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## SUMMARY REPORT of a Faculty Colloquium Held on the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of The Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home

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# SUMMARY REPORT

## of a Faculty Colloquium Held on the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of The Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home

St. John's University  
Staten Island, NY  
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The Papal Encyclical, issued in summer of 2015, elicited the attention of ten faculty members in St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. All but two of the participants (Patrick Flanagan, CM and Marie George) were faculty members based primarily in Staten Island. What follows is a collection of highlights from the formal presentations.

1. Peter Albano CM, Philosophy.

This talk described various mindsets and issued in a call for a transformative mindset in the wake of current global challenges. The ancient mind, asserts the author, exhibits a natural desire to know, an innate curiosity to know for its own sake that is interested in causes and their organic interrelations. The modern mindset exhibits a practical intentionality for the purpose of dominating and manipulating the natural world toward what it perceives as progressive betterment. The cosmocentric mindset of the ancient world differs from the theocentric mindset of the medieval world, which both differ from the anthropocentric mindset of the Modern mind. The Ancient and Medieval Mind were imbued with the sacred, whereas the Modern mind is secular. The Modern mind also displaces the primacy of the common good in favor of self-interested competition. A final call for a Commonwealth of the Earth concludes this statement – a Commonwealth preparatory to entry into that celestial festival of universal cosmic flourishing, that confirms the present good in everlasting grace and beauty.

2. Joseph A. Bongiorno, History.

The author discussed the attempts of the European Economic Community, beginning in October 1972, and continuing in legislative action in 1986, to

develop and enforce environmental protection policies. The author notes that, while the European goals were clearly stated in print, there continue to be shortcomings of attitudes and behavior in this arena, including continued reliance on automobiles as well as emission of greenhouse gases that are reducing Alpine snow and ice.

3. William F. Byrne, Government and Politics. The presentation praised the encyclical's goal of healing all fundamental human relationships, and laments the dehumanization of people by a desanctifying and reductionistic dynamic. Citing the work of Wilhelm Roepke, the paper makes a plea for subsidiarity that resists the deleterious effects of large-scale economics and domineering government. The author endorses the encyclical's call for a turning of the heart that will respect the fundamentals of reality.
4. Irene Dabrowski, Sociology. The presenter promotes a sociological imagination that strives to mend the perceived duality of nature and society. The author pays particular attention to the challenges posed by biotechnology and cyberspace to our sense of what it is to be human, and endorses the encyclical's call for prayer.
5. Patrick Flanagan CM, Theology and Religious Studies. Drawing on the legend of Ned Ludd of the early 1800s, this paper traces similar, subsequent efforts to resist technological innovation altogether, and finds that the encyclical distances itself from such a retrogressive worldview. The author takes note of the almost 100 references that the encyclical makes to technology, and both laments the use of technology for selfish and devious purposes, and endorses the encyclical's call for the peoples of the world to make an effort toward a choice for good and making a new start.
6. Marie George, Philosophy. The subject of this brief lecture is Beauty, noting its omnipresence and prescient anticipation of the ultimate destiny of creation to be fulfilled in its divine Source. Drawing on Aristotle's tract *On Animals*, as well as on Wisdom of Solomon 13:5 and Romans 1:20, the presenter endorses the encyclical's call for a good aesthetic education as an aid to maintenance of a healthy environment.
7. Roberta Hayes, Sciences. This author draws on data supplied by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration as well as by the Environmental Protection Agency that document the current levels of damage being wrought on the ecosphere. The issues include global temperature change, retraction of ice sheets and glaciers worldwide, decreasing amounts of Arctic sea ice, extreme weather events, changes in sea and lake levels, the crisis in the availability of clean potable water, and the acidification and warming of oceans. Concomitant changes wrought in soil and agriculture as well as in bird and insect populations are also noted. The paper concludes with a sober reminder from Carl Sagan that this is the only home we have ever known.

8. Mark Kiley, Theology and Religious Studies.

The paper discusses some of the ostensible background, structure, and intent of the encyclical under the following rubrics: Theologian of the Trinity, The Preacher, Brother of Bernard Lonergan SJ, and A Priestly Writer Doing a Current Riff on *Genesis*. The latter section particularly highlights the tragic and hope-filled contours of current human experience when seen through the lens of the Biblical primeval history.

9. Brian C. Lockey, English Literature.

Taking as its cue the encyclical's assertion that human beings and material objects are in a confrontational relationship, the presenter explores two novels in the English language. Doris Lessing's *Canopus in Argos*, a five-part series, imaginatively details the role of technology in dividing humans from one another, in cycles of rage, frustration, and disgust. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* imagines the fate of human refugees who shuffle through the landscape of a gutted world – a literary warning about the results of our current policies that consume ourselves and our future. A voluntary “disarmament”, a stepping away from harmful policies at various levels and on a global scale, offers hope for the future of the species.

10. Stephen Paul Miller, English Literature.

This presenter identifies the link forged by the Pontiff between a mistreated earth and the vast ranks of excluded peoples of varying kinds. Drawing on Jewish history, both Biblical and modern, the author notes the Jewish tradition's deep-seated suspicion concerning the capacity of large, centralized governments to serve a small clique of the elite, to the detriment of the majority of humankind.