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DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

**The 2016 John M. Kelly Lecture**  
**University of St Michael's College, Toronto**  
**St Basil's Church, 21 March 2016**

## ***Laudato si'*: Let's Redefine "Progress"**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for the kind invitation to deliver the 2016 Lecture in honour of Basilian Fr. John Kelly, your illustrious President from 1958 to 1978. The inaugural Kelly Lecture was delivered in 1980 by Fr. Roderick MacKenzie S.J. I am proud to have studied under Fr. MacKenzie as my Rector at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. His speech was entitled "Relevance of the Old Testament in the '80s" and, had I known of it in time, I would have entitled mine "Relevance of *Laudato si'* in 2016 and beyond." My hope would be to help fulfill the mission of the University of St Michael's College, namely, to bring the best intellectual traditions of the Church to bear on issues of major importance. Within St Mike's for the past 25 years, this is exactly what the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology has been doing, one of the world's first graduate theological programs in theology and ecology. Congratulations on your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Before entering into our topic, let's watch Pope Francis present *Laudato si'* himself in the briefest form – less than 90 seconds – the Pope speaks in Spanish and the sub-titles are in English: [www.ThePopeVideo.org](http://www.ThePopeVideo.org)

Here are some key take-aways from the video and *Laudato si'* itself:

- Our nature is created by God and surrounded by the gifts of creation
- Our failures are that we over-consume and that we do not share the gifts of creation. We have tilled too much and kept too little – with dire consequences for the poor and the planet
- And so it is urgent that we change our sense of progress, our management of the economy, and our style of life.

*Laudato si'* is generally referred to as an environmental document, but it is in fact a thoroughly social encyclical. One of the central preoccupations of Pope Francis in the encyclical is how modern society understands *progress* and how its thinking needs to be revised. In my talk I will provide some background to the idea of progress, then summarize *Laudato si'* with a focus on

progress and human development. This will lead to two applications of relevance in your country today: Indigenous populations and end-of-life issues.

### **A. Turning Progress into a Question**

Some of us remember the trademark motto which General Electric proclaimed in the 1950s and 1960s: “Progress is our most important product.” True not only of GE, the slogan seemed to carry the whole world’s industrial civilization through the boom which followed World War II and lasted until the first oil crash of the early 1970s.

In 1967, Blessed Paul VI used the same word in his great encyclical about the development of peoples, *Populorum progressio*. Economic growth is justified if it builds social progress towards a more human world and a greater humanity (§54, 79). He hopes for the day when the poor man Lazarus and the rich man eat together at the same table (§47).

The progress of which GE boasted, and which Canadian business certainly enjoyed, was a great achievement. But now the industrial age’s short-sighted confidence in technology and finance must be questioned: “The same ingenuity which has brought about enormous technological progress has so far proved incapable of finding effective ways of dealing with grave environmental and social problems worldwide” (§164).

A technocratic mentality has come to dominate all aspects of life. It reduces all of reality to objects that can be manipulated limitlessly. The technocratic paradigm or framework “ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities” (§107). This technocratic paradigm is the conviction that all reality – including human life – can be reduced to objects which people can endlessly manipulate for the sake of profit and without the slightest ethical consideration. The alliance between technology used as a means of power, and an economy obsessed with the short-term maximization of profits, is spread everywhere by globalization and tends to prevail over the political dimension.

Pope Francis asks ‘what kind of world will we leave for our children?’ Will they be able to flourish in a livable and beautiful natural environment and in harmonious social relationships? Not so if the present trends prevail; not if “progress” continues to mean constant economic expansion, technological innovation and dominance over nature. Instead, in our current world situation, “progress” should be defined in terms of building and preserving a truly habitable world. “Thy Kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven” – Jesus himself taught us that progress means making earth as like heaven as possible!

## **B. Reading *Laudato si'* on progress and development**

The encyclical opens with Pope Francis introducing those who accompany its course: St John XXIII, Blessed Paul VI, St John Paul II, Pope *emeritus* Benedict XVI, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and of course St Francis of Assisi. The text then follows in six chapters.

