

**SECTION 64: SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART:
CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT REQUIRES
CONVERSION**

Hans Kwakman MSC

In his Apostolic Letter "Evangelii Gaudium," Pope Francis encourages us to embrace "*a spirituality that changes hearts*" (EG 262). In "Laudato Si," the Pope would like "*to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living*" (LS 216). This spirituality, he states, can motivate us to come to "*a more intense concern for the protection of our world*" (LS 216). But this supposes "*a sincere desire to change*" (LS 218); even "*a profound inner conversion*" (LS 217).

The word "conversion" is a translation of the Greek word 'metanoia'. That word indicates "*a change of heart*" (LS 218) that is, a change of the direction, which the desires of our heart usually follow. Such a radical change is possible only when we are guided by God's Spirit, who calls us to cultivate in our hearts "*ecological virtues*" that are virtues that focus on caring for the environment (LS 88).

As ecological virtues, the Pope lists: "*a spirit of generous care,*" "*gratitude,*" "*recognition of the world as God's loving gift,*" "*self-sacrifice and good works*" (LS 220). While nurturing these virtues, we are "*called to quietly imitate God's generosity,*" realizing, "*that we do not live in isolation from the rest of the creatures, but are bound together in a wonderful universal communion*" (LS 220).

"*By developing these personal, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can lead us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in solving the problems of the world*" (LS 220). However, the Pope also reminds us that "*social problems must be tackled not only by some individual good deeds, but also by common networks*" (LS 219).

REFLECTION

*“Various convictions of our faith can help us
to enrich the meaning of this conversion.*

*These include the awareness
that each creature reflects something of God
and has a message to convey to us.*

*As well as the security
that Christ has taken unto himself
this material world.*

*Now, risen, He is intimately present to each being,
surrounding it with his affection
and penetrating it with his light.*

*We read in the Gospel
that Jesus says of the birds of the air
that “not one of them is forgotten before God” (Lk 12:6).
How then can we possibly mistreat them
or cause them harm?*

*I ask all Christians to recognize and to live fully
this dimension of their conversion.
May the power and the light of the grace
we have received also be evident
in our relationship to other creatures
and to the world around us.
In this way, we will help nurture
that sublime fraternity with all creation
which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied.”*

(Pope Francis in his Encyclical “Laudato Si.”
Rome, Pentecost, 24 May 2015, n. 221.)