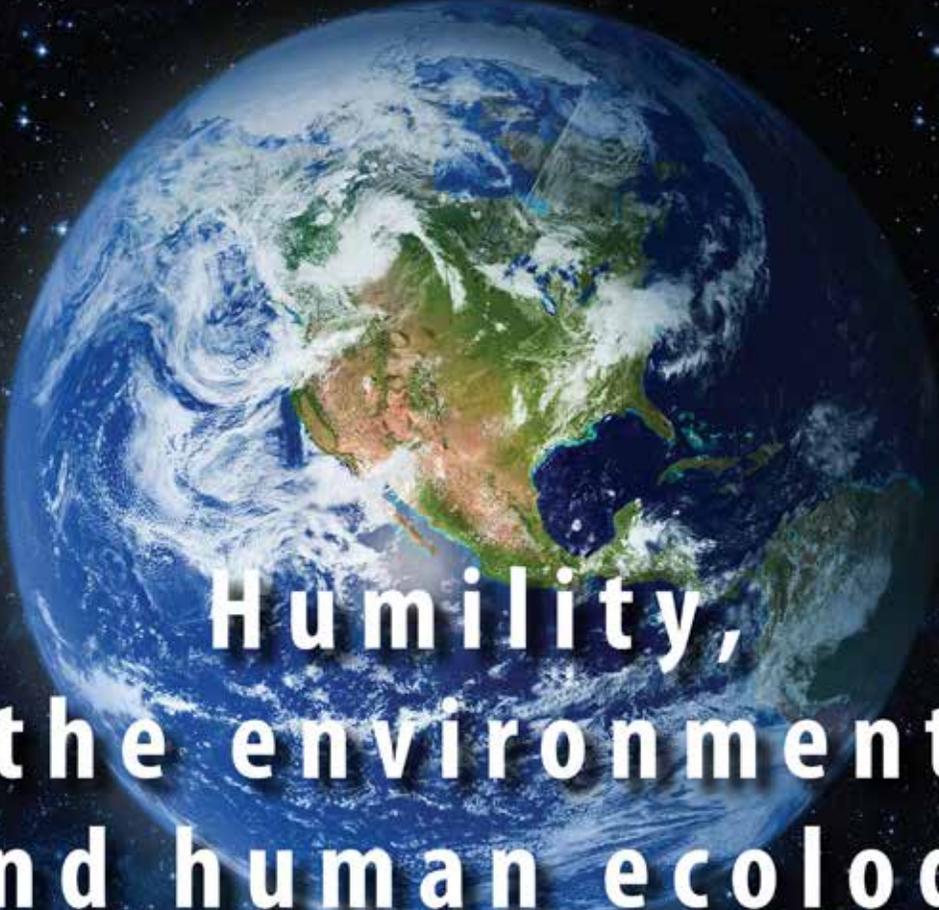




St Mark's Review

A Journal of Christian thought & opinion

No. 236, August 2016 (2)



Humility, the environment and human ecology

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Editorial

The articles in this edition of *St Mark's Review* are drawn from two important symposia that were held in 2015. The first four originated as papers presented at 'The good citizen and the Pope: the moral implications of *Laudato Si'*', held at St Paul's College, University of Sydney on 1 December 2015. The second set of articles was originally presented at a symposium on theologian Jane Foulcher's recent book, *Reclaiming Humility: Four Studies in the Monastic Tradition* (Cistercian Publications, Collegeville MN, 2015), held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, Canberra, on 22 October 2015.

Neil Ormerod's opening article helpfully contextualizes Pope Francis's encyclical on the environmental challenges facing the globe, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home* (2015). As Ormerod suggests, *Laudato Si'* needs to be understood within a longer tradition of Catholic Social Teaching initiated by Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. While noting the major contribution that *Laudato Si'* makes to this tradition, Ormerod observes that, in his entire career as a Catholic theologian, he has never witnessed 'as much interest in, discussion about, and criticism of, a papal encyclical even before it was published'. Ormerod goes on to chart the broad areas of change—social, economic and political—for which the encyclical is calling. The central message of the encyclical, he contends, is a call to 'place environmental concerns into the heart of the Christian life.'

Pope Francis's plea for the centrality of environmental concerns is echoed by Bartholomew I, current Archbishop of Constantinople, Ecumenical Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church and leader of some 300 million Orthodox Christians. Philip Kariatlis's article explains why Patriarch Bartholomew has been dubbed the 'Green Patriarch' or 'Green Pope'. Underpinning Bartholomew's doctrine of creation, contends Kariatlis, is a sacramental framework that affirms creation's sacredness and envisions mistreatment of the planet as nothing less than sin, or possibly even 'today's modern Christian heresy'. As Kariatlis demonstrates, however, Bartholomew's

contribution has been more than 'speculative theological abstractions on Orthodoxy's vision'. Rather, it is an offer of formative 'ways of relating with the world': in restoring a sense of the world's sacredness; in cultivating a sense of gratitude for the giftedness of the world and God's presence within it; and finally in fostering a 'eucharistic' attitude towards the world that challenges humanity to move beyond a capitalist and consumerist worldview. Bartholomew's contribution is also evident in tireless efforts, over several decades, in environmental advocacy and in the fostering of dialogue and inter-disciplinary gatherings on environmental issues.