Chapter I (§17-61) asks “What is happening to our common home?” What have development and progress cost, and can the planet and humanity continue to afford them? The chapter listens to the best scientific conclusions on environmental matters available today, “not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (§ 19). Some refuse to do anything because they “doggedly uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change” (§60). Such people are wrong. We have a serious moral responsibility to do everything in our power to reduce our “footprint” and reverse the deterioration of the natural and social environment.

The second chapter (§62-100) reviews the riches of Judaeo-Christian tradition, above all in biblical texts and theological reflection. This wisdom expresses the “tremendous responsibility” of human beings for creation, the intimate link between all creatures, and the fact that “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone” (§ 95). This perspective, says the Holy Father, is incompatible with “the modern myth of unlimited material progress” (§78). That myth of unlimited material progress must be abandoned.

The analysis then deals in chapter III (§ 101-136) with “the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes” (§ 15). In addition to the technocratic mentality mentioned earlier, the roots also include modern anthropo-centrism, relativism, and disrespect for life, all of which dehumanize human beings.

This chapter echoes the balanced assessment of progress offered by St John Paul II. He “stressed the benefits of scientific and technological progress as evidence of ‘the nobility of the human vocation to participate responsibly in God’s creative action’, while also noting that ‘we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention to the consequences of such interference in other areas’”.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, scientific and technological progress and market mechanisms by themselves “cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (§109) or “the progress of humanity and history” (§113). Instead, “we have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral” §112). This is where “the way to a better

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<sup>1</sup> *Laudato si'* §131, quoting John Paul II, *Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*, § 6.

future lies” (§113). The chapters concludes with the warning that “a technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power” (§136).

Chapter IV (§ 137-62) goes on to lay out integral ecology. It comprehends “our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings”, in the varied aspects of our life: environmental, economic, political, social, and every moment of our daily lives. Integral ecology integrates within the present generations, where it seeks the common good, and is inter-generational too, a matter of justice. So integral ecology is a multi-dimensional re-definition of progress and development. It needs to supersede the narrower, shorter-term and lop-sided notions of development and progress we’ve inherited from the industrial revolution.

Chapter V (§ 163-201) addresses what we can and must do. Practical proposals need to be holistic, comprehensive and integrated. So they cannot be developed in ideological, superficial or narrow (reductionist) ways. Instead, dialogue is essential, a term present in the title of every section of this chapter. Pope Francis expresses his concern “to encourage an honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good” (§ 188).

To honour the common good, progress and development need to redirect, not end. The Holy Father’s argument about progress could have been composed with this Kelly lecture in mind!

Whenever these questions are raised, some react by accusing others of irrationally attempting to stand in the way of progress and human development. But we need to grow in the conviction that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development. Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term. If we look at the larger picture, we can see that more diversified and innovative forms of production which impact less on the environment can prove very profitable. It is a matter of openness to different possibilities which do not involve stifling human creativity and its ideals of progress, but rather directing that energy along new channels (§191).

Pope Francis also quotes Benedict XVI’s *Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace*: his call for “more sober lifestyles, while reducing ... energy consumption and improving ... efficiency”; and new “models of global development”, which will entail a different “meaning of the economy and its goals” (§ 193, 194). Pope Francis concludes:

It is not enough to balance, in the medium term, the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the environment with progress. Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress (§194).

Finally, chapter VI (§ 202-46) proposes two prayers and other aids to authentic human development. This supposes a new direction for progress: “Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them” (§209). We need an education in integral ecology to escape the downward spiral of the contemporary naïve faith in technology and of the “utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market)” (§ 210).

I have saved an important passage of chapter III to conclude the presentation of *Laudato si'*. Citing a favourite source, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century thinker Fr. Romano Guardini whose work he studied extensively, Pope Francis decries the

tendency to believe that every increase in power means “an increase of ‘progress’ itself”... The fact is that “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well”, because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. Each age tends to have only a meagre awareness of its own limitations. It is possible that we do not grasp the gravity of the challenges now before us... Our freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest, and of violence... We cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint.<sup>2</sup>

Redefining progress therefore means abandoning the allure of power. Increase in power is not necessarily progress. Instead, our aims must be set by sound ethics and culture and true spirituality. Otherwise, we will continue to misuse power and continue to discover, too late, that our supposed progress was actually decline.

