

## ***Fossil Fuel Forum - Insights from Theology***

March 2016

### **1. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si***

“Laudato si’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”.

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.” (§§1–2)

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life”.’ (§207)

We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread. Furthermore, such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile. (§212)

### **2. Hope in God’s Future**

- ‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good’ (Gen. 1.31)
- Scientific warnings about the consequences of climate change.
- Hope in God’s future, but not that the world doesn’t matter nor that God will act to save us from the consequences of our actions.
- Hearing the cry of our neighbours & responding in love and justice.
- Repenting of our part in the destruction caused by climate change.
- Acting in accordance with this change of heart by reducing carbon emissions in line with government targets: 80% cut by 2050.
- Reviewing church investment policy in the light of this commitment.

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### **3. Cooperation with Evil**

- Formal cooperation with evil: sharing the evil intention.
- Material cooperation: not sharing the evil intention, but enabling the evil action.
- Investment clearly counts as material cooperation: e.g. providing capital for illegal arms trade.
- Profiting from evil activity goes one step beyond mere cooperation.
- Investment is clearly a morally weighty matter for Christians.

### **4. The Challenge Regarding Investment in Fossil Fuels**

- A **serious** challenge: material cooperation with the profound evil of making the earth unfit for human and non-human creaturely life.
- An **urgent** challenge: must be judged more important than traditional areas of church concern such as alcohol.
- A **novel** challenge: economic activity previously seen as routine must now be recognized as directly damaging human and non-human life now and for future generations.
- A **demanding** challenge: almost all current and potential investments are exposed to the consumption of fossil fuels, and political systems have failed to deliver required policy or action.

### **5. Basis for Christian Ethical Discernment**

- Principle of investing only in activity compatible with meeting internationally agreed climate goals.
- Recognition of complexity of assessing particular activities in the context of national/international goals.
- Argument for a precautionary principle given the seriousness of the challenge.

#### **References**

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*

<[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)>

*Hope in God's Future* <<http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/climate-change>>

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change <<http://www.ipcc.ch>>

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