Paul Babie's article considers how religious perspectives can aid us in responding to the challenge of anthropogenic climate change. Babie's principal focus is on ways in which standard secular liberal conceptions of private property have allowed humanity to produce the greenhouse gas emissions that 'drive global climate change'. In contrast, contends Babie, Pope Francis' focus on individual action might be read alongside Jewish, Christian and Islamic notions of private property, all of which shed valuable light on the nature of the human person, the community and obligation. Babie concludes with reflections on how notions of private property and monotheistic values catalyse our response to Pope Francis's call for action. 'Rather than the atomistic, self-regarding, individual of liberalism', suggests Babie, these three [monotheistic] traditions posit an alternative: a relational, obligation-bearing person living within community'

Danielle Celermajer considers Pope Francis's reminder that the global dimensions of climate change necessitate a 'conversation which includes everyone'. She considers what it might mean to create such an authentic and inclusive conversation, and 'what might be required to move towards establishing the conditions for such a conversation'. Crucial conditions, she contends, include the admission of a broad spectrum of worldviews and ethical languages; respect for (though not necessarily agreement with) each conversation partner's deepest 'moral ontologies' and 'thick languages of the good', a determination not to favour dominant groups, and the adoption of conversation registers that employ both our reasoning and our affective faculties.

Although not based on the *Laudato Si'* symposium, John Painter's review article on Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson's *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love*, explores similar thematic terrain. Johnson's book is based on a year-long reading of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in dialogue

with colleagues in biology, history, literature, political science and economics. The fruit of this study, observes Painter, is an important contribution to recent reassertions—of which *Laudato Si'* is not least—of the necessity of 'a Creation theology in our time'.

Graeme Garrett's article introduces the second collection of articles in issue, each of which reflects on aspects of Jane Foulcher's *Reclaiming Humility* and the broader theme of humility that the book opens up. Garrett provides a helpful overview of the book's trajectory and focus: four studies—or stories—of humility drawn from Christian monastic traditions: fourth- and fifth-century desert mothers and fathers; the towering figures of St Benedict in the sixth century and Bernard of Clairvaux in the twelfth; and the inspiring twentieth-century story of the Cistercian monks who lived, served and were eventually martyred among the Islamic community of Tibhirine, Algeria. As Garrett suggests, humility is not for the faint-hearted, and yet it remains a crucial challenge for our age, with personal, political and, in the context of environmental crisis, global significance.

Heather Thomson notes how the book offers new insights into the 'humility of God'. While it is necessary, Thomson suggests, to retain a concept of a God of power and might, this might need to be reconstructed in the light of a recognition of God's humility. 'Keeping God's goodness, greatness and humility together in creative tension,' she concludes, 'is a significant theological move, and one that allows us to learn humility in the presence and company of this gracious God.'

Foulcher's account of St Benedict is juxtaposed with the art of Giovanni di Consalvo and Marin Puryear in Scott Cowdell's reflections on humility and community. In Cowdell's opinion, Benedict proffers a 'humble lived eschatology in community' that represents a communal ascent to holiness, rather than an all too easy descent into the individual envy, rivalry, or 'pursuit of an essentially private salvation' that so often limit communal life. Benedict's vision and example provides a form of 'mimetic dialysis,' a vision that is 'radically ecclesial, sacramental and relational—a Catholic abiding in Christ, who takes away the sins of the world.'

Andrew Cameron reflects on how humility might be expressed in the public eye, taking Foulcher's case study of Bernard of Clairvaux as a starting point. For Cameron the complex and contradictory vocation of Bernard throws a revealing spotlight on the contradictions that are possible in the 'humble life of a Christian in public view.'

Finally, Stephen Pickard considers the book's powerful rendering of the Cistercians' vocation among the Muslim 'other' in Tibhirine, Algeria. Here, argues Pickard, is a tangible expression of humility and forgiveness, suggesting that the way of humility is 'the way by which we recognize that our common humanity is indeed hid in the lives of one another and the other in our midst'.

Although both symposia focused on two ostensibly different themes—one on the moral and theological implications of Pope Francis' influential encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and the other on humility—the articles in this issue of *St Mark's Review* reveal salient intersections. Perhaps the most striking is the plea for humility in our approach to what Pope Francis calls our common home. This is made explicit in Garrett's transposition of the virtue of humility to global environmental concerns. Likewise Celermajer's article is a plea for humility and respect as starting points for desperately needed conversations on environmental challenges. Finally, the following articles have further value in bringing Catholic perspectives on humility and the environment into conversation with Orthodox voices (for which see Kariatlis and Babie's essays).

The following conversation advocates a humble posture towards our earth, its delicate ecosystems and each other, drawing from deep wells of theological thought, ethics and scientific discovery. They provide valuable aids for considering our individual and collective responses to the crucial challenges we currently face.

Michael Gladwin