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**‘The speech act of pope Francis in Laudato si’,**

**October 28, 2021, Lecture at the *Resource Wende Dialogue*, 28 + 29 October. Clubof Rome, Tropenmuseum Amsterdam**

*Cari amici,*

Even though he usually speaks about God, Pope Francis has also expressed his great concern about the greatest crisis of this century: the resource crisis. Even before the outbreak of the corona crisis, he warned of the disastrous consequences of the alarming shortages of resources, commidities, which will manifest themselves in the foreseeable future. The Pope's way of warning is actually quite exceptional.

What I have in mind in my pitch is to present the core of his message, as expressed in his encyclical *Laudato si'*. His vision of the interplay between economy and ecology and the dynamics involved, in which the rich exhaust the earth at the expense of the poor, thus endangering world peace, might sound like the most obvious thing in the world to you. Therefore, I only will very briefly summarise the contents of this encyclical, which is both praised and reviled.

But the speech act, with which he wants to bring his readers in the West to understand and turn around is striking and exceptional. I will deepen the understanding of his speech act. The combination of content and form is effective: certainly when it comes to intensifying the awareness that no one may regard the earth and its treasures as personal property, even if, paradoxically, he or she has paid for them. The fruits of the earth belong to no one and everyone, now and in the future.

In *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis criticized the devastating effects of human activity on the balance of the planet. He wrote about the melting polar ice that causes the release of methane gas resulting in the greenhouse effect; about the loss of biodiversity by the destruction of tropical forests and the acidification of the oceans by our industry. In clear lamentations that would make those of the prophet Jeremiah on the misery of his people pale in comparison. The Pope called the demise and destruction of our ecosystems unprecedented: “with serious consequences for all of us”.

Well before the coronavirus outbreak, Pope Francis said in *Laudato si*’ that climate change, the scarcity of drinking water and declining biodiversity are affecting the poor in particular and will continue to affect the poor disproportionally. Global warming is putting at risk the availability of essential resources. Drinking water and energy will become even more necessary; their quantity will therefore become more limited. With the inevitable price-increase of these resources poor countries will have to be more economical. Consequently, especially in poor and warmer areas, crop yields will be lower, resulting in even greater poverty. All the more so because these climate changes are also caused by the unbridled consumerism of people in rich countries, behaviour the Pope deemed as unacceptable. To him, ecology and social justice, moderation and universal fairness are interconnected.

This observation brings me to my second point. How does the Pope intend to make a difference? By his speech act. He is aware that the rules of the game in a family are different from those in commerce. If I politely ask for coffee in my family, everyone knows that I do not have to pay for it. But if I ask for coffee in a shop and walk away without paying, that is a transgression, or even a crime. Here the private domain and the public domain apply different rules.

What the Pope now tries to do in *Laudato si'* is to implement the rules that apply in the private domain in the public domain. He calls the earth a common house. He calls everyone on earth a member of one and the same family, thus suggesting more insistently that the rich should take care of the poor, as in a family.

On this manageable, personal level he also addresses his reader personally, on the level of the personal companion, when he exhorts the rich sister and brother to be moderate. On this level, in *Laudato si’*, Pope Francis explicitly advocates a lifestyle – individually and collectively – and an economy that take into account the pressing social and environmental challenges facing humanity. He underlines the interplay between a serene and balanced personal life and peace on the one hand, and poverty reduction and the preservation of the earth on the other. Justice and peace on earth are not possible without personal, inner peace and moderation:

‘On the other hand, no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself. An adequate understanding of spirituality consists in filling out what we mean by peace (…) Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of the meaning of life..’ (*Laudato Si’* 225)

The ecological crisis, according to the Pope, is therefore rooted in a moral crisis within the hearts of people in rich countries; a moral crisis because we treat nature as disrespectfully as we are immoral. The need to consume comes from the need to fill the emptiness of our hearts. This consumption then happens too much without regard to the consequences for the rest of the world.As a consequence, disrespect towards nature goes hand in hand with disrespect towards others

In sum: the pope seeks to raise awareness that all races and languages belong to one and the same family and that the resulting existential involvement in people living below the poverty line is the solution to the problem of poverty. On a personal level also.

And also: the pope confronts us, the richer kids in the family, with our inability to put into practice the stoic *ne quid nimis*- (nothing in excess) principle. Stoics emphasized that people do not become happy when they have something ‘to an extreme extent’. On the temple of Apollo in Delphi was written: ‘Mèden agan’ (‘in nothing in excess!’). Moderation is a cure for megalomania. But also, in his view, a path to personal and collective happiness.

Yes, the pope comes across as rather confrontational. You, as experts on ecology, economics and the interaction between the two, know better than the Pope himself perhaps, that he has every reason to do so.