Though brief, this exploration of the meaning of “progress and development” should suffice to establish that they are thoroughly value-laden. Wherever these words appear, we must interrogate them: is it progress toward the good? Is this an instance of development of greater good? What is the nature of ‘the good’ in these inquiries?

These questions are far from rhetorical or merely theoretical. They are both practical and urgent, as we will see in two concrete and complex situations you have here in Canada.

### **C. Application: Indigenous peoples**

There are many peoples, cultures and traditions in our world. Not all believe and behave in the same manner. Let us look at the case of Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>2</sup> *Laudato si'* §105 quoting Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*, Wilmington, 1998, p. 82.

The encyclical mentions Indigenous peoples in the context of acute peril due to environmental degradation and profligate commerce. Indigenous communities, writes Pope Francis, “are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.” (§146)

The new progress that the world must embrace, better balanced and integrated and respectful of all life, must privilege the local over the distant: “local individuals and groups can make a real difference. They are able to instil a greater sense of responsibility, a strong sense of community, a readiness to protect others, a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land. They are also concerned about what they will eventually leave to their children and grandchildren. These values are deeply rooted in indigenous peoples.” (§179)

To sum up: “progress” in the colonial and industrial eras has typically brought regress for Indigenous peoples. The hunger of settlers for land and resources has meant the destruction of traditional relationships with land, with one another, and with other creatures. As one Canadian bishop has written, “in traditional Aboriginal ethics it is said, ‘The hurt of one is the hurt of all.’”<sup>3</sup>

But the Indigenous and the settler populations now share a common home – locally as well as globally. Caring for that common home requires, as Pope Francis says, not just an economic and technological revolution, but also a cultural, ethical and spiritual revolution—a profoundly different way of approaching the relationship between people and the environment, a new way of ordering the global economy.

In Canada, I am told, the participation of Indigenous people in national public life is on the upswing. (Your last national election was a testimony to that.) Court decisions have affirmed the right of Indigenous people to be “principal dialogue partners” in various discussions about land and economic development. And a striking and hopeful example of being “principal dialogue partners” occurred in early March when the Prime Minister met with First Nations representatives on the topic of climate change<sup>4</sup> before engaging in discussions with other first ministers on the follow-up to COP21. *Laudato si’* extends an invitation to Canadians, and to all countries where Indigenous Peoples live as minorities, to draw them into discernment about the

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<sup>3</sup> Bp Donald Bolen, *Letter* regarding missing and murdered Aboriginal women, Saskatoon, 31.10.2014.

<sup>4</sup> <http://behindthenumbers.ca/2016/03/04/from-paris-to-vancouver-what-happened-at-the-first-ministers-meeting-on-climate/>

future. The voice of Indigenous Peoples can serve as an antidote to visions of progress which in fact weaken and damage the common good.

It is my understanding that the history of the Church's relations with Indigenous Peoples in Canada is complex, as it is in many other countries; and that there were some major deficiencies where healing is still needed. I have heard reports of the Truth and Reconciliation process which has been taking place in Canada over the last seven years, addressing the waves of suffering connected to the Indian Residential Schools. I have read how the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report address the churches who were involved in the Residential Schools. While it is beyond my competence to comment on this topic directly, I would note that *Laudato si'* calls for us to work towards "healing all fundamental human relationships" (§119). Such an orientation would generate genuine progress. It would be consistent with *Laudato si'*'s approach to view the TRC's invitation to engagement as an opportunity, and to see the Calls to Action addressed to the churches as an opening for strengthening and building up relations with Indigenous Peoples. I am told that the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is deeply engaged in responding to these Calls to Action. I hope that everyone takes the Commission's recommendations seriously.

Pope Francis has spoken on such matters in the context of Central and South America. Last July in Bolivia, I personally witnessed him express deepest regret for the "many grave sins ... committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God", and repeat the confession of St John Paul II, to "kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters". He went on, "I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the Church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America."<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the Pope welcomed the efforts of "our brothers and sisters in the Latin American indigenous movement ... to bring peoples and cultures together – a coming together of peoples and cultures - in a form of coexistence which I like to call polyhedric, where each group preserves its own identity by building together a plurality which does not threaten but rather reinforces unity."<sup>6</sup>

