

**People, Pope and Planet: A Hermeneutic and Spectacle Analysis of *Laudato Si'* for Global Citizenship Educators**

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**Abstract:** Global citizenship education presents a number of challenges for educators, including the wide variety of texts available to be studied. I explore *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' 2015 statement on global warming and human development. *Laudato Si'* includes contents that are broad, connective, and significant/relevant, making it a strong candidate for inclusion in global citizenship education. I examine the text via two theoretical inquiries—hermeneutics and spectacle—to recommend instructional practices appropriate to this text and many similar ones. The pedagogical recommendations focus on supporting teachers engaged in global citizenship education.

**Key words:** hermeneutic theory, spectacle, global citizenship education, global warming/climate change.

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Teaching for global citizenship is challenging. The wide berth of content, the range of skills, the ever-changing nature of global discourse, the cacophony of texts and voices, and the ambiguity of global citizenship itself: all of these factors and more confound efforts to educate for and about global citizenship. Frameworks for global citizenship education [GCE, hereafter] developed by the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Oxfam, and the Maastricht Declaration, among others, provide broad guidance to sort through what is and is not GCE, along with support materials for teachers and schools so inclined (O'Loughlin, 2002; Oxfam, 2015; UNESCO, 2014). There remains uncertainty about how one teaches for and about global citizenship, however. My aim in this piece is not to dispel this ambiguity or resolve all of the problems associated with GCE. Rather, I offer a way of teaching global texts befitting GCE through two analytical spaces—hermeneutic and spectacle—to model recommended instructional approaches for reading global texts.

What is a global text? People come into contact with a wide range of texts, such as advertisements, memes, reports, news articles, and social media links throughout a normal,

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digitally connected day. Sorting out which warrant attention is a teacher's problem as classroom time and student attention are limited. I suggest three criteria for educators to use when choosing global texts appropriate for classroom use. First, the text must have a *broad scope* in terms of what it is about and its intended audience. These are texts that engage with issues that potentially affect a large segment of the worlds' population rather than one isolated area or concern. This choice presents a certain danger, for texts with a *broad scope* may not attend to issues of less breadth but of grave significance for particular groups, thus teachers ought to consider the range of materials put before students comprehensively over a course of study so as to invite counterpoints and avoid marginalizing perspectives. Second, the text should be *connective* to other issues or problems and should readily relate and connect to a wider context. Third, the text ought to have *relevance* and *significance* to the thinking and potential action of student learners (Gaudelli & Siegel, 2010). Some examples of global texts include the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, a World Health Organization bulletin on Ebola, or one of the many manifestos issued by ISIS. These texts, among myriad others, provide rich learning opportunities to develop students' understanding of the world. Using this sieve, teachers can choose texts that are worthy of already scarce classroom time. I selected the recent encyclical written by Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, since it is *broad* in the scope of global issues it addresses, *connective* to a variety of social, environmental, and political contexts that surround it, and *significant/relevant* to the lives and interests of students. *Laudato Si'*, which translates to 'praise be to you,' is the Vatican's official statement about global warming. In exploring how *Laudato Si'* might be used by educators interested in promoting GCE, I pursue two lines of analysis, a hermeneutic and spectacle path, both revealing ways of teaching for and about global citizenship.

**Background: GCE and *Laudato Si'***

UNESCO's conception of GCE provides a useful starting point for educators wishing to engage in GCE:

Global citizenship education aims to empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. (UNESCO, 2014)

This admittedly extensive conception has a few noteworthy features. First, the focus on empowering learners to become citizens who see the world problematically and act to improve

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the situation socially is notable. This represents a fundamental shift in education away from the substance, contents, or inputs toward processes of thinking about what students are able to do with knowledge and content developed in schools. The breadth of content is also significant in UNESCO's conceptualization as they implicitly aggregate human rights education, education for sustainability, intercultural education, peace education, and a variety of others to the wider service of GCE (Gaudelli & Schmidt, 2017). Multimodal forms of learning and resources are highlighted and participatory modalities are encouraged to harness connective technologies. Also, there is recognition that tools alone will not create the GCE currently required, as UNESCO calls attention to the cultivation of dispositions of openness, caring, and empathy accompanied by critical, creative, and innovative thinking. This attention to soft skills and orientations is noteworthy as it suggests a less mechanistic and formulaic approach to GCE, one that embraces the uncertain terrain of emotional and aesthetic landscapes. Yet, there are problems with UNESCO's conception as well as strengths. The phrase "face and solve global challenges" may be alienating since most people are unable to see the direct results of their work, even when aimed at solving global problems. While the phrase is intended as a call for collective action, the tendency to read texts as pertaining to individuals is typical. Thus, one might not be able to imagine how one's individual choices and actions may contribute ultimately to a global solution (see Gaudelli, 2016, chapter 2).

