



THE DESERT CHRONICLE

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The Child in the Manger

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, OSB

“A child is born for us, and a son is given to us”

(Entrance Antiphon, Mass on Christmas Day).

*“He will be called Wondrous God. Prince of Peace,
Father of Future Ages”* (Entrance Antiphon, Mass at Dawn).

These two Christmas antiphons, based on Isaiah 9, invite us to zoom in on the child in the crib, then zoom out to see his involvement with the universe from the beginning of time to its end. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Mary, abides in eternity. He is the Word in whom all things were created, and the Word become flesh. He came into a world which already bore his stamp; he was not unacquainted with the material universe, for he was its Creator.



The scope of the Son of God's involvement in the universe is spelled out in the second Eucharistic Prayer, where we give thanks to God the Father “through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, [1] your Word *through whom you made* all things, [2] whom you sent as our Savior and

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From the Prior's Pulpit

IT'S DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

By Fr. Kenneth Hein, OSB

AS WE APPROACH ADVENT AND ANOTHER YEAR OF LITURGICAL RERUNS IN THE FORM OF "CYCLE C", I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK OF YOGI BERRA'S OFT-QUOTED WORDS IN THE TITLE OF THIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DC.

In fact, when I think back over the events of this past year, and especially of just the past couple of weeks, and even more so of the situation developing in my own life at this time, the one word that best expresses it all is the simple, four-letter word, "back".

My present focus on "back" goes back about 10 years, when I was camping out in the outback near Council, Idaho. As evening approached, I picked up a log, about 5 ft. long and a foot in diameter, and lugged it nearer to the fire for something to sit on. However, in the lugging of the log, something dislodged itself at the bottom of my back. The next day, I stopped at a country store for some pain reliever, which made the rest of my few days of camping relatively pain free. But, in the words of *The Terminator*, my back problem has recently proclaimed: "I'm back!" However, I'm not telling you all this

just to give you an update on my health. Rather, I want to draw a lesson from it that we all might appreciate.

Way back in my grade-school days in a Catholic school, Sister told us we should always offer up our pains and tribulations in union with Christ and his suffering for us. Well, when we are in pain and experiencing tribulations, we find that "offering them up in union with Christ" is easier said than done. Understandably, pain pretty much keeps one focused on oneself to the exclusion of others and everything else and readily makes us rather "self-centered". So, now as we approach Advent and Christmas, we might consider trying to be less self-centered and more aware of why God sent his only Son to us--to suffer and die for us--so that we might have eternal and (I might add) a pain-free life with God and all the heavenly host and, yes, even with one another.

In conclusion, I wish all our DC readers "happy holidays"--keeping in mind that the root meaning of "holiday" is "holy day". So may your every day be a holiday, filled with a lot of déjà vu all over again through Christ our Lord. Amen. •



Everything is Connected: Pope Francis' *Encyclical Laudato si': On the Care of Our Common Home*

IN THIS ENCYCLICAL POPE FRANCIS EXPANDS ON IDEAS ABOUT CHRISTIANS' RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT THAT WERE ENUNCIATED BY PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH, AND BY POPE JOHN-PAUL II AND POPE BENEDICT. Pope Francis interprets the environmental crises that face humanity with the help of the ideas of the German Catholic theologian Romano Guardini (1885-1968), particularly his book *The End of the Modern World* (1950). The result is a critique of consumerism and unsustainable and unfair use of the limited resources of the earth by some, while others lived in poverty. Pope Francis invites us to live in a more humane, restrained, and thoughtful way

On the other side of this insert are two pages, each divided into three steps. The left hand page outlines Pope Francis' analysis of current ecological problems, some bad ideas that contribute to the problems, and the emptiness and twists of the human heart that lie behind our throwaway culture. The right hand page outlines ways to fill our hearts and straighten out our desires, ideas that can guide us take care of the earth, the poor, and each other, and concrete steps we can take on the international, national, local, and personal level to heal the human and natural ecologies of which we are a part. Here spelled out are some ideas that he puts forward with the numbers of the paragraphs in the encyclical.

