| September | 1 | World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation |
| Sept 1 to Oct 4 | | Season of Creation, Worldwide celebration to protect our common home |
| September | 8 | International Literacy Day |
| September | 17 | Saint Hildegarde, healer, composer, poet, scholar |
| September | 21 | International Day of Peace. The 2020 theme is Shaping Peace Together. The UN General Assembly has declared this as a day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire; it was established in 1981. |
| September | 27 | World Day of Migrants and Refugees. The 2020 theme chosen by Pope Francis is "Forced like Jesus Christ to flee". |

