



Mission to the Vatican

Rome, December 1, 2016 – With our mission many months in the making, Clóvis Cavalcanti and I met in Rome in late November intending to bring **ecological economics**, and in particular, the **International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE)** directly to the awareness of **the Holy See**, known simply as **'the Vatican'** throughout the world.



Our initial goal was to obtain an audience with **Pope Francis**, the world's foremost leader who both understands and is courageous enough to speak the truth about our immense climate, ecological and social problems, their impact on current and future humanity and life on Earth.

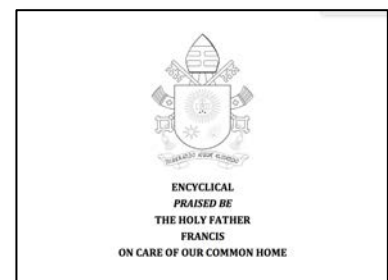
"The ecological crisis, and the large scale destruction of biodiversity, can threaten the very existence of the human species." - Pope Francis

Through a considerable *behind-the-scenes* effort, we succeeded in obtaining front row seats at a **General Papal Audience** on November 23rd. Those in the front two rows at general audiences are privileged to receive a personal greeting from **Pope Francis**, as well as a few moments to share thoughts, give a gift, or ask for a personal boon or blessing. Clóvis and I would use our time to draw his awareness to **ecological economics** and the **existence of ISEE**, seeking to 'open doors' for us to those whose functions are pivotal to the Vatican's work on global social and ecological challenges, in particular, **Cardinal Peter Turkson**, the public voice for **Laudato Si'**, said also to be one of its principal authors^β and spokesperson for what Pope Francis has termed 'the Human Ecology', and **Bishop Marcello Sánchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academies of Science and Social Sciences**, out of which **Laudato Si'** grew.

Thus our strategy to bring **ISEE** together with the **Holy See** has three aspects. First we would meet with Pope Francis, either privately (extraordinarily difficult) or in the front section after a General Audience (merely very difficult). Second, we would meet with Cardinal Turkson, and third, with Bishop Sánchez Sorondo. Bishop Sánchez is Chancellor of the Pontifical Academies, out of whose 2014 meeting **Laudato Si'** arose, and future initiatives concerning humanity's ecological and social problems and solutions will come. It is through these two clergymen that we hope to build an affiliation and working relationship. Our future efforts will also be directed to Pope Francis, but will necessarily be about cultivating relationships with Cardinal Turkson and Bishop Sánchez.

The Papal Encyclical

The 2015 Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, translated as "*Praised be You*," is 80-pages of groundbreaking writing by several individuals and agencies. Its name derives from a prayer composed by St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis' namesake. ***Laudato Si'*** has been acclaimed internationally as a document of unprecedented boldness and clarity, identifying the major social and environmental ills of the current social order, and documenting their underlying root causes, in what is referred to as the *'technocratic paradigm that dominates economic and political life'*.



For a single example out of so many, paragraph 109 of reads:

“The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings. Finance overwhelms the real economy. The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration

This detailed, well-reasoned document reads as a veritable *manifesto of Ecological Economics*. To wit, paragraph 141 states:

“This suggests the need for an ‘economic ecology’ capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality. The protection of the environment is in fact an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.”

With this in mind, it was our intention in going to the Vatican to offer our assistance, and to the extent we might be able to bring it about, the assistance of **ISEE** in highlighting and elevating the common ground between *ecological economics* and *Laudato Si’*.

The Papal Audience

There are two kinds of audiences with the pope. Private audiences are reserved for heads of state or other religious orders. General audiences are weekly affairs when a large number of people get to attend a group meeting with the current pope. It is largely an open affair, where tickets can be requested by fax. Perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 people attend, but there is a railing dividing an immense back section from the front two rows, which become a *de facto* VIP section.

Pope Francis enters from the back of the huge auditorium and makes his way down the center aisle, greeting hundreds of people on both sides who are thronging the railing for a handshake, a word, a blessing, a kiss on their baby, or any tangible contact with this humble, beloved man. It took him perhaps 15 or 20 minutes to make his way to the stage, his progress slowed by such an outpouring of love and admiration.

