**Rondal Snodgrass: Rising above the fray**

Pope Francis has become an international celebrity with how, as leader of the Catholic Church, he has chosen to present himself, his thinking, and concern for the entire world.

His visit to the United States was unprecedented, as he spoke not only to a joint session of Congress, addressed the United Nations General Assembly, and was the key participant in the 9/11 Memorial Service in New York City. He is enormously popular among not only the over 60 million Catholics in the U. S. but also with the general public.

The Encyclical Laudato Si (Italian for “praise be to you”) was officially published June 18, 2015 and was released in Italian, German, English, Spanish, French, Polish, Portuguese and Arabic. It is a 93-page treatise on the need for the world to take swift and unified action to meet the multi-faceted crises now before us.

This is a well-developed case for what has happened, and how to proceed to work together and be unified. There is a kindness in his concern and an expressed love for all creation. He stresses the inter-relatedness and how modern methods of gaining comforts and security are culminating in a dangerous result that clearly threatens all the Earth.

Reviewers call it “a book that catalyzes thought into action” (N.Y. Times). It is being compared to the impact that Silent Spring had on waking up this country. Rachael Carson introduced ecology in a way that changed the level of concern for nature in our laws, government policy, science, industry and human awareness.

He not only made the cover of Time but the cover of the Rolling Stone, and also chooses to speak with a humility that has made him not only famous but loved.

Francis is careful to not make this Encyclical a purely theological preaching to the “faithful.” It is based on science and truth, is modern, and well documented.

His writing is clearly presented in a rare kind of beauty of prose, easy to feel and understand.

He raises concern with the decline in quality of life and the breakdown of society. Most people must certainly be aware of conflicts and calamities that rattle our confidence in the future for all of us. Francis points out the facts of global inequality, the issue of water, climate change, pollution, poverty and the variety of opinions about these matters. But he clearly stresses the danger of “weak responses” to these inequities.

He does bring forth the Gospel of Creation, his ideas of the wisdom of biblical accounts, the mystery of the universe, and the message of each creature in the harmony of creation. He quotes and gives example from the life, experience, and writings from Saint Francis. There is a refreshing call for religions to be in dialogue with science. He challenges the reader with examining the human roots of the present ecological crisis. This writing is a clear explanation of the global impacts of technological advances, cultural ecology, and the ecology of simple, daily life. Then the Encyclical turns to how to approach these conditions and formulates a new paradigm of action. It calls on the ideas of new dialogues and ever increasing transparency in decision making with “civic and political love”.

There is the idea of a new lifestyle fully embracing the covenant between humanity and the environment. It ends with a prayer for earth, for all that makes up this planet, and for everything and everyone.

So this man who humbly has refused the palatial life of some previous Popes, who sleeps in a dormitory and eats in a cafeteria, and who shuns limousines for a small Fiat or Ford Focus, has also spoken boldly and brilliantly to the world.

He not only made the cover of Time but the cover of the Rolling Stone, and also chooses to speak with a humility that has made him not only famous but loved. There is a powerful wisdom in this Encyclical, so smartly expressed with firm conviction, of the trouble we are all in together, and then suggests how to get out of it.

I hope you will take it upon yourself to not only hear of this Encyclical, but to read it. In my opinion this amazing treatise belongs in every household. The document is readily accessible online and available in local bookstores.

The Inter-Faith Committee of the Nevada County Change Coalition is sponsoring a free study group of the Encyclical, meeting from 2 to 4 p.m. on three Thursdays, Nov. 5, 12, and 19 at the Nevada City United Methodist Church. For information and reservations email PopeFrancis@earth-justice.org.

Rondal Snodgrass is a conservation land consultant. He lives in Nevada City.