

HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL  
SPIRIT OF SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

31 MARCH 2016

BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURE AND THE MESSAGE OF  
POPE FRANCIS I LAUDATO SI

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## **Introduction**

The much anticipated and celebrated Papal Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, finally arrived late Spring 2015. Known as the ‘green’ encyclical, for its direct message regarding what St. Francis of Assisi calls “Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us,” Pope Francis I, takes issue with modern man’s past, present and future relationship with our planet. In June 1924, thirteen days short of 91 years prior to the release of *Laudato Si*, Rudolf Steiner conducted a nine-day lecture series commonly known as the Agriculture Course. The official title of this lecture series is ‘The Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture.’ It became the basis for biodynamic agriculture.

This presentation will attempt to show how the practice of biodynamic agriculture is not only of the same ‘spirit’, but can be part of the answer to the many issues raised by *Laudato Si*. The presentation will compare the fundamental components of biodynamic agriculture with the primary pillars of Catholic social teaching and *Laudato Si*’s “Gospel of Creation” and the integral role of human ecology. The paper will be broken into four parts. The first part will provide the background for the genesis of the encyclical. Part two will give a brief background of Rudolf Steiner, and will lay out the 4-fold structure of biodynamics and give an overview of how biodynamic agriculture works. Part three will discuss the major pillars of Catholic Social Teaching. Part four will argue how BD agriculture can contribute to the reversal of what Pope Francis calls the ‘throw away culture’.

## **Rerum Novarum<sup>1</sup> – Planting the Seed**

To understand the underpinnings of *Laudato Si*, one must first look back 125 years to what St. John Paul II deems as the ‘this great Pope and his “immortal document” . . . thus constituting what would come to be called the Church’s “social doctrine”, “social teaching” or even “social magisterium”.’<sup>2</sup> *Rerum Novarum* was written

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1 Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, [Labor and Capital], Encyclical Letter on the Worker Question, (15 May 1891).

2 Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, [Hundredth Year], Encyclical Letter on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, (1 May 1991), nos. 1-2.

in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century amid the Second Industrial Revolution, sandwiched between the American Civil War and the First World War. Western society and cultures were changing quite rapidly and the divide between the *proletariat* and *bourgeois* was widening. This widening gap was primarily economic and resulted in growing civil unrest in many countries. The Church itself was changing<sup>3</sup> and the Pontificate of Leo XIII<sup>th</sup> was experiencing the rising interest of the working class in socialism. Pope Leo in 1878, wrote an encyclical<sup>4</sup> on the evils of socialism, communism and nihilism. Later in *Rerum Novarum*, he addresses both worker's and employer's rights and responsibilities towards each other; the role of the state; the role of trade unions and free association and wage, hour, worker safety as well as private property rights.

The centerpiece discourse of this encyclical is his discussion of 'those whom fortune favors':

It is a duty, not of justice (save in extreme cases), but of Christian charity – a duty not enforced by human law. But the laws and judgments of men must yield place to the laws and judgments of Christ the true God . . . (thus) whoever has received from the divine bounty a large share of temporal blessings, whether they be external and material, or gifts of the mind, has received them for the purpose of using them for the perfecting of his own nature, and, at the same time, that he may employ them, as the steward of God's providence, for the benefit of others. "He that hath a talent", said St. Gregory the Great, "let him see that he hide it not; he that hath abundance, let him quicken himself to mercy and generosity; he that

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3 Prior to 1870, the papacy exercised a theocratic monarchy (for nearly 1100 years) on what was designated as the Papal States. After being forced back into the boundaries of the Vatican, Pope Pius IX, although residing in Chair of St. Peter as shepherd of the faithful worldwide, no longer presided over specific land territory as part of his duties. Thus in some ways the papacy shifted from one of governance to one strictly devoted to pastoral care of the people. In 1929, the Vatican reached an agreement with the Italian government for complete sovereignty in what today is known as the Vatican State.

4 Pope Leo XIII, *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, [Apostolic Mission], Encyclical Letter on Socialism, (28 December 1878).

hath art and skill, let him do his best to share the use and the utility hereof with his neighbor”.<sup>5</sup>

This statement implies, not that one should share his/her divine bounty by force<sup>6</sup>, but by the duty of ‘Christian charity’ that is taught in the gospels. The charity of the heart, of willingness, or recognition that ‘When much has been given a man, much will be required of him. More will be asked of a man to whom more has been entrusted’<sup>7</sup>.

Rerum Novarum planted the seeds of true ‘social justice’<sup>8</sup> and these seeds of social renewal sprouted over the next 125 years and were broadcasted in numerous Papal Encyclicals to follow. Pope Pius XI, in celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rerum Novarum, wrote in *Quadragesimo Anno*, that ‘Leo’s Encyclical has proved itself the *Magna Carta* upon which all Christian activity in the social field ought to be based’<sup>9</sup>. Later on, Pius XI discusses the problems of ‘individualism’ and ‘collectivism’ and points out, ‘However the earth may be apportioned among private owners, it does not cease to serve the common interests of all. This same doctrine declares that the division of goods which results from private ownership was established by nature itself in order that created things may serve the needs of mankind in fixed and stable order. . . in other words, that the common good of all society will be kept inviolate. By this law of *social justice*, one class is forbidden to exclude the other from sharing in the benefits. . . The redemption of the non-owning workers – this is the goal that Our Predecessor declared must necessarily

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5 Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, no.22.