Environment and sustainable development education (SDE) represent a species of GCE of concern to this article given its relationship to *Laudato Si'*. As Spring (2004) notes, there are four typical varieties of global education in circulation, including nation-building, global free market preparation (e.g., neoliberal), globalizing morality (e.g., human rights education), and environmental/sustainability education that focuses on human-nature interdependencies. Schattle (2008) notes in his review of numerous interviews a similar typology, one that includes environmental concerns as a specific type of global citizenship in wide circulation. Oxley and Morris (2013) note, however, that while environmental education is in the orbit of what constitutes GCE, this type is "uncommon" compared to the neoliberal and nationalistic varieties of GCE (p. 313). They explain that one of the confounding dimensions of environmental/sustainability education is a presupposition inherent within more radical versions of the discourse that attributes rights and protections to "the environment" as a type of sovereign entity. This perspective troubles the default assumption of many that GCE should and ought to concern people and their development, primarily, and thus may explain the relative diminution of environmental/sustainable development discourse within GCE.

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Pope Francis offered *Laudato Si'* [LS, hereafter] in July, 2015, a dramatic letter detailing his interpretation of Catholic teachings on social development and global warming. LS was leaked a few days prior to its planned release by forces within the Vatican who wished to undercut the media spectacle Pope Francis intended to create. LS is somewhat surprising in that Francis has put the Catholic Church on record on an issue that remains politically controversial around the world, since acting to reduce carbon outputs demands significant economic and social changes. But Francis' tendency to broach controversy has become characteristic given other moments in his papacy—including washing the feet of homeless people at Easter, the signal of openness to priests marrying, and the recent decision to allow priests to absolve abortion decisions through confession—all important decisions signaling the direction of Francis' papacy (“Pope Francis to Wash...” 2013; “Pope Says Favors...” 2014; Squires, 2015; Yardley & Goodstein, 2015; Yardley & Povoledo, 2015).

Encyclicals are a means of outreach that serve as periodic synthetic statements about Catholic doctrine. These “letters in circulation” are intended to offer guidance on a variety of concerns, some tied directly to interpreting Church teachings, others oriented to the wider expanse of humanity and its social conditions. The Church has used encyclicals since 1891 to offer teachings and commentary on social life (Maina, 2011). For example, in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (The Social Concern of the Church, 1987), Pope John Paul II pointed to grave and growing economic disparities in the world as a threat to peace, freedom, and human dignity. According to Maina, “Through the common good teaching... the integral wellbeing of all people is viewed as central to the Church teaching” (p. 5). *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* was in fact written to commemorate and update *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples, 1967), which demonstrates ongoing attention to social issues that transcend Catholic faith and positioning to address all of humanity. These articulations have been referred to as the social doctrine of the church.

The social doctrine of the church has often stood in opposition to modern society, as the latter is premised on free market liberalism and the economic freedom of individuals, upholding atavistic accumulation over the social good. “The Church, in its social teachings, continually stigmatizes the individualism of modern society and the supposed virtues of the free market for ensuring social stability and order” (Laurent, 2010, p. 520). LS falls neatly within this tradition of raising concerns about economic freedom that eschews a robust commitment to the commonwealth. Francis' focus on the environment, however, offers prominence to ecology that adds to the Church's extant social doctrine tradition. In *Populorum Progressio* (1967), for example, there is

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no mention of “ecology” or “environment,” and when the Earth is invoked, it is situated as being squarely within the dominion of humankind:

Now if the earth truly was created to provide man with the necessities of life and the tools for his own progress, it follows that every man has the right to glean what he needs from the earth. (p. 4)

Thus, *LS* represents a significant departure in Church teachings about the environment, leaning away from stewardship and possession and toward interrelationship and mutuality.