Building such a future requires attending to the suffering of the past and of the present. Let me express my wholehearted endorsement to the following words of the Bishop of Saskatoon regarding the painful shame of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. The path ahead requires openness, listening and compassion: "What has become clear to us is that we need to

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Expo FERIA Exhibition Centre, Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), 9.07.2015.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Expo FERIA Exhibition Centre, Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), 9.07.2015

listen more closely to the voices of the survivors and family members of the women lost to us; and we need to walk with their communities as they seek to name underlying problems and to take steps towards healing the brokenness that has allowed this tragedy to systematically continue. We all need to be more aware of what we have done and what we have failed to do.”<sup>7</sup>

The rethinking of progress and development that *Laudato si'* calls for globally, is most assuredly required in Canada too. I pray that you will find the strength to do so, and that the Church will henceforth provide only positive support to the flourishing of all in your country.

#### **D. Application: End of life care**

Crucial discussions are underway in your country in an attempt to redefine what physicians may or must do when patients may be near death. This is a huge separate topic. Allow me to contribute some thoughts from the perspective of *Laudato si'*.

An overriding consideration is *truth*. In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis excoriates those who would distort or hide information in order to promote their own viewpoint (passim, e.g. §135, 188). In the impassioned defence of the sacredness of all life on the one hand and of the primacy of individual autonomy on the other hand, it is possible for information to be distorted or hidden. No one should indulge in hyperbole, sensationalism or falsehood in this serious matter.

Another overriding consideration is *wisdom*, which *Laudato si'* accepts from all possible quarters: “Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. ... If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.” (§63) Must we not say the same about debates concerning euthanasia and other practices? Which form of wisdom should be ignored? Why discount ancient wisdom dating from the earliest recorded human intuitions about the human condition and our relationship to the eternal; wisdom that has been amplified and refined by countless thinkers and practitioners over millennia; wisdom that urged people of faith to be the first to establish hospitals and provide health care in conditions in Canada, Africa and many other places that were too difficult for others? Yes, ancient wisdom about the dignity and equality of all human life mixes awkwardly with the Enlightenment enhancement of the status and authority of the individual. But the solution when two related conceptions differ should be synthesis, not the *a priori* dismissal of one of them.

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<sup>7</sup> Bp Donald Bolen, *Letter* regarding missing and murdered Aboriginal women, Saskatoon, 31.10.2014.

When the perennial truths about the dignity and sacredness of life are dismissed, the Enlightenment's enhancement of the individual can be extended too far, as when people say: "I am master of my life. My life is mine to control, and I have a right to end it whenever I want." This key and distorted idea does not differ greatly from the insistence of Adam and Eve on being masters of ALL the trees in the Garden. People, not thinking more deeply, ask: 'Who is the government or the church to say I may not control the timing of my death?' This is autonomy gone mad. So the only restraining consideration, in the judgment of the Supreme Court and in the debates of the legislators, is a fear that a person might, in a moment of weakness, exercise unwisely their autonomous "right" to determine the moment of their death (and there is no correcting such a decision made in a moment of weakness). This focuses all the discussion on safeguards against making such a hasty decision inadvertently. But the assumption is that, if a person can be proven to have acted with due consideration, then he or she has a right to assisted suicide. This is tantamount to saying that all individuals have perfect self-knowledge so long as their thinking is free from coercion and impediments. In other situations, such an assertion would be seen as laughably naïve; in these circumstances, it is no laughing matter.

There is another assumption, about *technology*. Recall the many warnings in *Laudato si'* against assuming that all of technology is inherently good: "Biotechnology, information technology, knowledge of our DNA, and many other abilities which we have acquired, have given us tremendous power... Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used" (§104). I believe this warning also applies to medical measures in end-of-life situations. We must not confuse the availability of simpler and more reliable pharmaceutical aids to hastening death, with ethical acceptability of their application.

A further point is also about technology. The *technocratic paradigm* has allowed humans to treat other life forms with disdain. The world is impoverished by the disappearance of plant and animal species that were either over-exploited or under-protected (§35 and passim). By 'playing God' and making decisions about the value of life, we find ourselves playing the executioner. The concept that the lives of all men and women are equally precious is as old as the first pages of the Bible, but it is a very recent achievement in the secular world. It has been a huge struggle against racism, slavery and other abominations that categorically devalue the lives of some humans. We must not put ourselves in the position of deciding upon the value of life, whether by extinguishing animal and plant species, or by subordinating some categories of humans, or by hastening the death of another human being in the last stages of life.

