

## 9. Living well instead of having much. Virtues of Creation Spirituality

If structural reforms towards an eco-social market economy are not accompanied by a change in intrinsic attitudes, people will sooner or later rebel against them. Extrinsic motivations such as saving money through environmentally friendly behaviour must be filled by intrinsic motivations such as loving and being fascinated by Creation. Just as intrinsic motivation becomes frustrated when extrinsic incentives oppose it, extrinsic motivation will become hollow and empty in the long run if it is not nourished by the joy that comes from the depth of the heart.

That is why we are now dealing with the question of ethically good attitudes, classically called virtues, in dealing with planet Earth. Such virtues point to the possibilities of the people and bring their hidden potential to light. They motivate and inspire because they set processes of reflection and consideration free and encourage the transgression of previous personal standards in the direction of something even better. This motivational and inspirational potential of virtues has a lot to do with their pictorial character. Virtues can be understood and perceived as images of attitudes. Images are multi-layered, emotionally appealing and convey a much denser level of information than sentences (Michael Rosenberger 2018, 188).

In this sense, I will describe eight basic spiritual attitudes in the following, which are interconnected in a multi-layered way, but which I particularly relate to each other in pairs by relating them to the same basic human aspiration (cf. also Michael Rosenberger 2021, 129–151). All eight basic attitudes have a long ethical and spiritual tradition. Nevertheless, they could be joined by many more virtues. There is no conclusive catalogue of virtues. The number eight is therefore no more than an attempt to find a middle ground between confusing plurality on the one hand and simplistic one-sidedness on the other.

Most of the virtues explicated below also play a (varying) role in the encyclical *Laudato si'*. I will therefore refer to the relevant passages and analyse them in more detail where they are particularly substantial. In this way, Pope Francis' virtue ethical preferences can be more clearly identified and elaborated.

## 9.1 Gratitude as appreciation of the given

Gratitude (one could also say: contentment) is the momentary and lasting recognition and appreciation of what one has undeservedly received, that is, what one has been given. Or, as Pope Francis puts it: "Gratitude and gratuitousness (*gratitud y gratuidad*), that is, a recognition (*reconocimiento*) of the world as God's loving gift." (LS 220; cf. also LS 214; 222; 227). In order for gratitude to arise, it first needs thoughtfulness (in the literal sense of reflection) and a vivid memory of what has been received. Without memory, gratitude cannot grow. Out of attentive memory, gratitude affirms what has been given as a part of one's own overall good reality of life. It is the golden mean between permanent hardship that is convinced of constantly coming up short in life and naïve whitewashing that fades out the dark moments of one's own life and does not deal with them.

The *orientation* of gratitude is outward because it is the spiritual answer to the question: What do I receive? And from where do I receive it? In doing so, gratitude knows how to appreciate not only the superficially good, but also the heavy and dark. In retrospect, after sometimes very painful inner processes, it can be gratefully accepted because it has allowed one's own personality to mature and grow and because it has become an indispensable part of one's life. Gratitude is the other side of *humility*: while humility looks inwards at one's own neediness, gratitude looks outwards and discovers the richness of what has been received.

Together with humility, gratitude interprets and shapes above all the *human striving for prestige*. The grateful person recognises that they receive undeservedly without having given beforehand. They do not have the power to acquire or "make" everything through their own efforts. The grateful person admits the fundamental limitation of their own power and at the same time recognises the power of the giving authority, regardless of whether they call it "fate", "life", "nature" or even "God", and regardless of whether they think specifically of their own parents, from whom they received much undeservedly, of the animals or plants that give them nourishment, of "mother" earth, which supports all living beings, or of something else.

At present, the attitude of gratitude is receiving more attention in psychology than in theology and ethics. In the process, astonishing aspects are being brought to light: for example, gratitude (*gratitud*) strengthens one's own efforts to assist another, even if this "costs" a lot (*gratuidad*), not only towards a former benefactor, but even towards a stranger (Monica Y. Bartlett/David DeSteno 2006, 319–325; see also Jo-Ann Tsang 2006,

138–148). The reason for this stronger prosocial behaviour is to feel more valued (Adam M. Grant/ Francesca Gino 2010, 946–955).