### **A Hermeneutic Analysis of *Laudato Si'* and Teaching Suggestions**

In *LS*, Pope Francis displays a reverence for nature on its own terms rather than in reference to humanity, a significant revision of the social doctrine encyclicals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that focused exclusively on human development and viewed the Earth as being at the hands of humankind. Francis elevates the environment to something more than resources and repositories. The environment is for Francis a sovereign entity comprised of myriad, interdependent species each with dignity in the eyes of God:

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled. (p. 11)

Nature for Francis is a sanctified space that ought to induce awe and wonderment, as compared to a purely economic way of thinking about the environment as filled with resources to be extracted and used by people:

Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right. (p. 25)

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Francis' attempt to reinvigorate elements of the Church that stand against economic modernism reflects similar movements in Judaic Kabbalah and Islamic Sufism, mystic traditions that pre-date modernity and have experienced a revival in an era of rapid economic globalization (Cohen, 2003; Lawton, 2011; Saberi, 2006; Suliman, 2016; Zajac, 2014).

LS is more than a call to better appreciate the wonder of nature and refigure our relationship to it, however, as Francis also makes a radical appeal to forego consumption:

We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity. That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth. (p. 141)

The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. (p. 150)

Francis' invokes degrowth discourse along with the commonwealth notion of previous social doctrine encyclicals (Latouche, 1996). He suggests that spiritual fulfillment through being in touch with nature is axiomatic to human satisfaction. Francis contends that global warming is a direct result of modernity's accumulative bent and that an earnest conversation about what constitutes *enough*, in relation to material goods and economic growth, is desperately needed globally, especially among people who are already affluent by global comparison.

Francis' critique differs from advocates of sustainable development. His argument indicts the global economic system, not just the excessive use of carbon by individuals and states in the global North. Michael Löwy (2016) notes that Francis does not focus on individual behaviors but the "system of commercial relations and ownership which is structurally perverse" (p. 50). This move is significant given its radical nature; namely, a challenge to the consumption/disposal cycle that feeds ever-increasing economic growth amidst a growing North-South wealth gap and a beleaguered, warming planet. The more politically palatable call for "sustainability" is actually impugned by Francis as a ruse, as Löwy notes, one that "absorbs the language and values of ecology into the categories of finance and technocracy, and the social and environmental responsibility of businesses often gets reduced to a series of marketing and image-enhancing measures" (p. 52). Francis asserts that sustainable development has been an insufficient intervention, and a more direct, systemic reconfiguration is urgently needed to rebalance what rampant economic globalization has wrought.

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Francis' criticism of North-style economic development also connects to his skepticism regarding scientific ways of knowing. Francis and the Church are by no means anti-science but are concerned with blind adherence to an economic system without a robust accounting of its benefits and consequences, an approach similar to his thinking about science. The rhetorical distance Francis offers in *LS* from science may also help explain why his voice has garnered such widespread adoration in a time of rising fatigue with science-as-usual. Neither Francis nor the Church is seeking an end to science or global capitalism, *per se*, but rather a recalibration of how science, economic development, and the biosphere are balanced in relation to each other. As Jeffrey Sachs (2015) notes:

*Laudato Si'* offers a compelling, eloquent and reasoned appeal to a *new way of understanding*, an inspiring call on humanity to use reason *and faith* to create a world in which the economy is once again bound by the common good, and in which the common good embraces the reverence for the physical Earth and other species [emphasis added].

Francis echoes concerns raised in educational research and research among other social service professions about the limitations of scientific ways of knowing of people in complex organizations. Fields like education, healthcare, and social work have been beset with scientism, the belief that scientific methodology is the only path to knowledge creation, a stance which diminishes situational and contextual realms of knowledge-making that have long informed these fields (St. Pierre, 2006), not to mention discourses of revelation that are foundational to religious teachings.