It took months of work to obtain front row seating in the audience, in front of the critical dividing rail that delineates those who will get a personal greeting from the pontiff. We did not know whether or not all that effort had succeeded until the morning of the audience. As it turned out, we had been assigned seating in a front row section for Argentinians (**Pope Francis** is from Argentina). Clóvis was assigned seat 9 and I was assigned seat 12, with the Argentine Ambassador to Costa Rica and his wife between us. In the hour we waited for Pope Francis to arrive I spent my time giving the ambassador’s wife, Bárbara, a prolonged briefing on the severity and urgency of the climate problem, and on our compelling reason for coming to see Pope Francis. Being an environmentalist, Bárbara was aware of the climate problem. But along with most of humanity, she had no idea of the severity and speed of onset of consequences. She was astounded, and that resulted in a touching act of personal sacrifice when her turn to greet Pope Francis arrived.

Simply described, the formal part of the papal audience as a set of short addresses, delivered first by the pope himself in Italian, repeated by protocol in several other languages by a variety of cardinals and bishops. It would be a rather dry affair, except that as individual nations or cultures are mentioned or addressed, voluminous cheering breaks out. The already festive feeling becomes like one of a sporting event, but with the *key difference* that there is a sense of *unity instead of competitiveness* among the spectators. The formal proceedings of the audience take perhaps an hour, before the climax, Pope Francis’ exit amidst as much adulation as he entered.

The Baciamento

The Pope’s departure is called the *Baciamento*, in Italian traditionally to ‘kiss the hand’, referring I suppose to the legacy of people kissing the ring of the pope in times gone by. This was what we had been waiting for, our opportunity to meet and speak with Pope Francis. First the cardinals and bishops seated together on stage line up and are received one by one. Then, in contrast to his predecessor, Francis descends the stairs and comes to greet the audience; first on the right side

including the handicapped, followed by nuns and priests who have made the pilgrimage to Rome; then the left side, where the Argentine section is first.

Clóvis preceded me and spoke to Pope Francis in Spanish about **ISEE**, and about **Ecological Economics** in general and its startling congruence with the Papal Encyclical. Clóvis also presented the pontiff with a folder containing a 2-page statement (attached) prepared by ISEE's Board of Directors two weeks earlier.

I in turn made an unusual approach. Demonstrating heart-felt admiration and reverence, I presented him with my name card, and urgently asked him to *"allow us to meet with Cardinal Turkson and Bishop Sánchez Sorondo."* Those were my precise words, in an effort to open doors without being disrespectful to someone so venerated. He heard me out and passed my card to his aide indicating those two names to him.



After my brief exchange with Pope Francis came Bárbara's turn. She previously asked me to write the names of Cardinal Turkson and Bishop Sánchez on the back of her husband's name card. She offered that card to the pope as she emphasized in Spanish the importance of his allowing us to meet with the two indicated clergymen. She sacrificed her personal request to ask for him to bless her grandmother's rosary, wrapped around her right palm all this time. She then shook hands still holding her grandmother's

rosary, and he passed on to speak with her husband, the Argentine Ambassador to Costa Rica.

Meeting with Cardinal Turkson

A few days later I received an email from Cardinal Turkson inviting us to meet at his office, seemingly unaware of my interaction with Pope Francis. A material connection between the two is purely speculative. Pope Francis is inundated by hundreds of requests at papal audiences and cannot possibly respond to all of them. Bishop Sánchez, on the other hand, had been involved with a Plenary Meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Science the entire week following our Papal Audience, and left for Argentina the following day. We were not able to meet with him as we had hoped to, but left materials and a strong impression with Cardinal Turkson in lieu of such a meeting



The hour-long with Cardinal Turkson was very productive. Clóvis and I expounded the congruence of Ecological Economics and *Laudato Si'*. We also distinguished between **environmental economics** and **ecological economics**, careful to avoid denigrating the former, since Partha Dasgupta is a prominent member of the Pontifical Academies, and trusted advisor of Pope Francis' papacy. We also spoke as though Bishop Sánchez Sorondo was in the room, since our preparation had been for dual meetings. Indeed, for us to obtain our objectives, Bishop Sánchez Sorondo will have to be brought into the discussion at some point.