Throughout the encyclical (e.g. §47, 66, 70), Pope Francis emphasizes *relationship*. We are all brothers and sisters in a common home. No individual is an island. This is true in every aspect and phase of human life. Relationship is fundamental to being human. End-of-life provisions

must not neglect this point. The Church has long taught<sup>8</sup> that physicians may manage the pain and suffering of the dying so that they can live their final period as richly as possible, in relationship with others and with God, even if that period becomes shorter as a side-effect of the pain management measures. Unfortunately, another viewpoint would have physicians support a patient in acting as an isolated individual, without relationship to others, and deliberately hastening death as a way to manage pain. Pope Francis speaks unceasingly about the world's poor, excluded and marginalized, those who are so often 'thrown-away'. Compassion is misplaced when it intentionally hastens death; in fact, it discards; it is the ultimate form of exclusion, marginalization and throwing away.

There is a compassionate alternative. As Cardinal Collins observed in his wise and forceful statement of 1<sup>st</sup> March:

End-of-life care (palliative care) is currently accessible to only 30% of Canadians. This is a tragedy, and unacceptable. Instead of providing ways to hasten death, we should be providing palliative care for every Canadian, greater support for those with mental illness, and help for those tempted to suicide.

Some people become convinced that, at a certain point, there is no longer any "value" in their life, since they cannot function as they once did. Their concern deserves our compassionate respect, but it is a shaky foundation for social policy. Our value as people comes not from what we can do, but from who we are. It comes from within, from our inherent dignity as human beings. Once we make people's worthiness to live dependent on how well they function, our society has crossed the boundary into dangerous territory in which people are treated as objects that can be discarded as useless.<sup>9</sup>

In this spirit let me invoke the *precautionary principle* advocated by *Laudato si'*. Sometimes decisions must be made on environmental matters even when absolute certainty is not possible. In the face of uncertainty, the "precautionary principle makes it possible to protect those who are most vulnerable and whose ability to defend their interests and to assemble incontrovertible evidence is limited." (§186) In the case of persons who are near death or who consider death the best option, allow me to be certain about uncertainty. Despite all our science and philosophy and spirituality, dying and death remain mysterious and unpredictable. Uncertainty here is unavoidable, and it is a matter of life and death. To those who would offer assistance to suicide, I say, respect the fullness and dignity of every life. Therefore, anything but palliative care denies the full richness and uncertainties of the latest stages of life. And Catholic physicians, health

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<sup>8</sup> *Declaration on Euthanasia*, May 5, 1980; referring to Pius XII, ADDRESS of February 24, 1957: AAS 49 (1957), p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.archtoronto.org/media-centre/news-archive/chancery-news/cardinal-thomas-collins-euthanasia-assisted-suicide-march-2016>

providers and healthcare institutions, who do so much good, should not be forced to go against their conscience and their mission.

## **E. Conclusion**

When Pope Francis poses the key question of his encyclical, “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us?”, he says that the question obliges us to ask about the general direction, the meaning and the values which we desire and strive for (§160). This we have done, this evening, by asking about progress and development.

I hope you noticed your own reactions and reflections, as we asked about progress in three contexts: charting a new course for nature and society in *Laudato si'*; valuing Indigenous peoples in Canada and elsewhere; and respecting the sanctity of life at its final moments.

Thinking back to the video we saw at the start of my talk, let us agree on this. It would truly be progress if all were to “agree that the earth is our common heritage, the fruits of which should benefit everyone.” We need to develop “another way of managing the economy and measuring progress, conceiving a new way of living” that includes everyone and at every stage of their lives. This constitutes “Caring for our common home.”

I recently spoke about *Laudato si'* at a University in a Spanish-speaking country. In an effort to reach out to me and other Anglophones, the programme proclaimed the title to be “Laudato yes!” – an amusing play on “si” that means “you” in the Italian original and “yes” in Spanish. I suggest we let this happy linguistic coincidence enrich our attitude and even provide our slogan in the face of the great challenges for the human family everywhere and especially here in Canada: Laudato yes!

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson  
President