

Laudato Si' . . . a Call to Contemplation



by [Nancy Sylvester](#)

Jul. 2, 2015 in

- [Contemplate This](#)

Pope Francis' encyclical, "[Laudato Si' , on Care For Our Common Home](#)," unequivocally names human behavior as a major cause of global climate change and urges all sectors of society to examine our actions, policies and behaviors in light of this urgent situation. It speaks to how the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are one and that all forms of poverty – environmental and human – need to be addressed in an interconnected way.



A spiral can start small and journey upward and outward. At some point the arm of the spiral begins to shift upward and comes around again moving across the same terrain but from a different and wider circle. The spiral transcends its current path yet includes it as it goes around in its orbit.

However, as I read the encyclical I was struck with how it is much more than a moral exhortation on a very complex issue. I saw within it an invitation to contemplation. There was a section that caught my attention. It reads “There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm” (111).

When I give talks I often speak to how our consciousness both individual and collective evolves in a developmental way. I draw on the works of many scholars and use the spiral to give an image to this complex reality. It helps to understand what I'm saying if I describe what my spiral looks like. Picture a spiral that starts small and journeys upward and outward. At some point the arm of the spiral begins to shift upward and comes around again moving across the same terrain but from a different and wider circle. The spiral transcends its current path yet includes it as it goes around in its orbit.

As consciousness develops it acts somewhat like this spiral. Because of changing conditions – i.e. the scientific revolution, the advent of quantum physics, new understanding of the origins of the universe – different values, beliefs, assumptions enter our consciousness, and like the arm of our spiral we shift upward and outward into greater complexity. New structures, systems, ways of living are created which may replace the old ways of doing/being or may exist side by side with what has gone before. These worldviews for the most part are like the air we breathe. We are not always aware of the forces that influence us until something happens. The spiral shifting is one such moment. The next evolutionary stage often occurs when the current dominant worldview or paradigm has exhausted itself and has begun to breakdown. That breakdown is felt very personally causing great discomfort, insecurity and even fear.

Pope Francis makes the connections among all the numerous problems facing us that are part of environmental poverty and human poverty. He sees everyone and everything connected. He is inviting us to see beyond this atomistic worldview and generate a new way of looking, thinking, policy-making that will address these complex problems out of a new consciousness.

Albert Einstein said we cannot solve the problems at the same level of consciousness that created them. I believe this encyclical echoes that belief. We know something is wrong with our world, with ourselves.

“Humanity has changed profoundly” the encyclical states, and we are in the midst of a revolution. The arm of the spiral has begun to shift and to transcend the worldview that has dominated industrialized countries for over 500 years. Our response cannot be to go backwards – that is impossible. Rather we enter the future from this paradigm acknowledging its strengths and limits so as to include that which is of value as we continue outward interpreting our reality from this new place. We need to bring forth, as Pope Francis states, “. . . an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal” (202).

The encyclical is a call to address global climate change and tells us we can’t do it in the old ways. It is a call to a new way of being. For me, that is a call to contemplation: to see with new eyes; to respond out of that space of Divine indwelling. Then we will act out of this new awareness creating structures, policies, systems that support this emerging consciousness.

[Nancy Sylvester, IHM, is founder and director of the [Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue](#). She served in leadership of her own religious community, the [Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, Michigan](#) as well as in the Presidency of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Prior to that she was National Coordinator of NETWORK, the national Catholic social justice lobby.]