There are other glimpses of Francis' efforts to tamp down the excesses of scientism as the sole basis of planetary climate discussions and economic development. His use of the phrase "well up spontaneously" invokes an embodied response that resounds as true, a turn of phrase of particular interest. His word choice has important parallels to the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960/2011), who writes of the truth "shining forth" around interpretive moments, a type of possession by truth that makes it self-evident, beyond empirical proof or confirmation (p. 478). The modernist division of rational/a-rational and non-rational selves is treated skeptically through Francis' article, as he suggests a more holistic way of knowing and being that includes, but is not limited to, science. And while Gadamer could not justifiably be considered a post-empirical thinker, he was indeed sharply critical of the hubris that too often accompanies Western ways of knowing typified by scientific empiricism (Gadamer, 1998). *LS* posits that rigid scientific empiricism is alone insufficient to move people to know about and act on global warming:

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It cannot be maintained that empirical science provides a complete explanation of life, the interplay of all creatures and the whole of reality. This would be to breach the limits imposed by its own methodology. If we reason only within the confines of the latter, little room would be left for aesthetic sensibility, poetry, or even reason's ability to grasp the ultimate meaning and purpose of things. (*LS*, p. 146)

It is worth noting that the second chapter of the encyclical does offer scientific claims about atmospheric warming. Francis consulted with leading experts on economics and sustainable development, among them Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University's Earth Institute. Clearly, he was concerned that if the whole of the piece spoke to notions of human flourishing in relationship to the biosphere and the need to limit the excessive, consumptive lifestyles of the global North, that the text might be diminished. Francis' focus on the environment, with particular attention to its mystical and aesthetic qualities, reframes the conversation he wishes to engage. But the unmistakable thrust of the encyclical draws upon spiritual evidence of inseparability of people from their environment and the need for the cultivation of human-biosphere relations as familial (e.g., Francis' repeated usage of "sister" and "mother" in reference to Earth) and the Earth as a sovereign entity/body (e.g., the Amazon and Congo as "lungs") hosting other non-human animals deserving dignity and respect.

Pope Francis, previously named Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was the first of 266 popes to choose the mystic<sup>1</sup> St. Francis of Assisi as his namesake. Choosing St. Francis was significant, as this saint from the 13<sup>th</sup> century represents an earlier version of the Church, one that predates the modern era. Despite belonging to the Jesuit order, or the Society of Jesus founded by St. Ignatius Loyola in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and at the dawn of the modern era, Pope Francis reached back four centuries prior to venerate a saint who was known for speaking to non-human animals, singing to plants, and for his love of the natural world. Francis' choice both to venerate St. Francis and to author *LS* signals a significant shift in Catholic teaching, both internally and toward all of humanity, to value the earth, environment, and its inhabitants for their inherent dignity.

*LS* as an encyclical offers a textual forum to signal this shift from human development to environmental sanctity within the church's social doctrine. As Garry Wills (2015), a Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the term *mysticism* and *mystic* is not intended in a pejorative sense but rather a descriptive manner, pointing toward a pattern of religious activity that has been described as 'mystical' (see Underwood, 2009/2010). This description centers on the fact that there is, among all world religions, a desire to move beyond the immediate and material conditions of life and toward a deeper unity with a deity. The path toward communion is often characterized by eschewing materiality in favor of a deeper experience in being.



historian of a critical orientation, notes, following the loss of state power, popes relied on encyclicals to enunciate beliefs and directions: “The encyclical was the main vehicle for getting world attention” (p. 118). This has led, however, to encyclical wars among left and right forces within and outside the church, as “conservatives and liberals picked their favorite parts of encyclicals to use against each other” (p. 119). Francis’ papacy has been interpreted as a turning away from the conservative order of his two most recent predecessors, decried in some quarters and heralded in others. Wills demonstrates, however, that the momentary left/right dust-ups are relatively minor compared to the seismic change the Church has endured for millennia, not the least of which is the loss of monarchic control and state authority.

Interpreting encyclicals today, then, it is worth noting this longer trajectory and how the current iteration fits within it. What may appear to be a monumental shift in church thinking both affirms some earlier belief (e.g., mysticism) and is rarely as monumental as it may appear within its own time. The novelties of *LS* notwithstanding, it would be an error to read the work as fundamentally out of character with other such papal declarations. Francis cites, for example, numerous other encyclicals that represent traditional views. To this point, Francis largely views his work as continuing rather than fundamentally altering the volition of the church’s teachings, knowing that as a change agent, he is still obligated by the weight of his office to “care for continuity and minimize disruption... he [Francis] cannot knock the props out from under the throne he sits on” (Wills, 2015, xviii).

