

POPE FRANCIS – Report to Parish from the study group who examined the Encyclical

Laudato si – ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

The group met six times, taking at each meeting a separate chapter of the Encyclical. Our chairman and organiser, Derek Smith, produced a summary of one of the six chapters at each meeting to act as a stimulus to keep our ideas focussed. Our procedure involved reading one of the chapters section by section followed by discussion and, ultimately, reflective silence and prayer. The meetings proved to be stimulating, participatory and enjoyable.

The Encyclical is devoted exclusively to climate change and the threats to our environment. Its style is rich in expressive intent to call to action the whole of humanity as the world faces serious ecological problems which appear to be growing at a faster and faster rate. The scientific evidence is presented to back up such a claim. The technology is skilfully outlined to support an underlying theme of optimism that “humanity has the ability to work together in building our common home”. The Holy Father drew ideas from St. Francis of Assisi as the saint most remembered for “his wonderful harmony with God, nature and himself”.

At an early stage we examined the idea of “our common home” the Earth. We explored the rapid changes in the pace of life and climate when compared to the rate of biological evolution. This led us to explore concerns of pollution and accessibility of water. Further topics discussed included the theological and biblical evidence of creation and the harmony and equilibrium of its achievement. This led to considering that the political will to include the concern that not all scientific and technological discoveries are neutral in their effects. They often can and do condition life styles along avenues of change to support the interests of the rich and powerful.

Some themes re-emphasised the reality of the “common good” and the importance of education especially that concerned with the environment. We reflected on the necessity for transparency in decision making and how small local initiatives can produce measured quanta of improvements that can bring the attention of decision makers to the need for change. Locally there are examples of initiatives which are both carbon neutral and provide employment opportunities.

Finally, Pope Francis draws our attention to the spiritual and theological implications of his Encyclical. He pointed out that the encounter with creation (in the broadest sense, our environment) was an encounter with God with a clear link to the Eucharist. In regard to the Trinity, he sees the relevance of the Father as “the ultimate cause of everything”, the Son through whom all things were created” and the Spirit “as the “infinite bond of love” all necessary for full understanding and effective action. He concludes with reference to the key impact of Christ’s life and teaching in the grand scheme of our consideration of the future and even possible survival of mankind.

For some this was the first discussion group that they had attended. We all appeared to find the process lively, important and fulfilling. The impression gained is that we were making the effort to contribute, in however small the way, to important issues which affect our world.....our “Common Home”

We would appreciate having your views, comments and reactions and whether you would consider joining any future, similar activities.

Paul Hill, February 2016