



## ***Laudato Si'* Harkens to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor**

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Personally I am happy that Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune is one of the pioneers in the country to organise a comprehensive seminar on *Laudato Si* and thanks to the organisers for asking me to note down the highlights of my own sharing during the Seminar. In spite of my personal involvement in social forestry by raising nurseries and propagating each one and plant one scheme through our educational mission and social action programmes I had developed an antipathy towards the term, “environmental protection” as the enthusiasts had been overemphasising the theme while excluding the poorest sections who have been the main victims of the process and consequence of the same environmental pollution. The call of *Laudato Si'* to harken to the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” has transformed my attitude drastically with my participation in the recently held high level International Conference at the Vatican, Rome by the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace and CIDSE on “People and Planet First: The Imperative to change Course”.

Cardinal Peter KA Turkson, President of the Commission in his keynote address emphasised that it was not people or planet or one over the other as both are equally imperative. Pope Francis through his prophetic Encyclical which I wish to call as the Magna Carta of the Church’s Social Teachings, “*Laudato Si*” (Praise be to you)

quoting St. Francis of Assisi has reconnected the bond between the concern for nature and justice for the poor - to promote human dignity, to eradicate poverty and counter environmental decay. Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin as the Chief Guest of the Conference called the world community to re-direct our steps and to cultivate a culture of care. CIDSE calls for a “Change for the Planet and Care for the People”. The Encyclical calls the earth as our common home which is a shared inheritance and the fruits must benefit everyone.

The timing of the Encyclical is apparently meant to influence major global decision making Conferences on environment: July 2015 Addis Ababa Conference on Financing for Development, September 2015 UN General Assembly on setting new Sustainable Development Goals and December 2015 Paris Conference of the Heads of all the Member Nations on Global Climate Change. However, the Encyclical that remains a course changing document for all for a long time to come to make the Climate Change an “Integral Ecology” – environmental, social, economic and political for distribution of goods that really belong to all and are meant for all. Efforts for Global Climate change must address the denial of basic needs like drinking water and food which is a human right to a life with dignity; decline in quality of human life and breakdown of society and the loss of bio-diversity. Questioning the tendency for impressive dominance over the whole humanity and the entire world investing to gain and for enriching a few, the Pope says that market forces should not be allowed to decide for all.

Calling for a preferential option for the poor the Encyclical states that Integral Ecology can no longer separate social and environmental issues. Action for change should include all and ideologies should not replace common good. The Encyclical expects intense and continued education and for developing a new spirituality and life-style with the principles emphasised in the Encyclical. While there is a need for technology and science the Encyclical says that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; 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”**.

Laudato Si has immediate implications for India: The Church and Christian Organisations and Institutions in India must give topmost priority and agenda to the understanding and implementation of the Encyclical. Special Assemblies of the CBCI, National CRI and other Bodies must be held at the earliest to deliberate upon the ways and means of reaching the essential message of the Encyclical every level of political, social, educational and economic system in the Country. The Christian educational institutions that have been in forefront of propagating single dimensional aspect of climate change now must unlearn the old technological understanding and relearn Integral Ecology in the background of *Laudato Si*'.

Further, the Encyclical must be included in the main syllabi of the educational institutions, seminaries, formation study houses, Parish study circles, etc. To hold national and regional level seminars and workshops on the Encyclical. To translate the Encyclical into regional languages and create awareness among people at all levels. To hold interdenominational and interfaith dialogues on the teachings of the Encyclical which may be acceptable to them. To initiate movements and to join the national and regional efforts to impress upon Central and State Governments to reframe policies on integral ecology in the best spirit of the Encyclical and the Government to take proactive stand in the context of the Encyclical at the forthcoming UN General Assembly to set new Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Global Summit in December 2015. 🌱