Gratitude not only has positive effects on others, but also on the grateful person themselves: For example, someone who writes down what they are grateful for in a diary every week achieves self-imposed goals more often, is healthier and is more satisfied with their life. Those who practise a daily gratitude exercise are more attentive and energetic. This also applies to people suffering from a serious chronic illness (Robert A. Emmons/Michael E. McCullough 2003). In this respect, gratitude leads to more "wisdom" in the sense of life skills in all the ups and downs of life (Susanne König/Judith Glück 2013, 655–666). It is a stronger predictor of personal well-being than the so-called "Big Five" of personality psychology (OCEAN: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism; cf. Alex M. Wood et al. 2008, 49–54 and 2009, 655–660).

However, gratitude is not simply a given character trait, as can also be shown empirically, but can actually be strengthened by one's own life practice, as Aristotle claims of the virtues. People who practise a religion or spirituality, i.e. attend religious services, read religious scriptures, pray and meditate, and feel tangibly connected to God or the Divine, are significantly more likely to be grateful than people who do not practise a religion or spirituality (Michael E. McCullough et al. 2002, 112–127). Gratitude plays a key role in all major religions. In Christianity, it finds a particularly striking form of expression in the Eucharist, literally translated as thanksgiving.

## 9.2 *Humility as becoming free through limitations*

Humility (humildad: LS 89; 224; 242) is the free and affirmative recognition of one's own limitations and dependence, fragility and mortality as a good existential destiny of being a creature—despite all its remaining questionability. Thus, humility initially means a sober and realistic self-assessment. However, it is by no means resigned, but senses and recognises the positive side of the limitedness of all earthly reality: only what is limited has value—what is unlimitedly available, according to the basic insight of economics, is worthless. This applies in particular to the most precious, because it is the scarcest, resource of earthly life: time. At the same time, its limitation relieves every creature: we do not need to be able to do everything, achieve everything, work endlessly. We can free ourselves from the pressure to take responsibility for everything and anything.

Humility, in Latin *humilitas*, is derived from *humus*, earth. Humility therefore means being close to the earth, staying on the ground, standing with both feet on the ground. Humility knows that, as a creature, man is taken from the earth, nourishes himself from the earth and its gifts and returns to the earth in the end (Gen. 3:19)—and that is good! In this sense, humility is the golden mean between arrogance and inferiority.

In Greek philosophy, humility was frowned upon—it is a specific legacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, it was and is often misunderstood and misused, for it by no means signifies uncritical submissiveness or the renunciation of one's own opinion. Humility means standing on the ground, but not crawling to the ground. In this respect, the Christian Churches have taken much blame and misused the call for humility as an instrument of power.

The *gaze* of humility does not turn towards the authorities, but inwards, for it brings the realisation: "What do you have that you have not received? But if you have received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7) In the early Church, many theologians referred to humility as true self-knowledge (e.g. Aurelius Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus* 25:16). But it is precisely in the sober acceptance of one's own limitations and frailties that the perception of their value lies: scarce goods are valuable, and all the more valuable the scarcer they are. Humility is thus the other side of *gratitude*—only the humble and earthbound can be grateful.

Together with gratitude, the virtue of humility interprets and shapes above all the human *striving for prestige and standing*. A humble person recognises their own powerlessness, even impotence, but experiences it as liberating. In order to live well, one does not need to seize power by force or chase it with all one's might. The humble person has understood that they are allowed to be weak and limited and that therein lies an opportunity for a greater richness of life.

### 9.3 Reverence as stepping back from the mystery

Reverence or esteem, attentiveness, respect (*respeto*: LS 5–6; 71; 85; 130; 157; 201; 207; 213) constitute the reverent amazement and shy withdrawal before another creature, whose unfathomable and unavailable secret one suspects, but leaves alone and appreciates in its inviolability. Reverence means renouncing the complete appropriation and complete possession of a fellow creature. It leaves room for the other being to unfold and realise

itself. Knowing its sensitivity and fragility, reverence strives to "handle the other being with kid gloves" and to treat even the seemingly most insignificant being like a precious treasure. Thus, reverence is the golden mean between aloofness, the striving for too much distance, and encroachment, the striving for too much closeness.

The *gaze* of reverence turns outwards, looks at the greatness and inscrutability of the You. Turned inwards, it corresponds to the *capacity for enjoyment*, which experiences the fascination and richness of the other as a value and absorbs it as enrichment of one's own identity. Those who have learned to enjoy become more reverent through every experience and every encounter. A reverent person recognises the preciousness of a being in itself; the person who is able to enjoy perceives this preciousness for itself and absorbs it.