Francis’ work is purposefully not a hermetic text but one that is explicitly ecumenical. What is his thinking within this layer? Francis is consciously writing a global text, offered as much for those outside the church as those within or once affiliated with it. *LS*, like social doctrine encyclicals that came before, speaks of humanity rather than *Catholic* humanity. Francis is positioning himself as a global thought leader, not unlike the Dalai Lama, who reaches far beyond those within the fold to assume a stance of spiritual leadership in a secular world. But Francis is also signaling to those who once belonged to the flock and have strayed an assurance that the Church is committed to a moral sectarian vision, a commitment that requires not being tone deaf to contemporary social political issues and movements. This can be read as an attempt to overcome the image of inaction that bedeviled the Church regarding Pope Pius XII’s disturbing silence during the Holocaust (Coppa, 2011; Phayer, 1998).

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*Teaching Suggestions*

Educators pursuing interpretations of *LS* ought to engage students in a central question: *What does the text mean?* Related questions might include:

- What is Pope Francis saying in *LS*?
- Why is he saying that?
- How does he use language (and other encyclical references) to make his claims? Why?
- How have others responded to *LS*, both within and beyond the Catholic faith?

These descriptive questions may be dismissed as too didactic to engage students, but a hermeneutic orientation recognizes that description is deeply interpretive. Description holds out the possibility that students can connect their personal horizon of understanding—their life experience—with the wider tradition of humanity around the issues raised in the text. Students can see themselves, for example, in light of mysticism, materialism, and personal fulfillment, providing them with an opportunity both to grasp what is being said to weigh those issues in their own lives.

A second layer of hermeneutic analysis might consider the traditions manifest in *LS*. The text is built upon substructures of meaning that are delivered up to the present. Mysticism, for example, renders a strand of thought that is intelligible in the present and rooted in a tradition of seeing the world through its soulful and aesthetic aspects. Reading mysticism may seem utterly foreign to some students, as many are likely to believe that inanimate and non-sentient beings, from rocks to flora, are not spiritually endowed entities but simply inert objects. Yet, there are traces of this earlier tradition of thought in everyday commonalities, from the personification of non-human animals in literature to the imagery of forests being alive.

A third, and by no means exhaustive, layer invites students to read the text connectively, demonstrating how it is offered in response to and in contradiction with other interpretations. The “enough” premise of Francis, for instance, points to an ongoing discourse about how modernity may be facing its own end-time, a rising sentiment against instrumentality and objectification, along with an agnostic retreat from scientific inquiry as a singular discourse. By inviting readers to consider climate change differently, focusing less on science and more on sacredness, the text resounds with the growth of “spirituality without religion” gaining traction globally.

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Analyzing interpretive layers closely—inside and outside the text, the text as delivered from history and tradition, and the connectivity of the text to the present—provides a rich reading of *LS* that opens up many plausible interpretations. The aim, however, should not be to definitively assert a *true meaning* from the text, as this would belie a requisite openness that accompanies interpretation. Too, this outline of method is applicable to many similar texts, ones that have the breadth, connectivity, and significance of content that make robustly discursive readings possible.

In terms of GCE, the encyclical permits many lines of analysis and interpretation. Francis' focus on human development, for example, is a critical piece for GCE. Inviting students to read and interpret other related sources, such as advocates of increased economic development, those who seek technological solutions to global warming that would allow carbon consumption to increase exponentially, and climate change deniers, could provide an engaging point-counterpoint analysis of the assertions embedded in Francis' text. Too, it would remind students that global learning requires an encounter with diverse and conflicting perspectives while nourishing the skills to ascertain validity, trustworthiness, and reasonableness in public arguments. Lastly, GCE teachers should invite students to engage in the issues raised in *LS* beyond time spent in class. Questions like:

- What civic organizations and non-governmental organizations are addressing global warming?
- What is being done? How have policymakers responded in various governments around the world?
- What actions have been taken to address global warming and the environment within our local community?
- What more can be done?

Encouraging students to go beyond merely studying topics is fundamental to engaged citizenship. Questions like these can spark that type of work to begin, given a sound grasp of the interpretive dimensions within and connected to this global text.