6 Force in the form of progressive taxation (socialism) or government acquisition (communism).

7 *The New American Bible, St. Joseph Edition*, Catholic Book Publishing, New York, 1970. Luke 12:48.

8 I use the word ‘true’ to describe the authenticity of the meaning of social justice as prescribed by the Church, not the bastardized version of the last 50 years and especially the last decade.

9 Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, [Fortieth Year], Encyclical on Reconstruction of Social Order, (15 May 1931), no. 39.

be sought'<sup>10,11</sup> On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Leo XIII's Encyclical, St Pope John XXIII in *Mater Et Magistra*, declared that *Rerum Novarum* 'is rightly regarded as a compendium of Catholic social and economic teaching'<sup>12</sup>. John XXIII for the first time points to the 'depressed state of agriculture'<sup>13</sup> and the result of this depressed state has cause many people to leave the farms and migrate into the cities. He states further, 'A contributory cause of this movement away from the country is doubtless the fact that farming has become a depressed occupation. It is inadequate both in productive efficiency<sup>14</sup> and in the standard of living it provides'<sup>15</sup>. He further defines farming and calls for the 'self-advancement of the farming community'. He gives a beautiful description and role of the farmer:

'Those who live on the land can hardly fail to appreciate the nobility of the work they are called upon to do. They are living in close harmony with **Nature – the majestic temple of Creation**. Their work has to do with the life of plants and animals, **a life that is inexhaustible in its expression, inflexible in its laws, rich in allusions to God the Creator and Provider**. They produce food for the

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10 Ibid. nos. 56-59.

11 Keep in mind that Pius XI is not advocating classic socialistic tenets of 'everyone is equal' and that government (in today's speak) should 'spread the wealth', but he specifically points out the 'non-owning' worker's contribution in the 'harvesting' or acquisition of 'divine abundance'. In other words, he is referring to the responsible and charitable treatment of workers by paying competitive wages, worker safety, basically not exploiting the human condition to reap profits. See Gen 3:19 and 2 Cor. 9:6.

12 Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, [Mother and Teacher], Encyclical on Christianity and Social Progress, (15 May 1961), no.15.

13 Ibid., nos.123-124.

14 Note, this encyclical was written 15 years after the close of WWII. Today, farming efficiencies have vastly improved by mechanization. However, the technology improvements have come at a cost of human employment; which we will see playing out in *Laudato Si*.

15 Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, no. 124.

support of human life, and the raw materials of industry in ever richer supply. Theirs is a work which carries with it a dignity all its own. . . It is a work which demands a capacity for orientation and adaption, patient waiting, a sense of responsibility, and a spirit of perseverance and enterprise. . . In the work on the farm the human personality finds **every incentive for self-expression, self-development and spiritual growth. *It is a work, therefore, which should be thought of as a vocation, a God-given mission, an answer to God's call to actuate His providential, saving plan in history.*** It should be thought of, finally, as a **noble task**, undertaken with a view to raising oneself and others to a higher degree of civilization'.<sup>16</sup>

Two years later, St Pope John XXIII, in *Pacem In Terris*, lays out the 'three things which characterize our modern age: the economic and social condition of working men; the part that women are playing in the political life; and the form in which society is evolving to an entirely new social and political lines'.<sup>17</sup> In some ways, he alludes to what Rudolf Steiner established as the 'Three-fold Social Order' consisting of the economics sphere, political/rights sphere and spiritual/cultural sphere.<sup>18</sup> Yet John XXIII is presenting this concept from the Church's position, when he sates: 'for man's awareness of his rights must inevitably lead him to the recognition of his duties. The possession of rights involves the duty of implementing those rights, for they are the expression of a man's personal dignity. And the possession of rights also involves their recognition and respect by other people. When society is formed on a basis of rights and duties, men have an immediate grasp of spiritual and intellectual values, and have no difficulty in

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16 Ibid., nos. 144-145, 149. Author's emphasis.

17 John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, [Peace on Earth], Encyclical on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty, (11 April 1963), nos. 39-42.

18 Due to the limited nature of this paper, detailed explanation of the Three-fold Social Order is not possible. For further explanation, please see the following: Dr. G. Wachsmuth, *Threefold Social Order*, Anthroposophic Press, New York or google G. Wachsmuth, look for a pdf- *Threefold social order*. Also rschive.gov and search under 'threefold social order'. There one will find 20 articles by Steiner published in the newspaper: 'Threefold Social Order'.

understanding what is meant by truth, justice, charity and freedom. They become, moreover, conscious of being members of such a society. And that is not all. Inspired by such principles, they attain to a better knowledge of the true God – a personal God transcending human nature. They recognize that their relationship with God forms the very foundation of their life – the interior life of the spirit, and the life which they live in the society of their fellows<sup>19</sup>. John XXIII successor, Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*<sup>20</sup>, continues in the tradition of Catholic social teaching, with an encyclical directing attention to the ‘Development of Peoples’. Paul VI used this encyclical to re-examine the human condition as was present in the mid -1960s. (Keep in mind, Paul VI was the first Pope to ever travel outside of Italy<sup>21</sup> and was deemed the ‘Pilgrim Pope’. These travels brought him face to face with the other cultures and difficulties experienced by the many peoples of the world.) The center point of *Populorum Progressio*, is what Paul VI noted as ‘the development of the individual necessarily entails a joint effort for the development of the human race as a whole’<sup>22</sup>. He further points out the duty and ‘obligations’ of the wealthier nations towards what he defines as: ‘1. Mutual solidarity – the aid that richer nations must give to developing nations; 2. Social justice – the rectification of trade relations between strong and weak nations; and 3. Universal charity – the effort to build a more humane world community, where all can give and receive, and where the progress of some is not bought at the expense of others’<sup>23</sup>. Next in the line of social encyclicals and by far the most controversial then and even now, *Humanae Vitae*<sup>24</sup>, ‘Human Life’. I only mention this encyclical because without the fullest respect for life from conception to

19 John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, nos. 44-45

20 Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, [Development of Peoples], Encyclical on the Development of Peoples, (26 March 1967).

