

CREATURES



RADICAL ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION AFTER LAUDATO SI'
Discovering the intrinsic Value of all Creatures, Human & Non-human

Reflections From Science, Ethics and Religion **Prof. Dr. Celia Deane-Drummond,** *University of Notre Dame, USA*

Concluding Remarks

It has been a tremendous privilege to be invited to take part in this conference and all I can do is offer a few pointers towards some of the important issues that have come to the surface over the last few days. At the start of our proceedings we were reminded of that beautiful phrase in *Laudato si'* that Pope Francis offered us in his letter addressed to our meeting, regarding the expansiveness of God's love, so that 'Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection' (§LS77). That vision of God's care contrasts with the brokenness in relationships between humanity and God, among human beings and between humans and the natural world. The message of the ecumenical Patriarchate of Bartholomew I spoke in his recorded video of ecological sin, and the need for *metanoia*, a radical turning round to take a new direction. And it was Cardinal Peter Turkson who then wove this into an ethical mandate of justice for those who are poor and marginalized, a justice that encompasses listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. And just as we might be wondering what that might look like, John Chryssavgis stressed the need to take time, to contemplate in ascetic stillness so that we learn to see differently and develop both a more radical asceticism and revolutionary mysticism.

Reconciliation means literally sharing the same space: we have to learn to share our common home with all other creatures and all peoples living on this over crowded planet. I pressed for the importance of wisdom thinking, God's wisdom in creation and our need to search for that wisdom in all we undertake. Navigating the gap between the vision of the good and the reality of the troubles facing us requires both inner wisdom and practical wisdom gleaned from the rich sources of our own tradition, but also from close observation of the natural world around us. That wisdom arising directly from ecology was no more beautifully

demonstrated than in Enric Sala's spectacular presentation showing both the depth of the problems in ecological devastation in the oceans, but also real signs of hope. And the discovery of oceanic *Prochlorococcus*, the green picoplankton that generates oxygen only discovered in the late 1980s, shows just how dependent we are on the life of the tiniest of creatures.

What kind of value do we really place on the natural world, and what kind of perspective do we bring to our understanding of 'nature'? Peppered throughout this meeting, especially in Michael Northcott's contribution and the responses following, we have been reminded of the importance of indigenous thinking as an example of a different way of being in the world, one that is not tied up with those forms of market driven consumerism that are so deeply damaging to the health of the planet. Christopher Southgate's talk on the plight of those creatures such as polar bears now bereft of their habitat due to climate change was a striking illustration of how iconic such suffering has become and our own sense of powerlessness as we watch yet another beautiful species slip into oblivion. And the examples of forced migration of indigenous communities, ironically in the name of conservation in Loreen Maseono's powerful address shows us how keeping both land rights and the worth of all creatures together is so important.

Yet achieving any kind of lasting transition is hugely complicated. First, we are, as Louis Caruana argued, living in a value landscape that is more like a neural network of exchange rather than one to one correspondence. Is it possible to broaden that landscape so as to include other animals? Secondly, indigenous peoples may be exemplars, but they are not perfect, and it would be demeaning to idealize their way of thinking or take up practices uncritically, as discussed in Alberto Alejo's narrative. Third, there may be clashes in ethical demands between the rights of marginalized peoples and vulnerable creatures, even though the hope is to find ways of protecting both. This makes decisions very difficult. But challenging development and other agencies, for example, to understand how ecological justice is connected with justice for human societies represents an urgent need, if anything approaching the UN sustainable development goals are going to be attained. Even the language of both sustainability and development carry their own freight, not least because the terms can cover up practices that are not necessarily in keeping with the requirement to respect both people and planet. Fourth, even though the intrinsic value of creatures as that which reflects their worth as living, creaturely beings seems to clash with their instrumental value where the value relates to usefulness for some defined human end or purpose, there may be some occasions where instrumental value is recognized as a positive good that outweighs intrinsic value. Killing animals for food falls into this category, but that means that such killing should be minimized or at least reduced. Food production through concentrated feeding lots is inexcusable in its exploitation of both people who are working in such conditions and the animals themselves. Fifth, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the sheer scale of problems to hand, and in this respect, as Katherina Beyerl suggests, it is important to take stock of what is motivating our perceptions of the natural world around us. Finally, sixth, Ottmar Edenhoffer brilliantly explained how the economic reality of the global carbon reserve to keep temperatures within a few degrees of warming shows how close we are to reaching those limits. But such results might lead to fear, rather than optimism, and such fear threatens to trigger either paralysis or hedonism.