As far as we can tell, to date the Vatican's penetration to the core issues of the current unsustainable model of economic growth has incorporated the thinking only of **environmental economists** like Partha Dasgupta and Karl-Gören Mähler. Imagine how the perspectives of true **ecological economists**, like Herman Daly, Joan Martinez Alier, Richard Norgaard, John Gowdy or Clóvis Cavalcanti himself might help shift the global economic paradigm.

Laudato Si' has also encountered limits to its penetration and readership in from several causes. Few people on the street have ever heard of it, and its big splash was been mostly with Catholics, environmentalists and in intellectual and political circles. However, reception in political circles was problematic in itself since the overwhelming majority of politicians in power at present have been

placed there by or with the blessing of the current growth economic regime. Central banks and the Wall Streets and Nikkei's of the world hold amazing sway over the current political process.

The Papal Encyclical was steeped in a Catholic context, its initial pages concentrating on citations of earlier statements by popes, designed to highlight continuity with Church teachings, rather than a departure from them. Second, its sheer length and intellectual depth makes it difficult for the larger body of humanity to penetrate, especially in a day and age where the Internet has effectively reduced the dissemination of ideas to '30-second sound bites' and '140-character tweets'.

We believe that a project to bring *Laudato Si'* out of its strictly Catholic context and more into a secular one would allow for further spread of its core ideas. Distilling these ideas, quite literally, to those 140-character 'tweets' could then be projected to the Pope's millions of followers also offering a natural means for sewing them into society; the re-engineering of society's 'memes'; the concepts in which we think about our role in the natural world; the current diametric counter-positioning of *growth economics* and *ecology*.

Cardinal Turkson made an effort to understand the depth of what we were there to communicate. This was not the usual courtesy call, but rather a working meeting meant to transform to the collective thinking of the Vatican. He remarked that he would likely not be able to get back to us on these matters until well into the New Year, largely since Pope Francis had asked for reorganization of four separate pontifical agencies into one. But he also demonstrated his interest and effort to assimilate what we had presented by repeating back to us his understanding of what we had proposed.



Any collaboration between the *ISEE* and the *Holy See* to further popularize the concepts within *Laudato Si'* also stands to bring the term '**ecological economics**' more into human awareness, another useful byproduct of such collaboration, to make it a societal *meme* in its own right. The world needs to know there is an *alternative* to the current economic model of unlimited, accelerating economic growth. Society needs to understand that there are fundamental limits to planetary resources and waste 'sinks'. Popularization of **ecological economics** as that *alternative* would in itself have a beneficial effect on the collective human psyche and the resulting culture, the current *ethos* of human civilization.



We left Cardinal Turkson with three (small) sets of reading material to underscore our points, asking that he share one with Bishop Sánchez Sorondo. The other set was implicitly for Pope Francis himself. All three sets included a very bold single page of **Recommendations and Requests to the Holy See**, a copy of which is attached. Two of the three points detailed pertain specifically to collaboration between the *Holy See* and *ISEE*. The last point was a more personal request and aspiration.

After our hour-long meeting, Cardinal Turkson walked us outside to the iron gate of the campus housing his Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. A very congenial air among us warmed us in the chilly evening air of late November. Clóvis and I left feeling something significant had been accomplished. Our mission to bring together *ISEE* and the *Holy See* has seen its initial success, one certainly to be built upon in the near future. §





International Society for Ecological Economics

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Who is the International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE)

ISEE is an international, not-for-profit, member-governed organization dedicated to advancing understanding of the relationships among ecological, social, and economic systems for the mutual wellbeing of nature and people.

Ecological economics exists because a hundred years of disciplinary specialization in scientific inquiry has left us unable to understand or to manage the interactions between the human and environmental systems that comprise our world.