### **A Spectacle Analysis of *Laudato Si'* and Teaching Suggestions**

Pope Francis was clearly aware of the spectacle-media dynamic he hoped to create as he orchestrated the release as an event and arranged it in the peak of summer in the global North. Why would Francis play in the space of spectacle when attempting to revive the loss of a sensibility that itself was precipitated by massive mediation? His strategic deploy of media is

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somewhat ironic given that media is often regarded as a source of humanity's growing disassociation from the natural world. Guy Debord's (1966/2000) writing on spectacle suggests that separation and isolation are foundational both to modernity and to the rise of a society of spectacle. Debord writes, "separation is the alpha and the omega of spectacle" (stanza 25). Separation from the material aspects, or biosphere, of people from their production allows one to believe they are producing *one's own world*, yet "the closer his [*sic*] life comes to being his [*sic*] own creation, the more drastically is he [*sic*] cut off from that life" (stanza 33). This illustrates well what Francis is concerned with: the narcissism and dissociative tendencies of hyper-mediated living. Still, he also recognizes that as a public leader responsible for a vast, global organization, he is obligated to make thoughtful use of these media tools and phenomenon like spectacle.

As the world has grown increasingly interconnected in an age of spectacle, media delivers images immediately from distant places, giving a sense that distance is closing and time is collapsing. Particularly in the industrial era, where societies began marking time with greater precision and compression for economic purposes, time has become a commodity like no other (Mosley, 2010). The unanticipated results are all too familiar as the incessant rush of a now-culture has created a hyper-society that leads to exhaustion. It is important to note that most youth under the age of 25 have not experienced a slower world, such that the *need for speed*—in interactions, activity, engagement, learning—is all consuming and works interactively with a commodity-driven economy. Not only is time of the essence, but the desire to draw out the fullness of each moment is coupled with a desire to spend and consume voraciously. As DeBord (1966/2000) notes:

In its most advanced sectors, a highly concentrated capitalism has begun selling "fully equipped" blocks of time, each of which is a complete commodity combining a variety of other commodities. This is the logic behind the appearance, within an expanding economy of "services" and leisure activities, of the "all-inclusive" purchase of spectacular forms of housing, of collective pseudo-travel, of participation in cultural consumption and even of sociability itself, in the form of "exciting conversations," "meetings with celebrities" and such like. Spectacular commodities of this type could obviously not exist were it not for the increasing impoverishment of the realities they parody. And, not surprisingly, they are also paradigmatic of modern sales techniques in that they may be bought on credit. (stanza 152)

In an era where there are no quick fixes to long-standing problems of social exclusion, growing inequality, and a beleaguered environment, current circumstances beg for people patient and

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attentive to long-term changes not realized through inspiring if ephemeral experiences or fleeting images and texts, no matter how poignant. This temporal disconnect is a confounding one indeed, and yet time's compression and consumption are so fundamentally a part of how society works that educators and citizens are compelled to operate on this terrain: it is inescapable.

Modernity has offered the illusive prospect of living a kind of *bon vivant* existence, which permeates media, advertising, and is parasitic on other domains of culture, such as education and spirituality. The rise of certain charter schools that borrow heavily on the theatricality of teaching and learning is one allusion, along with the spectacle of the mega-church movement in the United States. As people move incessantly from one attempt of living fully to another, a chaining of experience that devalues ordinary time or everyday existence as being *a waste*, the appetite for the "next big event" grows recklessly. As DeBord (1966/2000) notes in this light:

The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear." The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances. (stanza 12)

The desire for events, happenings, moments of fullness, or what DeBord has called "fully equipped blocks of times" (stanza 152) contributes to a sense of *waiting for spectacle*, an exhausting vigilance that focuses attention externally in anticipation of the *next big moment*.

Francis' engagement with spectacle through *LS* illuminates the situation of the text. Francis' call to deemphasize material life and his desire to "slow down" also suggests an alteration in the pace of life amidst the rapidity that is media:

Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to *slow down* [emphasis added] and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur. (p. 86)

The contextual irony here is puzzling, as Francis himself creates *made-for-media moments* while trying to interrupt them, a tension that illustrates the confounding situation faced by educators who seek to create habits of reflection within a din of rapid fire, inundating media and schools intent on technologizing all dimensions of learning. How does one participate in effectively

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reading the world amidst a cacophonous flow of media, texts, and information at the same time as one attempts to interrupt the deep grammar of how a mediated society functions? Francis' approach here is to moderate, to remind readers that a return to the past is impossible, but that a retrieval of different ways of being is still within our grasp.