21 Pope Pius VII was forcibly removed from Genoa to France in 1809 by Napoleon I.

22 Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 43.

23 *Ibid.*, no.44.

natural death, how can we as human truly respect anything for its innate value and rightful place in divine creation. In the third year of his long papacy, Pope John Paul II issued *Laborem Exercens*<sup>25</sup> in celebration of the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. John Paul II uses this encyclical to build a framework and structure, that later Pope Francis I was to add shape and finish that reflects the ‘modern’ world. John Paul II opens with the following: ‘I wish to devote this document to *human work* and, even more, to *man* in the vast context of the reality of work. As I said in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, published at the beginning of my service in the See of Saint Peter in Rome, man “is the primary and fundamental way for the Church”, precisely because of the inscrutable mystery of Redemption in Christ; and so it is necessary to return constantly to this way and to follow it ever anew in the various aspects in which it shows us all the wealth and at the same time all the toil of human existence on earth. . . We are celebrating the ninetieth anniversary of the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on the eve of new developments in technological, economic and political conditions which, according to many experts, will influence the world of work and production no less than the industrial revolution of the last century’<sup>26</sup>. In typical JP II fashion, the encyclical is long and detailed. He covers ‘work and man’, and the role of technology and how “Christian truth about work had to oppose the various trends of materialistic and economic thought”<sup>27</sup>; the ‘conflict between labor and capital in the present phase of history’<sup>28</sup>; the ‘rights of workers’<sup>29</sup>; and finally he closes with the ‘spirituality of work’<sup>30</sup>. John Paul II adds two more detailed and lengthy encyclicals to thread of *Rerum Novarum*: ‘*Sollicitudo rei*

24 Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, [Human Life], Encyclical on the Regulation of Birth, (25 July 1968).

25 Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* [Exercising Labor], Encyclical on Human Work on the Ninetieth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, (14 September 1981).

26 *Ibid.*, no. 1.

27 *Ibid.*, nos. 5, 7.

28 *Ibid.*, nos. 11-15. I would like to draw the reader’s attention to specific passage in no. 13.

Socialis’<sup>31</sup> (On Social Care) and ‘Centesimus Annus’<sup>32</sup> (100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Rerum Novarum). Both encyclicals reminding people of the importance of not only the development of the human person but the ‘dignity to work as a free man’. Centesimus Annus was the last social encyclical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This encyclical is approximately 2/3rds the length of Laudato Si, but it puts together all of the issues discussed in the previous nine social encyclicals that make up of Church’s compendium of social doctrine. This encyclical is rich in substance and moving in thought. And yet before we reach Francis I’s Laudato Si, there is one finally addition to the social thread, Pope Benedict XVI’s ‘Caritas in Veritate’<sup>33</sup> (Charity in Truth). Pope Benedict XVI focuses an entire encyclical on charity – love. Pope Francis I quotes Caritas in Veritate more than any other Church document or Catholic writer. This should not come as a

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‘The break (between labor and capital) occurred in such a way that labor was separated from capital and set in opposition to it, and capital was set in opposition to labor, as though they were two impersonal forces, two production factors juxtaposed in the same “economistic” perspective. This way of stating the issue contained a fundamental error, what we can call *the error of economism*, that of considering human solely according to its economic purpose. This fundamental error of thought can and must be called *an error of materialism*, in that economism directly or indirectly includes a conviction of the primacy and superiority of the material, and directly or indirectly places the spiritual and the personal (man’s activity, moral values and such matters) in a position of subordination to material reality.’

- 29 Ibid., nos. 16-23. Like his predecessor, John XXIII, John Paul II calls out the role of the farmer. ‘Thus is necessary to proclaim and promote the dignity of work, of all work but especially of agricultural work, in which man so eloquently “subdues” the earth he has received as a gift from God and affirms his “dominion” in the visible world’. No.21.
- 30 Ibid., nos. 24-27.
- 31 Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, [On Social Care], Encyclical for the Twentieth Anniversary of Populorum Progressio, (30 December 1987).
- 32 Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, [Hundredth Year], Encyclical on the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum, (1 May 1991).
- 33 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas In Veritate*, [Charity in Truth], Encyclical on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, (29 June 2009).

surprise to the reader, in that the end mission of the Church is love itself, embodied in Christ Jesus. Benedict devotes all of Chapter Four of this encyclical to ‘The development of people, rights and duties and the environment’<sup>34</sup>.

Francis opens *Laudato Si* with a brief history starting with St. John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* moves through St. John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* and *Centesimus Annus* and ends with Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate*; and the reader is still on page two of a ninety-nine-page encyclical. Francis points out Benedict’s premise that ‘the book of nature is one and indivisible’ and ‘the deterioration of nature is closely connected to the culture which shapes human coexistence’<sup>35</sup>. It strikes me that Francis uses *Caritas in Veritate* to introduce the varying themes of this encyclical. For example, he says, ‘The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time “she must above all protect mankind from self-destruction”<sup>36</sup>; and “Purchasing is always a moral – and not simply economic – act”. Today, in a word, “the issue of environmental degradation challenges us to examine our lifestyles”<sup>37</sup>. *Laudato Si*, like it *Rerum Novarum* is a wakeup call to the world. A call ever more important in today’s world.