This leads me to another major insight arising from our meeting, that there need to be strategies put in place to generate the kind of practices that lead to the common good, a good that includes the commons that is our atmosphere, as well as all the other interlaced goods. Are there ways of sharing experiences with each other in order to help shift the value nodes in the network? Oliver Putz provided some powerful examples of how contact with our nearest living relatives, the primates, brings us up against some fundamental theological and philosophical questions about what it is to be human. Alice Hague, on the other hand, offered up a discussion of different churches in Scotland who have made incredible efforts to change their ecological footprint in ways that make a real difference. Sophia Chirongoma reminded us that one important priority is to consider the disproportionate impact on vulnerable women: gender issues will not go away and strategic initiatives that take this into account are crucial. A new approach to economic policy and governance discussed by parliamentarian Molly Scot Cato shows that such strategies are not impossible. Further, national boundaries become even more fluid once we consider the difficult question of human and non-human migration. Martina Grecequet's discussion of how biological understanding of non-human migration due to climate change might help inform policies on human migration offered a window into a genuinely cooperative strategy for change. What kind of strategies need to be put in place for those peoples suffering the threat of extinction or who cannot escape and are in trapped populations?

Theologically, how might we begin to work out what a spirituality that can deepen our sense of commitment looks like? Prem Xalxo offered some positive insights from the Ignatian tradition and Ignatius of Loyola's attention to creation. Nick Austin began his talk with a prayer just at the time in the conference when there was a need for something other than intellectual struggle. For given the enormity and scale of the problems besetting both people and planet, prayer is perhaps the only way that hope can be sustained. But we were not left without any exemplars. Linda Jones led a workshop on CAFOD's work towards transforming a whole organization so that it is more in keeping with the message of *Laudato si'*. That change towards joined up thinking between people and planet had been started well before the encyclical was released. Kailean Khongsai presented a second workshop on his work with conservation agency *A Rocha* in regenerating urban communities in Southall, and the positive impact on the people living in that area. His own background is that of living in a fragile rainforest in India, inviting us to think more carefully how solidarity might be built between different global communities. The founder and director of *A Rocha*, Peter Harris, offered us a remarkable account of how working in conservation serves to regenerate communities in ways that brings about a holistic flourishing of all creatures, and is part and parcel of the mission of the church. Augusto Zampini Davies spoke of sacramental practices that can start to change in ways that make sense to those working in Catholic communities. Carmody Grey offered us a striking and vivid portrait of the Eucharist as a non-violent act of eating.

There were, nonetheless, many underdeveloped questions arising at the end of our conference. The structural change required at the policy, political and economic levels are exceptionally difficult and hard to resolve. Building networks of hope inspired by changes in practice has begun, but it is still insufficient. Educating communities and the church in practical wisdom, a developed ecological conscience, and ecological virtues including the requirements for justice are still insufficient. There are differential responsibilities for those who are in power, who need to be encouraged to take on different aspects of the problem. For

example, those living in subsistence conditions or recovering from violent conflicts cannot be expected to implement ecological strategies immediately, even though it is important for their long-term survival. The mentality of those working in nongovernment or even government agencies that always try to fix problems in the short term needs to be challenged. Women and minorities need to have a much stronger voice in articulating priorities and strategies for lasting change.