*Teaching Suggestions*

The spectacle path in reading *LS* suggests other opportunities for learning within and beyond it. *How does spectacle work within mediaspace?* I first heard about the coming encyclical months before its release, not unlike a news teaser that one might hear in advance of an event. An attempt to raise interest in the release of a significant text is used by governments, corporations, and private organizations to gain attention. The need to anticipate and, in effect, create an event is crucial in a mediaspace that rewards well-organized and planned events, as these create the perception of an organization being *in control* of the event. The Pope, for example, used Twitter under the handle @Pontifex to excerpt from *LS* and simultaneously tweeted throughout the day, adding to the event of the text. The aftermath of the *LS* release was similar as tens of thousands of news articles and social media posts resulted from the controversial issues raised by Francis.

GCE educators must be cautious about embracing spectacle given its episodic and exhausting nature, however. The whiplash of following media's lead can lead to problems: first, that a curriculum is being set from afar and by those with an eye toward market-share rather than more valuable questions such as *How do we promote global understanding?*; and second, that rapid-fire attention may give students comfort in the instantaneousness that they experience otherwise but lack reflective space needed for genuine and careful thought. As Bjørn Thommason (2012) notes, to delve into momentary dimensions of being and learning, a pleasure symptomatic of the fascination with perpetual experience in an age of spectacle, runs the risk of exhaustion. Those forever in pursuit of the next, great experience, are typically left feeling bereft, or as he offers, "A carnival that never ends stops being fun" (p. 31).

The current social obsession of cramming more into every moment is counter-productive to learning, actually, as the seemingly fallow periods of less activity can give the mind a chance to work out what has been experienced. The *hard-to-witness* changes that are elemental to learning are the foundation for much of what we might momentarily see as change (Gaudelli & Laverty, 2015). Critique, examination, asking questions and thinking twice, or revisiting an issue at a later point, all suggest an inefficiency that is not befitting a social moment of speed and spectacle. And

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yet, it is precisely these moments that surround the reading of a significant text that educators should seek to extend deliberately, deepen ponderously and even promote reveling within.

GCE educators might consider a variety of activities to develop the spectacle analysis of *LS*. First, teachers might address the pace of contemporary classrooms by mindfully and purposefully slowing down. Practices in mindful education where students are invited to practice clearing their minds, engage in focused breathing exercises, and developing a meditative practice in classrooms will help to establish a context of thinking carefully and deeply about texts while slowing down the frenetic pace of schools (see Jennings, 2015; Rechtschaffen, 2014). A mindful approach to classroom teaching will also amount to an experience of otherness as it represents an alternative way of being for many students, a crucial strategy for educators committed to GCE. Embedding mindful practices into the norms of a classroom are especially useful in studying media and spectacle, as it establishes a counter-practice from which to better understand the way that media promotes episodic thinking through spectacle-making.

Another practice is to engage a deeper inquiry about *LS* in light of the spectacle surrounding it. Questions might include:

- How are spectacles made within and around ideas, texts, and events?
- What expectations do participants have for spectacles?
- How do spectacles, through anticipation and the events themselves, create an ever-increasing expectation of being entertained?

GCE provides a viable framework for engaging students in learning about *LS* and the accompanying spectacle. Texts like *LS* offer pinnacle learning opportunities in that they represent a broad swath of discourse on highly significant global issues, namely economic development and global warming. It would be difficult to imagine teaching a global course of study in a K-12 environment without addressing these twin, related concerns. Too, analyzing the media strategies surrounding these texts is itself a form of global learning as it represents the networked dimensions of media and how ancient traditions, like Vatican decrees, have been shaped by a rapidly changing media context.

A problematic dimension of engaging the spectacle path in reading global texts is the potential blurring of the lines between study and worship, witnessing and participating. At what point does the text become an object of worship, or a surrogate for its author and their faith, as opposed to one that is pedagogical? I vividly recall teaching comparative religions in a secondary school's

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multicultural studies course. We visited a variety of religious institutions and many of the students were drawn to Buddhism from their visit with the monks of a nearby monastery. They were taken in by the humility, genuineness, and charm of these interlocutors of Buddhism in what I recall as deep, aesthetic moments for the class within a hillside sanctuary. We once had the opportunity to hear the Dalai Lama speak, and the joyousness of that occasion was indeed difficult, perhaps impossible, to separate from the teachings of Buddhism. I often wondered if that was appropriate study, given the commitment to secularism that I was charged to uphold in a public school. The same potential arises from *LS*, it seems, or any other global text that is associated with a media celebrity like Pope Francis.