The run up to the release of *Laudato Si* was filled with all kinds of applause from the world media about the upcoming ‘green encyclical’; that finally the Church was recognizing climate change and the many environmental challenges facing mankind in the new millennium. This level of excitement continued for some time after the release, with many members of the media micro-focusing on what served their environmental interests. However, if anyone bothered to read and accurately report the encyclical

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34 Ibid., nos.43-52.

35 Pope Francis I, *Laudato Si*, [Praise Be], Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home, (24 May 2015), no. 6.

36 Ibid., no.79.

37 Ibid., no.206.

contents, ones would quickly discover that *Laudato Si* was not a ‘green encyclical’ but one is a very long line of Church social encyclicals. This was re-affirmed by Pope Francis I about a month later, in his address to a meeting regarding “Modern slavery and climate change”. In his remarks he said the following: ‘It is true that everything revolves around . . . this culture of care for the environment. But this “green” culture – and I say that in a positive sense – is much more than that. Caring for the environment means an attitude of human ecology. In other words, we cannot say: the person and Creation, the environment, are two separate entities. Ecology is total, it is human. This is what I wanted to express in the Encyclical ‘*Laudato Si*’: that you cannot separate humanity from the rest; there is a relationship of mutual impact, and also the resound effect when the environment is abused. Therefore . . . I say, ‘no, it is not a green encyclical, it is a social encyclical’. Because we cannot separate care for the environment from the social context, the social life of mankind. Furthermore, care for the environment is a social attitude”.<sup>38</sup> Later in the same Vatican article, Pope Francis points out the ‘idolatry of technocracy’ and says, ‘Health is also at stake. The increasing incidence of “rare” diseases, which often come from elements used to fertilize the fields, or . . . from an excess of technification’.<sup>39</sup> The article closes with what I would define as a very Steinerian statement: ‘And so, why did the Pontifical Academy of Sciences convoke mayors and city governors? Because we are aware of how to **carry out this important and profound work, from the centre to the periphery, and from the periphery to the centre**’.<sup>40</sup>

### **Rudolf Steiner- The Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture**

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38 News.va, *In the meeting on climate change and modern slavery, the Pope warns against the idolatry of technocracy*, Vatican City, 22 July 2015.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

To understand the basic tenets of biodynamic agriculture and to some extent the thinking behind it, one must have an elementary understanding of Anthroposophy<sup>41</sup> and the man behind it – Rudolf Steiner. Anthroposophy as defined by Rudolf Steiner, ‘is a path of knowledge aiming to guide the spiritual element in the human being to the spiritual in the universe’; as defined by the Goetheanum<sup>42</sup>, ‘anthroposophy means “wisdom of the human being”, or for us today, “awareness of one’s humanity”’. Rudolf Steiner was born February 1861 and left this earth March 1925. He was a philosopher and by most accounts could be considered a clairvoyant, a seer. He was the force behind the Anthroposophical movement and gave over 6,000 lectures and wrote about a dozen books. Most of the books that bear his name are actually lectures given by him and not written directly by him. Steiner lectured on medicine and pharmacy (Anthroposophic), pedagogical education (Waldorf), performing and curative arts (Eurhythm), economics, curative education (Camphill), social reform (Threefold Order), science and nature, architecture and much more, yet he was none of these professions. Steiner lectured on farming (Biodynamics) but was not a farmer; however, in a conversation with Count Polzer-Hoditz said that ‘if I did not need to nurture anthroposophy, I would become a

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41 To provide a detailed explanation of Anthroposophy will take more time and space than this paper will allow. Thus for the sake of expediency, suffice to say for those interested in learning more about the ‘study of spiritual science’, Rudolf Steiner and the relationship to Christianity, I would suggest *googling* ‘Anthroposophy and Christianity’ and click on both the *Wikipedia* site (which as of 26 March 2016, my reading) is quite accurate and also click on *rsarchive.org* site. The Rudolf Steiner Archive is a free online source to many of Steiner’s lectures. Look for ‘Anthroposophy and Christianity’, 13 July 1914, GA 155, Norrköping. Note, there is a lot of mis-information about Steiner on the internet. Darkness has a funny way of trying to cast its shadow to cover the light. However, let us never forget John 1: ‘In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God’s presence, and the Word was God’ (v. 1); ‘The light shines on in darkness, a darkness that did not overcome it’ (v. 5); and ‘The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory; The glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love’ (v. 14).

42 [Goetheanum.org/anthroposophy](http://Goetheanum.org/anthroposophy). This website will be in German, however there is an English translation site. The Goetheanum is located in Dornach, Switzerland and is the international headquarters for Anthroposophy.

farmer'.<sup>43</sup> This statement as well as comments<sup>44</sup> made during his opening at the Ag Course<sup>45</sup> leads the reader to consider that agriculture was near and dear to his heart, despite it took over four years for Steiner to actually give the course. The Ag Course was given in Koberwitz, Silesia, (now Poland), just outside of Breslau, Poland in June 1924 at Whitsuntide. I would argue the timing, Whitsun, (Pentecost) was not coincidental. Steiner gave eight lectures and four discussions over the course of nine days. These lectures covered a variety of things, that through the course of my nearly 25 years of using biodynamic practices on my Demeter-certified<sup>46</sup> farm and my 15+ years of teaching the course to future farmers and gardeners in both the U.S. and Canada, I have simplified the course into four areas: 1. Paradigm shift in thinking, 2. Use of Biodynamic Preparations, 3. Cosmic Rhythms and 4. Whole Farm Organism.