The *form of action* of reverence consists rather in passively letting something be. Primarily, the concept of reverence addresses that which one refrains from out of a healthy and realistic "fear"—namely, hurting or destroying the You. Reverence is thus the passive counterpart of the virtue of *justice*, which actively works for the well-being of others and strives to give each their own. Only those for whom one has respect will be treated justly. But just treatment demonstrates respect for those treated in this way.

Together with justice, reverence interprets and shapes above all the *striving for localisation and belonging*: in respect, the You is ascribed a fundamental autonomy and self-legality that functions as the ground of equality and togetherness. The autonomous I expresses its respect for the autonomous You—both meet each other at eye level and are connected to each other.

Reverence is a central attitude in all religions. It is symbolically practised in worship and spiritual practices. The Rule of Benedict ties in with this attitude when it instructs the economist of a monastery: "He shall consider all the utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred altar vessels. Nothing shall he consider indifferent." (RB 31; cf. chapter 4.1). This encompasses all implements and goods—that is, the soil and the plough, the ox and the hen, clothes and books. In everything, the spiritual man can sense the mystery he is on the trail of in his life.

## 9.4 Justice as impartial engagement

Justice (*justicia*; LS 10; 49; 70–71; 82; 92; 159; 200; 207; 242) is the firm and constant endeavour to give to each his own and, conversely, to demand from each his own (Plato, *Politeia* IV 433e and 433a). Just action aims at giving no one too much, but also no one too little, and at taking from no one too little, but also from no one too much. The giving should correspond to the other's needs, the receiving to their abilities and possibilities.

The *perspective* of justice turns outwards and looks at the (exchange) relationships between individuals and institutions. It attempts to achieve an appropriate balance in the interplay between the common good and the individual good in each case of conflict. Justice is therefore the twin sister of inward-looking *moderation*, which for its part strives to keep the needs of the actor within a responsible framework.

The *form of action* of justice consists of an active, often passionate commitment. Primarily, the concept of justice addresses impartial advocacy for the disadvantaged and forgotten. Justice is thus the active counterpart to *reverence*, which for its part consists primarily in passive renunciation of encroaching, usurping actions. Only those who are treated justly can feel respected. Unjust treatment always implies a lack of respect.

Together with reverence, justice interprets and shapes the human *striving for location and belonging*: just treatment implies the formal equality of all. But precisely because all are formally equal, they must not be treated equally in terms of content because of their differences. To give everyone the same and to demand the same from everyone would be highly unjust. The consequence of formal equality is to give everyone something different that corresponds to them.

Without question, justice is ascribed a central importance in secular as well as religious environmental discourses. In the sustainability discourse, it is expanded globally and intergenerationally, but remains anthropocentric. In the biblical tradition, on the basis of the Noahide covenant, it is additionally extended in a biocentric way from the outset and referred to as "everything that lives" (cf. chapter 6.2). The encyclical *Laudato si'* sometimes also speaks of fraternity (*fraternidad*: LS 70; 82) with all creatures. Compared to the title of the *Canticle of the Sun*, which prefixes the attribute "brother" or "sister" to every creature listed, the idea of fraternity, however, rarely occurs and does not gain any formative power overall. In his subsequent encyclical *Fratelli tutti* from 2020, Pope Francis tried to compensate for this shortcoming as early as in the title.

### 9.5 Moderation as harmony with Creation

Since ancient Greece, moderation has been the term used to describe the firm effort to bring the demands of one's own person (*ψυχή*) into harmony (*συμφωνία*, cf. Plato, *Politeia* IV 430e) with the demands of other human beings (*πόλις*) and non-human creatures (*κόσμος*). Moderation is thus motivated and justified by the coexistence of creatures and the sharing of resources on a finite planet. Where it succeeds, it leads to more than just passively letting others live, namely to wonderful sounding together, a magnificent symphony of all living beings, which is a tremendous plus compared to the sum of all individual voices. More than all other virtues, the concept of moderation immanently expresses that it aims at a middle way between character extremes. Moderation is the golden mean between greed on the one hand and excessive asceticism that is hostile to the body and lust on the other. In the encyclical *Laudato si'*, it is associated with sufficiency as "frugality" (*sobriedad*) (LS 11; 126; 193; 222–225). The frugal being recognises when "it is enough" (Latin *sufficit*).