The deep grammar of schools, teaching, and curriculum, can be viewed as a form of implicit curriculum, one where Christian principles and narratives are widely adopted unwittingly by educators (see Burke and Segall, 2015). Analyses like this suggest that, contrary to the idea that religion can be taught “objectively,” orientations of particular religions are already preformed in the deeper culture of a school. With respect to my secondary school teaching about Buddhism, I abided by the three “objectivity” principles of teaching about religion in public schools, namely, (1) that it was permitted, (2) that inclusion of religion is important for literary, historical, and social understanding, and (3) that it be done neutrally and objectively, to be academic not devotional (First Amendment Center, 2008; NCSS, 2014). Despite my objectivity frame, some students were so moved and taken in by the ecstatic experiences—its own form of spectacle—that they sought out Buddhism thereafter. Reflecting on this episode suggests that there was a counter-dynamic to the one offered by Kevin Burke and Avner Segall, or that within a dominant/implicit Christian school, the presentation of an othered religion like Buddhism grew in its attractiveness by way of its alterneity. Indeed, both aspects are plausible; or it is likely that schools impart Christian viewpoints unknowingly while also periodically making counter-spaces as a result of what students might read as the obligatory norms and ways of Christianity.

A linear conception of curriculum moving from aim to outcome has been widely criticized as an unrealizable vision of learning and teaching (Pinar, 2013). The fact that we live amidst an unending cacophony of texts and experiences, all inviting us to think of the world differently, is a foundational condition of learning in a spectacle age and learning for GCE. That is not to suggest that aims do not matter for educators, as they do inform a course of educational journeying. But they must be viewed circumspectly, given our awareness of the nature of learning that defies systematic mapping and assured outcomes. Entering into conversations about media and the spectacle that surrounds certain texts and events does invite this uncertainty. And yet if we are

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serious about the contemporary need for education that reckons with the seriousness of the global situation young people stand to inherit, then we must take these risks and step, if so judiciously, into these challenging areas.

### **Conclusion**

One can presume that Pope Francis' encyclical, now just a few years beyond its release, will quickly fade in the overwhelming din of a global mediaspace. So is the fate of global texts in circulation, perhaps more quickly now than ever before, that their half-lives rapidly increase as momentary attention carries us onto the next and the next in an endless flow of thumbed-through feeds in an ever-expanding digital diet. *LS* is different, though, in that unlike fleeting content delivered onto smartphones, there is unmistakable depth, sincerity, and substance in this work, regardless of how one is disposed toward its content and rhetoric. Interpreting a text like this requires a degree of care and knowledge, taking the time to describe the argument, examine the details, and consider its social and historical connections. The pause that one would aim to create around a substantial text like this is increasingly challenging, however, as the encyclical arrives in the same spectacle-context that is flooded with media texts available to teachers.

Educators, particularly those dedicated to a practice of GCE, need discernment about what global texts are appropriate to bring to their students along with the instruction suggested by the same. Condensed, commodified time coupled with a need for sustained and careful attention offers a peculiar pedagogical dilemma within a spectacle age. Attention given to a fuller engagement with a limited number of worthy texts is much preferable than sweeping, cursory reads of a wider swath. Depth is demonstrably more valuable than coverage in learning, particularly when one's aim is to teach the situation of the world, the problems that we confront, and the actions and interventions needed to develop a quality of life for all on the planet.

Global citizenship educators working in the context of a media age and myriad texts are offered a great challenge and opportunity. They can choose to constrict the flow of information, and indeed thought, by fortressing themselves and their students in the stable isolation of narrowly construed textbooks and ready-made curriculum texts that stand in for rich material; or, alternatively, they might throw themselves, their students, and their care into a media swirl without attention to slowing down and thinking circumspectly of the losses inherent in this approach and indeed within what modernity has wrought. In this analytic essay, I have aimed to show that careful interpretation is possible in an inundated media context, and yet I know that

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these are indeed difficult pedagogical dances to synchronize. Yet, if educators are to adequately prepare young people for the global situation of the present and future in light of the past, it is urgent that they enter the dance as adroitly and pragmatically as they are able. The times require deep mindfulness about global texts, their many possible readings, and an enveloping spectacle contexts.

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