I. Problems: extreme economic differences and poverty, environmental degradation, squandering irreplaceable resources.

Sister Earth "now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her." (#2)

The crisis we face is environmental and social. (#139); not just nature, but historic, artistic and cultural patrimony are under threat. (#143)

II. Bad ideas: extreme consumerism that measures human advance by the GDP or similar measures; individualism; invalid extension of the technocratic paradigm.

"The market tends to promote extreme consumerism so people can get caught on a whirlwind of needless buying and spending." (#203) The market will not solve all problems, such as economic inequality, ecological degradation, and the rights of future generations. (#109)

We have extended a technological paradigm way beyond its validity by reducing reality to what can be known by the scientific method and thinking of ourselves as outside of nature, able to exploit it indefinitely, as though there were an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and material progress knew no limits. Technology is not neutral: it conditions lifestyles and shapes social possibilities along lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful economic and political groups. (##106-108)

Obstructionist attitudes to changing our relation to the natural world include denial of facts or refusal to acknowledge them; indifference; resignation; delaying tactics; pretending nothing will happen; and blind confidence in technical solutions. (#14, #59)

"There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected." (#54)

In spite of growing awareness and some advances, recent World Summits on the environment have not lived up to expectations, because of lack of political will and the lack of enforceable international agreements. (#166)



Laudato sí' - On Care

Deep Causes

Greed
Self-Centeredness
Fear
Denial
Pride
Disconnectedness

False Ideas

Limitless freedom
Irrational belief in progress
Technological paradigm applied indiscriminately
Individualism
Unlimited confidence in market forces
Things and people valued only if useful

Problems

Unrestrained consumption
Loss of biological diversity
Pollution and habitat loss
Climate Change
Throwaway culture
Poverty and inequality

"A fragile world, entrusted
challenges us to devise intelligent ways of di

Pope Francis, *La*



For Our Common Home

Deep Causes

Restraint
Generosity
Gratitude
Humility
Care
Connectedness

Good Ideas

Everything is interconnected
Integral ecology (including humans, culture)
World is a sacrament
Earth is God's gift for the common good
Self-limiting power
Species & people have value apart from utility

Solutions

Lifestyles shaped by concern for common good
Enforceable international agreements on environment
Creative far-sighted political leadership that is creative
Education on true ecology
Dialogue and inclusion
Preferential concern for the poor and defenseless

d by God to human care,
recting, developing and limiting our power.”
udato si’, par. 78



III. *Inner emptiness and misdirection of desire.*

“People of our postmodern world run the risk of rampant individualism, and many problems of society are connected with today’s self-entered culture of instant gratification.” (#162)

“The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs to buy, own and consume. . . . Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when only few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction.” (#204)

The incessant desire for new things and for more leads to superficiality. (#113)

III. *A changed heart.*

“Many things have to change, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.” (#202)

“Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.” (#240)

Any technical, scientific solution will be powerless to solve the serious problems of our world if humanity loses its compass, if we lose the motivations that make it possible for us to live in harmony, to make sacrifices, and to treat others well. (#200)

We need more gratitude and generosity, loving awareness of our connection with other creatures; more creativity and enthusiasm for solving the earth’s problem. (#220).

Find joy and peace in a contemplative lifestyle, that does not need a lot or need to consume, is humble, and takes time to be in harmony with creation. An expression of this is grace at meals. (##222-227)

II. *Better ideas.*

“We are not God. The earth was here before us and has been given to us . . . to till and keep.” (#67).

Preferential option for the poor; appreciation of their dignity in the light of our deepest convictions as Christians. (#158)

Biological species give glory to God by their existence, reveal God to us, and have many uses. Because of us thousands of

species are going extinct; “we have no such right.” (##33-42)

If we acknowledge the value and fragility of nature and our own God-given abilities, we can leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. We have to find intelligent ways to direct, develop and limit our power. (#78)

Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. (#189)

Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. Quality of life can decrease in the midst of economic growth. (#198)

Purchasing is always a moral—and not simply an economic—act. (#206)

III. *Things to do: Internationally, nationally, locally, and individually.*

We need to dialog with all people about our common home (#3).

