



The Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' / Used with permission

CHAPTER XVI

Laudato si': A prophetic primacy

We received this story courtesy of Anupama Ranawana, a former Regional Animator for the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace:

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*During 2015-16, while working for the Alberta Region of Development and Peace, we undertook a series of initiatives aimed at encouraging grassroots engagement with Pope Francis' Encyclical Laudato Si'. This led us into interesting partnerships with Christians from all kinds of different backgrounds. One example of this was a teaching day given by members of the Care for Creation Working Group of the Anglican Diocese of Calgary, in*

*which Development and Peace was invited to participate. While many of the attendees were of course Anglicans, there were almost as many Catholic participants, along with some Lutherans, United Church folks, etc.*

*The presentations throughout the day focused on a number of ecological themes, with the Anglican group drawing heavily on *Laudato Si'* to reflect on the intersection of faith and the emerging interest in urban farming. Read that again to make sure you catch it! Anglicans were using a document from the pope to give some teaching to an ecumenical audience, many of them Roman Catholics.*

*Those of us who were Catholic were initially a little bit surprised – but in a good way! Here was a magisterial teaching document bringing people together across the lines of institutional division; here was a papal encyclical serving as a basis for Catholics and other Christians to develop common language and mutually agreeable goals. Something like this would have been unheard of a generation or two ago, and yet here it seemed perfectly natural to everyone. We even heard people – Anglicans, Lutherans, United Church folks, etc. – say things like “on this issue, Pope Francis is our pope too!”*



While this story refers specifically to the ministry of Pope Francis, similar examples of ecumenical reception to the teaching and leadership of various recent popes (John XXIII on war and peace, John Paul II on economic justice, etc.) on major socio-political and ethical issues can also be identified. It is also easy to think of examples of this same sort of “universal” or “global” ministry being exercised by leaders in the Anglican tradition which has inspired and given direction to Roman Catholic fellow Christians

(Archbishop Desmond Tutu on anti-apartheid, Archbishop Rowan Williams interfaith relations, etc.).

ARCIC II's *The Gift of Authority* explores Anglican and Roman Catholic understandings of the exercise of ecclesial authority at various jurisdictional levels. While the text acknowledges that the two communions do in general tend towards differences of emphasis in terms of the relative authority of local/regional and global/universal instruments of Church governance and decision making, it concludes that both traditions see the importance of offices and structures of unity at the local, regional, and global levels as essential gifts for the life of the Church. On the basis of mutual learning from one another about topics such as collegiality and synodality, it may be possible for both traditions to embrace a renewed and reformed the primatial ministry associated with the bishop of Rome. To quote the text: "Such a universal primate will exercise leadership in the world and also in both communions, addressing them in a prophetic way. He will promote the common good in ways that are not constrained by sectional interests, and offer a continuing and distinctive teaching ministry, particularly in addressing difficult theological and moral issues... Such a universal primacy might gather the churches in various ways for consultation and discussion" (GA, 61).

Anglicans certainly have continuing questions about the papal office and its exercise in terms of nature, extent, and jurisdiction. These questions, however, are increasingly being welcomed and invited, even by the papacy itself. In John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, he expresses an openness to discerning together ecumenically "a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation" (UUS, 95).

This story of a bishop of Rome providing prophetic leadership with respect to one of the most pressing issue of our time gives us a small glimpse of what that exercise of a primacy that is honoured across the lines of division might look like.



*A Laudato Si' prayer walk organized by Justice and Peace /  
Credit: Julien Hammond*

*Why is care for creation an area where Christians are finding themselves drawn together in common cause?*

*On what other issues have the recent bishops of Rome exercised a role of global leadership and inspiration to Christian communities beyond the Roman Catholic Church?*

*How might the ministry of the bishop of Rome become a more effective means of unity for all Christians? What kinds of transformations would enable this?*

*Are there other global Christian leaders in recent memory who have carried a certain authority that has been recognized beyond their respective communions?*