Paradigm Shift in Thinking- Steiner opens the course and throughout the course requires from his audience, to shift their thinking from the world of the seen to the world of the unseen. In chapter 1 he asks his audience to 'consider both the cosmic and earthly environments'. He talks about the various planets and the role that limestone and silica play in mediating the 'influence' from these planets. He goes on in chapter 2 to discuss the 'individuality' of the farm and how the 'forces' above the ground are different than the 'forces' below the ground. In chapter 3, he goes into greater detail of how those

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43 Selg, Peter, 'The Agriculture Course, Koberwitz, Whitsun 1924', Temple Lodge, Forest Row, England, 2010, Preface.

44 Creeger, Catherine E., and Gardner, Malcolm, 'Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture by Rudolf Steiner', Bio-Dynamic Farming and Gardening Assoc., Kimberton, PA, 1993, pg. 14.

'Please keep in mind, however, that although people have been asking for a course like this for a long time, this is the first time that I am undertaking such a course out of the heart of our anthroposophical striving. Such a course is by no means simple or undemanding, for the interests of agriculture are bound up with the broadest spheres of human life, as you will see from the course itself.

45 The official title for the agriculture course was 'Spiritual Foundations for the Renewal of Agriculture' or in short, the ag course.

46 Demeter© certification is the only certifier of biodynamic agriculture.

‘influences’ or more accurately defined ‘forces’ are manifested in the spiritualized elements of oxygen, carbon, sulfur, nitrogen and hydrogen and their role in the health of the farm. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 go into great detail regarding the making and use of the 9 biodynamic preparations. Chapter 6 also includes the relationship between the Moon and the earth, as it relates to plant disease, as well as the relationship between the Zodiac (constellations) and animal and plant life. Chapter 7 discusses the need to recognize the ‘subtle’ interactions in nature. The role of trees whether as orchards or forests/woodland affect the farm; and finally the intricate and must relationship between plants and animals. Chapter 8 closes with certain specifics of livestock feeding as well as the significances of various vegetables. Nestled in between these eight lectures are four discussions. Steiner provided his audience an opportunity to ask specific questions regarding either something he said or practical farming questions. Each of these chapters requires the audience (reader) to shift and change the way one views nature, the earth, the cosmos and in the end his/herself. My experience has led me to conclude: the farm is a symphony and I the farmer am the conductor. The universe (God) presents me with a score (musical composition) and it is up to me as conductor to fuse the melodies and harmonies provided by the plants, animals, wildlife, soil life and cosmos (planets and constellations) together to produce magnificent performance that is reflected in not only the health (appearance) of the farm but in the quality of what the farm produces (food and fodder). I can assure you, that this is no easy task. And for this reason, in the above words of St. John XXIII, being a farmer is a ‘noble vocation’.

Use of Biodynamic Preparations - As noted in the previous paragraph summary of the Ag Course, Chapters 4,5 and 6 contain the details for the making and using of the nine biodynamic preparations (preps). (I specify nine, because in many instances the last prep discussed by Steiner is BD 508<sup>47</sup>, *Equisetum arvense*, is typically under used by many BD practitioners.) Chapter 4 details preparations 500-horn manure and 501-horn silica. Steiner talks above the balancing of forces using BD 500 on the ground and BD

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47 The preparation numbering system, BD 500-509 was derived by the ‘Ag experimental circle’ that was suggested by Steiner and set-up after the course to ‘work out the practical use and applications’ presented by the course. I have not been able to locate the ‘source’ of the why the numbers 500-508 were used.

501 on the plant and how these substances affect plant life and improve and enliven soil health. He provides specifics and the reasons for the use of a cow's horn and hoofs when making these two preps. In Chapter 5, Steiner presents his audience with the specifics of making what is known as the 'compost preps', BD 502-507. He provides the reasoning for each prep's combination of plant material, sheath and timing required for the making of the preparation. All the preps, with the exception of BD 508, are made at a certain time of the year in order to be exposed to specified 'cosmic influence'. Keep in mind, man only places the various plant and animal materials together as directed by Steiner at certain times of the year. But it is God or the divine cosmos or cosmic Presence that actually creates through the transformation<sup>48</sup> of these raw materials, imbued with divine cosmic forces that in the end the final product is created. In other words, man cannot 'make' the BD preps, he can only facilitate the 'creation' of them; for in truth, God created all the preparation materials, the cosmos and the planets and constellations that in the end unite to produce what is known as Biodynamic Preparations. As noted above, the last and easily, the most under used of the Steiner's indications<sup>49</sup>, BD 508 is discussed in Chapter 6. In this chapter Steiner points out how different planets can influence pests, weeds and plant diseases. In particular, he discusses the relationship of the Moon to the earth and how the Moon's connection with water, influences plant diseases. He then points out the last in the series of BD Preps, BD 508 as a remedy to mitigate and/or prevent fungal based plant disease.