Moderation *looks* inwards and examines one's own demands to see whether they represent real needs or only dispensable desires, and whether or how they can be reconciled with the needs of all others. In the tension between the common good and the individual good, it tries to achieve appropriate self-restraint for every case of conflict. Moderation is therefore the twin sister of *justice* directed outwards, which for its part strives to actively realise inter-individual balance where this is not given "by nature".

Together with the *capacity for enjoyment*, moderation interprets and shapes the *human striving for pleasure and well-being*: However, while moderation captures pleasure quantitatively and determines the healthy middle of its measure, the capacity for enjoyment aims at the qualitative side of pleasure, where there can never be too much, but only too little. The logic of the popular slogan "less is more" (LS 222–223) recurs to this connection: fewer goods consumed can produce more enjoyment because pleasure is not smothered in excess, but is encouraged to taste and savour ever more intensively.

Moderation includes, among other things, the ability to accept delaying wish fulfilment. This ability is the starting point for the empirical research of the so-called "marshmallow test". Above all, this is inseparably linked with the name of a developmental psychologist: Walter Mischel (1930 Vienna–2018 New York). Mischel calls this ability "self-control" and "willpower". These are very performance-oriented semantics that certainly need to be questioned from a spiritual perspective. Nonetheless, the find-

ings of Mischel's research and that of his many students, which began in the late 1960s and continues to the present, are highly relevant. This research follows the same individuals from early childhood to midlife and beyond and conducts psychological investigations (in the form of experiments and interviews) with them at regular intervals. The guiding question is which of the young child's abilities have statistically significant consequences for their later life.

The baseline test is as follows: A kindergarten child is led into a room where there is a table with a marshmallow on it. The experimenter explains to the child that he or she has two options: either he or she can eat the marshmallow immediately, or he or she can wait until the experimenter returns to the room. If the marshmallow is still on the table at that time, the child gets two or three extra marshmallows.

Ten years later, those children who were able to wait for the return of the experimenter are more able to concentrate, less prone to frustration, more self-confident, more intelligent and more successful at school. Twenty years later, they have achieved a higher level of education, have higher self-esteem, are more resilient in stressful situations, have more stable partnerships, are slimmer and use drugs less often (Ozlem Ayduk et al. 2000; Walter Mischel et al. 2011). They are also less likely to become physically or verbally aggressive and less likely to suffer from depression (Monica L. Rodriguez et al. 1989). An analogous study from New Zealand shows that "strong-willed" children are less likely to drop out of school later, earn more, save more and incur less debt. Women are less likely to become pregnant unintentionally and less likely to be single parents. Men are less likely to be addicted to gambling and to commit crimes (Terrie E. Moffitt et al. 2011).

But what facilitates a three- or four-year-old child to have self-control and willpower? Surprisingly, there is first of all a collective influencing factor: language. There are "futureless" languages, which allow the speaker to say what will happen in the present tense ("morgen regnet es"), and "future-related" languages, which definitely enable the speaker to say what will happen in the future tense ("tomorrow it will rain", "domani pioverà"). Futureless languages include German, Mandarin, Japanese and Finnish, while future-related languages include English, French, Italian and Greek. In the future-less languages, the future seems to be closer because it is spoken of in the present tense; in future-related languages, it seems to be further away. It follows, however, and this has been empirically proven, that people with a futureless mother tongue find it easier to exercise self-control and postpone the satisfaction of needs than people



with a future-oriented language (M. Keith Chen 2013). This is because subjectively they do not have to wait as long. This is true even if, for example, German- and Italian-speaking children in Merano/South Tyrol go to the same primary school (Matthias Sutter et al. 2015).

A second factor is of an individual nature, and it is unquestionably more significant ethically: early childhood experience in the first year of life has a great influence on the child's ability to set aside its own needs. A longer breastfeeding period and the newborn growing up with both parents, for example, have significantly positive effects. This is because the child feels that it can rely on the care of its parents and does not need to be afraid of falling short (Matthias Sutter et al. 2013). Reliable and close relationships in early childhood thus enable easier renunciation and greater moderation.