It is essential to devise stronger and more efficiently organized international institutions with functionaries who are appointed fairly by agreement among national governments and empowered to impose sanctions. (#175)

“Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of human rights.” (##28-31).

Things societies can do: (1) Conserve energy by greater efficiency; (2) improve transportation; (3) better waste disposal and recycling; (4) protect certain species; (5) protect local ecosystems and small producers; (6) adequate environmental impact assessments, that include working conditions; effects on health, the local economy and public safety; local people should have a special place at the table. (#180)

What individuals can do: avoid use of plastic and paper, reduce water consumption, separate garbage, don’t waste food, take care of other living beings, use public transport/carpool, plant trees, turn off lights. “We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society . . . for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread.” (#211-212). •



Redeemer *incarnate* by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin, ... [3] he stretched out his hands as he endured his Passion, so as to *break the bonds of death and manifest the resurrection*. [4] Therefore as we celebrate the memorial of his Death and Resurrection... [5] Remember also our brothers and sisters who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection, and all who have died in your mercy: welcome them into the light of your face.

In the beginning. It is the clear teaching of the New Testament that Jesus, as Son of God, was the Word through whom all things were came (John 1:3). "In him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible" (Col 1:10). In the beginning, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit created all things. Theology pictures the Father creating the universe, with its billions of galaxies, stamping it with being, intelligibility and beauty patterned after the Son with whom the Father is one in being, and giving it motion and life (what St. Hildegard called "greenness") through the Holy Spirit who joins them. As the Son is the perfect equal of the Father, and the Spirit the equality between them, so the universe is linked together by forces that make it a numerical and harmonious whole, whistled into being by the Father with the tune that is the Word. As Pope Francis has told us, each thing in the universe gives glory to God quite apart from us. Each thing is also God's revelation to us as well as a gift that God gives to us to use respectfully and wisely.

On Christmas, 2000 years ago. The Word, the perfect Image and Equal of the Father, quietly entered this world, a single fetus in an out of the way place on a seemingly insignificant planet. The infinite and eternal Word became a particular living being in a particular time and place. He was born like other people, cried, nursed, pooped. Things he knew as Creator he now experienced in human flesh. That human flesh was made of stardust, matter that was related to all other matter, and living in a web a life that emerged in matter in a universe fine-tuned to that end.

On Calvary. The Word became flesh in an empire that encircled the Mediterranean Sea. Rome refined architecture and conquest, and it mastered communication and cruel oppression. Jesus preached a different kind of society, the Kingdom of God, shaped by divine justice and love. It is not a Utopia, because it is begun on earth even if it must wait to be completed by God in God's own time. In this Kingdom the blind would see and sinners would be welcomed. It was threatening; Caesar was not willing to acknowledge that anything existed that was



not his. As a result, Jesus became the target of human sin, as he was plotted against, arrested, tortured and publicly executed to entertain and frighten the onlookers. He accepted this, believing that his free, loving acceptance of suffering, horror, and the darkness of death, would renew human beings and with them all creation. His faith was justified. On the third day he rose again.

The Body of Christ through time. Jesus invited people to change their hearts, to be with him, and to follow him, to

take the plunge with him into death in order to rise again. He sent them to invite others to join him, to live in him and he in them, to be members of his one Body. He invited them never to forget the Cross and Resurrection, to celebrate with him his offering of himself in love, and to imitate it. He promised to be with them in a new and eternal covenant so that where two or three are gathered in his name he is there, and the Kingdom of God is present.

In the hope of the resurrection. Christ has risen. We and all creation have risen and will rise with him. There will be a new heaven and a new earth; there will be no more dying there. As Pope Francis wrote in his Encyclical *On the Care of Our Common Home*: "At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God, and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude. Even now we are journeying towards the Sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven. Jesus says: 'I make all things new.' Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe,



in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all. In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home

that has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God."•





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