Cosmic Rhythms- Steiner discusses the role of the divine cosmos or what is considered 'celestial' forces and their interaction with earthly or 'terrestrial' forces. For example, he points out the necessity of balancing 'calcium' (limestone) forces with 'silica' (sand) forces at any given time and the problems that may arise if these forces are not balanced. He teaches his audience that the 'calcium forces' are associated with the

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48 Later in the paper, I will discuss the parallels of the BD preps with the Church's sacraments.

49 Throughout the course, Steiner gave only 'indications' on how to do things (to include the preparations). He most urgently proposed that the course participants/farmers go out and put the indications to practical use in order to discover actual results and to develop protocols of use in varying environments and farming situations.

nearby planets (Moon, Venus, Mercury) and the ‘silica forces’ are associated with the distant planets (Mars, Jupiter, Saturn). He goes on in various chapters to provide indications on how these forces as well as their corresponding planetary connections affect not only the soil, but specifically plant life, as well as animal life. Most biodynamic farmers make use of calendars that lay out the known movements of planets and constellations. One of the more popular calendars that is in use, is known as the Stella Natura. Although weather does not always allow for the perfect timing of harvest or tilling or planting, at some point things just have to happen. However, the one thing that I always time with the calendar is the making and using of the BD preps. When I look around to what is happening in my neighborhood and neighboring farmers, I can definitely see the difference not only the biodynamic practices as laid out in the Ag Course, but the results brought about by perfect timing of preparation applications. Keep in mind, the BD preps do not function like standard organic or conventional substances. The BD Preps are made and used in the world of ‘forces’ (spiritual-unseen) not substances (matter-seen). It is for this very reason, there is a fair amount of push back by most farmers, even organic farmers. For to be a good and successful biodynamic farmer or gardener, one must learn to ‘see’ not only with the eyes, but more importantly, with the heart. Thus one is not only employing the use of the physical sense of seeing or (more correctly stated) observing nature in action, but outstanding biodynamics, requires the employment of the heart, the soul force of feeling.<sup>50</sup> Thus one can easily understand how the unseen soul force of feeling can match up with the unseen cosmic contributions. In other words, most conscious people can physically see or physically feel the effects of biodynamics. For example, one can observe the ‘life’ that exists in a biodynamic field/farm versus the ‘death’ in a neighboring conventional farm<sup>51</sup>; or when someone eats quality biodynamic food, one can feel the effects of food that has life versus conventional food that has no life. My experience has demonstrated that people eat less quantities of

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50 My apologies for not being able to cite the lecture source, but in the many years of reading Steiner, I came across a lecture in which Steiner stated (paraphrasing), ‘man must come down from his head and up from his will and move out through his heart, in order to move properly in the world’. Essentially what he was saying is that man must receive from and give to the world through the heart. This concept makes a lot of sense, if one is familiar with Christ Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels. See John 1:14, John 3:16, John 13:34.

BD food versus conventional food and have more energy because the BD food gives the body what it needs.<sup>52</sup> The key to achieving ‘life force’ in the food, in the plants and animals and in the soil, is understanding, embracing, and implementing the ideas and concepts that Steiner sets forth in the Ag Course in order to create what he terms, the farm ‘individuality’ or more formally known as the whole farm organism.

Whole Farm Organism- The goal in biodynamic farming is to create a whole farm organism. One that produces its own fertility; one that has the ‘right’ balance of animals; one that is closed to all outside inputs. This is possible, however making it economically feasible is the greater task in today’s modern landscape. Most economically sustainable and independent for-profit, privately held biodynamic farms are not completely closed. The main reason for this is the way the world views farms in general and the fact that, at least here in America, people don’t really understand the true cost of food. Today, America typically spends less than 10% of their disposable income on their food. According to USDA reports<sup>53</sup>, Americans spent almost 18% of their disposable income on all food purchases (in home and away from home) in 1960. Where has this ‘extra’ income (approx. 8%) been spent? Who knows. However, given that less than 2% of the population actually farms for a living, I would suggest not to the farmer. Even though many biodynamic farms are like mine, horticulturally diversified, yet being able to have a livestock component sufficient to support the necessary fertility

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51 I live in one of the poorest (socio-economic) regions in the United States; what I call America’s ghetto. However, this region (central San Joaquin Valley) is one of the richest agricultural regions in the world. Quite the irony. I would argue one the major reasons for this situation, is that a lion’s share of the farming done here is conventional in nature, however organics has increased over the past 10 years. Having said this, I witness every day, the ‘death forces’ that conventional agriculture employs. Killing a weed, killing a bug, killing a fungus. In my world this represents the ‘culture of death’. Biodynamic is about working with and not against nature.

52 Once again, I cannot cite the exact source, but Steiner said in one of his non-ag lectures that by the end of the (20<sup>th</sup>) century, food would be just filler, because it would not have the life force that biodynamics provides.

53 USDA, Economic Research Service, Food Expenditure Series (2013). [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov).

requirements is quite difficult, but most farms are trying to find an economic solution to this goal.