### 9.6 *Enjoyment as a taste for life*

Enjoyment (in LS 222–223 *gozo*, joy) means the willingness and constant effort to savour and internalise what is used, i.e. things "enjoyed" in all their richness. Enjoyment does not mean quantitatively maximised and economically optimised utilisation, but "feeling and tasting of things from within" ("*el sentir y gustar de las cosas internamente*", according to Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* No. 2). The enjoyer is "capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption... and the capacity to be happy with little" (LS 222). He or she is able to "learn familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them" (LS 223). Those who can enjoy have a taste for life. The ability to enjoy is to a large extent a spiritual activity. The person who has the ability to enjoy tastes the finest spice in a dish, perceives the slightest smell in their surroundings, hears the softest sound in a concert, sees the many shades of a colour and feels even the gentlest touch of their skin. This is precisely what pleasure-seeking and pleasure-hostility, as the two poles whose golden mean is the capacity for pleasure, cannot do: both remain on the surface and are unable to delve into the depths of spiritual pleasure.

The *orientation* of the ability to enjoy turns inwards and tries to perceive momentary sensory impressions with the highest attention and the ability to differentiate, so that these can be stored in the memory as lasting images. The ability to enjoy senses the preciousness and value of individual perceptions and strives to keep them present. It is therefore the twin sister of outwardly directed *reverence*. One could also say: enjoyment is the inwardly directed reverence for things, the true internalisation of their

uniqueness. Genuine enjoyment brings about reverent awe of its own accord.

Together with *moderation*, the capacity for enjoyment interprets and shapes the human *striving for pleasure and well-being*; whereas moderation measures pleasure quantitatively and determines the healthy middle of this measuring, the capacity for enjoyment aims at the qualitative side of pleasure, at its constant deepening and intensification. People who are capable of enjoyment need increasingly fewer external stimuli to feel deep pleasure and are better able to retain it, even when the object of enjoyment has disappeared. All common forms of spirituality know exercises to train and increase the ability to enjoy.

### 9.7 Serenity as being free from oneself

Serenity (serenidad: LS 222; 226; cf. also chapter 10) is the ability to refrain from one's own needs and fears even in difficult situations and to maintain a confident and open basic attitude. Such serenity grows out of a basic trust in the goodness of life and out of the inner security of being supported and safe. Medieval (male) mysticism can be understood as a path to serenity. The Middle High German word "Ledigheit", from which the New High German "Gelassenheit" comes, still clearly shows the echoes of being single (unmarried, in modern German "ledig") in the sense of being free. A serene person is able to let go of themselves—their thoughts and feelings, fear and longing, needs and desires. But it is precisely in this way that they become open to happiness and fulfilment. This is exactly what Jesus' key ethical sentence is about: "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life... will save it." (Mark 8:35)

The *direction of serenity's gaze* is inward. It seeks to free itself from inner fetters and constraints by activating all potential that can strengthen trust and confidence. Trust is the breeding ground of serenity. It is for good reason that Jesus motivates serenity in the Sermon on the Mount by referring to the paternal and maternal love of God, who will provide food (the father's task in the understanding of roles at that time) and clothing (the mother's task in the understanding of roles at that time) (Mt. 6:25–34). The inner orientation of serenity corresponds to the outer orientation of *devotion*: whoever can let go of themselves becomes able to devote themselves to others. And whoever gives themselves finds themselves. Serenity and devotion are two sides of the same ethical coin.

Together with devotion, serenity interprets and shapes the human *striving for security and safety*: every human being seeks security and needs it in order to be able to develop. But security cannot be made. It is given to us. It is precisely this paradox that is addressed by the words of Jesus quoted above. Whoever frantically seeks security, whoever wants to safeguard themselves through money, possessions or contracts, will not gain inner security in the end. In the end, one has to let oneself fall in order to be able to experience that one is caught and carried.

### 9.8 Devotion as the willingness to give oneself to others

Devotion (entrega: LS 211; 232), sometimes also called "generosity" (generosidad: LS 209; 220) or "generous devotion" (entrega generosa: LS 10; 165; 245) and discussed again in chapter 10, means the willingness to give oneself with one's energy, abilities, resources and time to others who need it. Only an inwardly strong person can give themselves. They develop the necessary serenity to refrain from their own needs and to perceive that the needs of others are greater and more urgent. Strong people give out of fellowship and connection with those in need—because they themselves have once received. Nevertheless, giving has its limits: It is not expedient to wear oneself out in commitment to others to such an extent that in the end one can no longer help. Genuine devotion in the sense of ethical virtue will think sustainably and divide one's own forces realistically. It is the golden mean between egoism that closes one's heart to the needs of others and the helper syndrome that over-exploits oneself and one's own strength and ultimately ends in burnout.