While none would dispute the insights that disciplinary specialization has brought, we recognize that in an interconnected evolving world, reductionist science has left us bereft of ideas as to how to formulate and solve problems that stem from the interactions between humans and the natural world.

What does ISEE stand for?

The International Society for Ecological Economists (ISEE) facilitates understanding between economists and ecologists and the integration of their thinking into a trans-discipline aimed at developing a sustainable and just world. Some of the central themes of our work include:

- Developing models that integrate economic and ecological systems to address management of local biodiversity, ocean fisheries, and the climate services of the global atmosphere.
- Addressing equity between individual people and nations, including future generations, and relating equity to sustainability.
- Developing new indicators that augment traditional indicators such as GDP (gross domestic product) to account for the biophysical and social impacts of economic activity.
- Identifying properties of ecological and social systems that pose limits to economic development and identifying the extent to which human-produced capital can substitute for these properties.
- Assessing the relationship between policies that promote development through capital mobility, and the ability of nations to manage environmental systems and the distribution of wellbeing.

- Developing measures that assign value to non-market services provided by ecosystems and promoting public discourse on environmental and social values that enrich and expand economic values and measures.
- Developing policy instruments that reconcile the conflicting perspectives of economics and ecology and recognize the reinforcing and mutually supportive nature of economic, social and ecological sustainability.

We recognize that these central themes are eloquently addressed in the Encyclical Letter ***LAUDATO SI'*** of the Holy Father Pope Francis, on the Care of our Common Home. ISEE is grateful for ***LAUDATO SI'*** and its commitment to a sustainable and socially just world. We stand ready to support the work ahead that will realize the vision of the sustainable future that is set forth in ***LAUDATO SI'***.

Respectfully,

Dr. Marina Fischer-Kowalski, Past President, ISEE

Dr. Sabine O'Hara, President, ISEE

Dr. Clovis Cavalcanti, President Elect, ISEE



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Recommendations & Requests to the Holy See

In order to assist the Holy See with the huge and urgent task of implementing the philosophy and commitment that lies behind *Laudato Si'*, we recommend and request the following:

- Acceptance, acknowledgement, and collaboration with the **International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE)** in the implementation of *Laudato Si'* commencing with regional conferences, the first of which we anticipate will take place in Latin America. At such conferences we would hope to include a keynote address from **Cardinal Turkson**, either in person, via videoconference, or pre-recorded as convenient and appropriate. These conferences would engage **religious leaders of many faiths** as well as **ecological economists, scientists, outstanding political figures** in terms of their commitment to the UN SDGs, **print and online media**, and others as appropriate.
- The appointment of **ecological economists** to the **Pontifical Academies of Science and Social Sciences**. (This recommendation would have been made to **Chancellor Bishop Sánchez Sorondo** if not for the **PAS Plenary Meeting** that just completed and his subsequent departure for Argentina the following day.)
 - For the **Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences** we recommend one of the original founding members, **Dr. Joan Martinez Alier**, Emeritus Professor of Economics and Economic History, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
 - For the **Pontifical Academy of Science**, we recommend **Dr. William Rees**, Ecologist and Professor at the University of British Columbia, creator of the concept of 'ecological footprint', and former School of Community and Regional Planning at UBC, and member of the Club of Rome.
- Engage with strategic advisor, **Stuart Scott**, Founder and Executive Director of the **United Planet Faith & Science Initiative**, in an effort to disseminate *Laudato Si'* in 'bite-sized pieces' for better understanding and assimilation by humanity employing **Pope Francis'** immense personal stature, international respect, and wide audience.

There is a poetic appropriateness to the collaboration of the **Holy See** with **ISEE** (pronounced *I-See*) on the urgent matter of avoiding, in **Pope Francis'** own words...

"The 'distraction' or delay in implementing global agreements on the environment shows that politics has become submissive to a technology and economy which seek profit above all else..." and "to develop a cultural model which can face the crisis of climatic change and its social consequences" by "an ecological conversion capable of supporting and promoting sustainable development."

We wish to engage with the **Holy See** in all humility, as bees engage with an orchard to cross-pollenate and produce abundance for all future humanity and life on Earth.

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