### **Catholic Social Teaching- Four Pillars**

If one would look at the ‘Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the (Catholic) Church’, one finds there are numerous components that comprise the compendium. For the purpose of this paper, I shall look at the four main pillars of the Church’s social doctrine: 1. Dignity of the human person, 2. Common good, 3. Solidarity and 4. Subsidiary.<sup>54</sup>

Dignity of the human person- In honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pope John Paul II presented to the world *Centesimus Annus*<sup>55</sup> - ‘a “re-reading” or “look back” at the text itself in order to discover anew the richness of the fundamental principles which it (*Rerum Novarum*) formulated for dealing with the question of the condition of workers’.<sup>56</sup> He goes to say, ‘there is the fruitful activity of many millions of people, who, spurred on by the social Magisterium, have sought to make that teaching the inspiration for their involvement in the world. Acting either as individuals or joined together in various groups, associations and organizations, *these people represent a great movement for the **defense of the human person and the safeguarding of human dignity***’.<sup>57</sup> The dignity of the human person is not only the cornerstone of Catholic social teaching, but it is basis for the Church herself. Paul teaches us in Romans 12:4-5, ‘Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all the members have the

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54 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 2004. Pgs.71-92. There are 8 principles of the Church’s social doctrine, however I have chosen to use the main four that appear over and over in numerous Papal Encyclicals.

55 John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, [Hundredth Year], Encyclical Letter on the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, (1 May 1991).

56 *Ibid.*, no. 3.

57 *Ibid.* Author’s emphasis.

same function, so too we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members of one another'. Later in 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul says, 'You, then are the body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it'. The Church teaches whether professed Christian or not, Christ Jesus came for all, died for all and became man, so in the words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, 'the Son's obedience on the Cross is the place where man's divinization is accomplished. Man can become God, not by making himself God, but by allowing himself to be made "Son". Here in this gesture of Jesus as the Son, and nowhere else, the Kingdom of God is realized.'<sup>58</sup>

Common Good- What is the common good? The Church teaches us 'the principle of the common good, to which every aspect of social life must be related if it is to attain its fullest meaning, stems from the dignity, unity and equality of all people'<sup>59</sup>. Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes*, describes the role of common good as 'the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily. The resulting rights and obligations are consequently the concern of the entire human race. . . The social order and its development must constantly yield to the good of the person, since the order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way around . . . The social order requires constant improvement: it must be founded in truth, built on justice, and enlivened by love. . . The Spirit of God, who, with wonderful providence, directs the course of time and renews the face of the earth, assists at this development. The ferment of the Gospel has aroused and continues to arouse in human hearts an unquenchable thirst for human dignity'<sup>60</sup>. St. John XXIII closes this description of the common good as follows: 'the nature of the common good that every single citizen has the right to share in it – although in different ways, depending on his tasks, merits and circumstances. Hence,

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58 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1988. Pgs. 64-65.

59 Compendium, No. 164.

60 Austin Flannery, OP, *Vatican II*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 2014. *Gaudium et Spes*, [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], no. 26. Pgs. 191-92.

every civil authority must strive to promote the common good in the interest of all, without favoring any individual citizen or category of citizen. As Pope Leo XIII insisted: “The civil power must not be subservient to the advantage of any one individual, or of some few persons; inasmuch as it was established for the common good of all.”<sup>61</sup>

Solidarity- If anyone is old enough to remember when John Paul II ascended to the Chair of St. Peter, then one would remember the Solidarity Workers Movement in Poland. This movement supported by Pope John Paul II rose to successfully, (through semi-free elections) take control of the Nation of Poland. This eventually led to complete breakdown of control of the communist party over the country and started the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union. Thus 2 years prior to the ‘semi-free elections’, it came as no surprise that the Polish Pope issued yet another social doctrine encyclical on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*, entitled ‘*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*’, or ‘On Social Care’. This encyclical spoke of the necessity of establishing ‘solidarity’ among the peoples of the earth. Many parts of this encyclical were drawn together to form the meaning of ‘solidarity’ within the Church’s social doctrine. ‘The message of the Church’s social doctrine regarding solidarity clearly shows that there exists an intimate bond between solidarity and the common good, between solidarity and the universal destination of goods, between solidarity and equality among men and peoples, between solidarity and peace in the world’.<sup>62</sup>

Subsidiary- ‘Subsidiary is among the most constant and characteristic directives of the Church’s social doctrine . . . On the basis of this principle, all societies of a superior order must adopt attitudes of help (“*subsidium*”) – therefore of support, promotion, development – with respect to lower-order societies’.<sup>63</sup> In other words, ‘The principle of subsidiary protects people from abuses by higher-level social authority and

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61 Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, no. 56

62 Compendium, no. 194, pg. 86.

63 *ibid.*, no.185-86, pg. 81.

calls on these same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfil their duties. This principle is imperative because every person, family and intermediate group has something to offer to the community. Experience shows that the denial of subsidiary, or its limitation in the name of an alleged democratization or equality of all members of society, limits and sometimes even destroys the spirit of freedom and initiative.’<sup>64</sup>

### **Biodynamic Agriculture and Laudato Si**

As was noted above, Laudato Si is a social encyclical jammed packed with eloquence and urgency that only the occupant of the Chair of Saint Peter could deliver. Pope Francis I, with the help of his predecessors, continues to remind the world that not only is Christ the center of the universe in whatever language or description one may use; but that ‘In the beginning, God created heaven and earth, . . . Then God said: Let us make man in our image after our likeness. Let them have dominion over (all) . . . God blessed them saying: Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.’ (Gen 1:1, 26, 28) I would argue that ‘to have dominion and subdue’ does not mean to take and disregard. God made creation for man and man for creation. However, as mankind has moved through time, to the present, it seems he has forgotten that Creation is not only his home, but is his very sustenance, nourishment, - life. Thus before we truly take care our environment, we must first recognize the dignity of the human person, not only our neighbor, but our very self; for St. Paul teaches us, ‘Are you not aware that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, and you are that temple’.<sup>65</sup> The Church in all of its teaching, calls all men to be holy, for God told the Israelites in the desert, ‘For I, the Lord, am your God; and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy’. (Lev 11:44)