The *direction* of devotion is outward. It looks at the needs and fears of fellow human beings and fellow creatures, empathises with them (empathy) and is ready to help without excessive consideration for one's own needs. The external orientation of devotion corresponds to the internal orientation of serenity: it is devotion that protects the serene person from self-sufficient egocentrism and self-limited egoism.

Together with serenity, devotion interprets and shapes the human *striving for security and safety*: serenity does not make committed devotion superfluous, but makes it possible as a free gift that is not driven by inner compulsion. It is serenity that prevents the helper syndrome because it can also let go of the urge to help and critically examine it from a distance. In this way, a serene person can honestly and impartially assess where

their possibilities have been undercut and where their limits have been exceeded.

The central term of "Laudato si'" for devotion is "cuidado", care. It already appears in the title of the encyclical, which in the English translation is "on care for our common home". In total, the noun "cuidado", the adjective "cuidadoso" and the verb "cuidare" occur sixty times in *Laudato si'*. "Cuidado" has a wide range of meanings in Spanish. It means care and concern, but also caution, respect, esteem, as well as guarding and watching over (Latin *custodia*). In Spanish, "cuidado de la creación" (LS 14) is a *terminus technicus* corresponding to the Italian "custodia del creato" and the English "care for Creation". The German translation of *Laudato si'* has also recognised that it is a *terminus technicus*. It translates it as "Bewahrung der Schöpfung", literally "preservation of Creation", which is etymologically close to "cuidado", but in today's usage sounds very preservative and technical. The relational aspect that resonates in "cuidado" has become almost invisible in "preservation". At the same time, "cuidado" alludes to Gen. 2:15, that man should cultivate and tend the garden of Creation. Also, in comparison to the German term "Schöpfungsverantwortung", which sounds very rational, "cuidado" expresses more strongly the emotional side of the human relationship to Creation, the loving care.

In comparison to the active "cuidado", Francis only rarely uses the term "compassion" (*compasión*), which is popular in secular discourse, in both *Evangelii gaudium* and *Laudato si'*. At one point, the close connection between compassion and care, which Francis otherwise takes for granted, is highlighted. There, he speaks of "care based on compassion (*el cuidado basado en la compasión*)" (LS 210). In fact, Francis wants to evoke this compassion when he speaks in a leitmotif of Sister Earth crying out because of her mistreatment (LS 2; 53). However, he explicitly links this cry for *compasión* only in *Evangelii gaudium*: "In order to be able to advocate a lifestyle that excludes others, or to be able to be enthusiastic about this selfish ideal, globalisation of indifference (*una globalización de la indiferencia*) has developed. Almost without realising it, we have become incapable of feeling compassion (*incapaces de compadecernos*) towards the painful outcry of others, we no longer cry in the face of the drama of others, nor are we interested in caring for them (*cuidarlos*), as if all this were a remote responsibility that is none of our business. The culture of prosperity numbs us ... while all these lives suppressed for lack of opportunities seem to us like a mere spectacle that does not shake us in any way." (EG 54) These sentences sum up much of Francis' thinking: Consumerism numbs us and distances us from fellow human beings in

need and from the abused Creation; it makes us insensitive and indifferent by robbing us of the gaze of proximity, the gaze of those affected and involved. The virtue of devotion opposes this indifference and numbing.

### 9.9 *Epilogue: Living simply*

What is ultimately at stake in a virtue ethic linked to Creation is made clear by Francis in a passage from his Creation Encyclical that bears his very own signature more than almost any other. These are the passages in which he proposes a new lifestyle (LS 222–225). These sentences can rightly be considered a synthesis of this chapter (practically all eight virtues described occur in it), so I do not wish to comment on them further, but leave them in the original text:

"Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. ... It is the conviction that 'less is more'. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasure." (LS 222)

"Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full. In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So, they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, ... Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer." (LS 223)

In a retreat house that I visited regularly years ago, the sentence "simply living" is written above the entrance door. One can understand this sentence in two ways: If you emphasise the first word "*simply*", which in German would be the first preference in contrast to English, it seems ascetic and admonishing. If, on the other hand, the second word "*living*" is emphasised, it appears inviting and attractive. Traditionally, the emphasis on the first word was mostly noticed when talking about the environmental crisis. It is time to discover that the emphasis should be on the second word: Living simply(er) works—and it does good.