Rudolf Steiner teaches us, ‘Humanity has only two choices: either start once again, in every field of endeavor, to learn from the whole of nature, from the relationships

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64      *ibid.*, no. 187, pg. 82

65      1 Cor. 3:16-17.

within the whole cosmos, or to allow both nature and human life to degenerate and die off. There is no other choice. Today, no less than in ancient times, we are in need of knowledge that can really enter into the inner workings of nature'.<sup>66</sup>

Francis' call to life is the same call to life that Steiner proposed in Agriculture Course of 1924. And although Biodynamic Agriculture cannot solve all the problems that Laudato Si presents, let us not forget Steiner's opening remarks on that Saturday in June 1924, 'There is practically no field of human endeavor that does not relate to agriculture in some way. Seen from whatever perspective you choose, agriculture touches on every single aspect of human life'.<sup>67</sup>

Both Biodynamic Agriculture and the Church's Social Doctrine are built on the same rock called – freedom. Biodynamic practices can be applied on most rustic, bush, peasant farm, as well as the most technological sophisticated first world agricultural enterprise<sup>68</sup> because for both there is freedom to work with nature and not against her; to embrace and respect her, not try to power over her; to be grateful and know that all one receives from nature is a gift and blessing, not just a product for sale. All 'new real' wealth comes from Creation – four sources from the Earth and one course from the heavens. The Earth gives us agriculture, forestry, oil and mining and ocean fishing. The heavens, gives us ideas. Ideas that through the course of time, created opportunities for added wealth as natural resources are brought to market and for man to sustain life in difficult climates and extend life through engineering and medicine. The greatest of these gifts is agriculture; not because it is renewal, but it is necessary for life.

Biodynamic agriculture is not agribusiness. It is steeped in culture and lets the business follow. That of course takes the very same faith that calls man to Christ. Yet I

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66 Creeger, pg. 40.

67 Ibid., pg. 14.

68 However, I would argue the peasant would 'see' the prospects and benefits faster than the 'educated' sophisticated farmer. Mainly because the peasant farmer is smart enough to get out of his own way.

would argue that biodynamic agriculture is the farming for the future; for when technology that is built upon the power of electricity may fail us, the simple and free gift of the Sun (Son) shall never fail us.

The old saying, 'the more things change, the more things stay the same' may be appropriate for the closing. Although the Church has for over 125 years called man to a higher order of conduct, to life, to love of his fellow man through Papal Encyclicals, and Steiner's agriculture lectures are approaching their 92<sup>nd</sup> anniversary in June 2016, it may very well be the message and theories of two MIT professors that the world will finally embrace. Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, tell us in the Introduction to their book, "Leading from the Emerging Future": 'We have entered an Age of Disruption. Yet the possibility of profound personal, societal, and global renewal has never been more possible. Now is our time. Our moment of disruption deals with death and rebirth. What's dying is an old civilization and a mindset of maximum "me" – maximum material consumption, bigger is better, and special-interest-group-driven decision-making that has led us into a state of *collectively creating results that nobody wants*. . . This inner shift, from fighting the old to sensing and presencing an emerging future possibility, is at the core of all deep leadership work today. It's a shift that requires us to expand our thinking from the head to the heart. It is a shift from an *ego*-system awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself to an *eco*-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself. When operating with *ego*-system awareness, we are driven by the concerns and intentions of our *small ego* self. When operating with *eco*-system awareness, we are driven by the concern that is informed by the well-being of the whole. The prefix *eco*- goes back to the Greek *oikos* and concerns the "whole house". The word economy can be traced back to the same root. Transforming our current *ego*-system economy into an emerging *eco*-system economy means reconnecting economic thinking with its real root, which is the well-being of the whole house rather than money-making or the well-being of just a few of its inhabitants. But while the whole house was for the Greeks something very local, today it also concerns the well-being of our global communities and planetary *eco*-systems.'<sup>69</sup>

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69 Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, *Leading from the Emerging Future*, Berrett-Koehler Publisher, San Francisco, 2012. Pgs. 1-2.

Sounds familiar, does it not.

### Appendix- Summary

Biodynamic Agriculture	Church Social Teaching	General Comparison
Paradigm Shift in Thinking	Dignity of the Human Person	Both are required first steps to proceed ahead with understanding each respective teaching.
Use of Biodynamic Preparations	Common Good	This is the most difficult explanation. Both are universal in nature. The preps affect the soil/plant/animal/human health for the good. Common

		good to work, is inclusive of the whole.
Use of Cosmic Rhythms	Solidarity	Both concepts require a collaborative exchange between subjects – a unification to create a whole.
Create Whole Farm Organism	Subsidiary	Address any issues at the lowest basic level. Both concepts respect and recognize the closed system of a specific ‘community’. Honors the role the individual plays within the community.

This chart is by no means set in stone. The paper attempted to demonstrate that although Catholic Social Teaching and Biodynamic Agriculture are separate, independent and address very different issues, they both operate to support man’s independence and freedom to be. The Church’s social doctrine are in place to support the soul and spirit of man. Biodynamic agriculture was designed to heal the earth and in turn heal man. Laudato Si lays out a number of issues that require correction. As it relates to agriculture, Biodynamic practices can assist in providing corrective action; whether it is food production, employment, clean environment, etc.