

Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment
"Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home

The introduction

The pope begins the encyclical by summarizing his presentation and citing earlier popes and other religious leaders who have spoken about the environment. He says Sister Earth "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."

Chapter 1: What is happening to our common home

Pope Francis is a firm believer in the need to gather the facts in order to understand a problem. Chapter 1 presents the scientific consensus on climate change along with a description of other threats to the environment, including threats to water supplies and biodiversity. He also looks at how environmental degradation has affected human life and society. Finally, he writes about the global inequality of the environmental crisis.

For reflection: How has pollution affected me or my family personally?

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Chapter 2: The Gospel of creation

The pope argues that faith convictions can motivate Christians to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. He begins with the biblical account of creation and then meditates on the mystery of the universe, which he sees as a continuing revelation of the divine. "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth." He concludes, "The earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone."

For reflection: How have I experienced God in creation?

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Chapter 3: The human roots of the ecological crisis

Although science and technology "can produce important means of improving the quality of human life," they have also "given those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world." Francis says we are enthralled with a technocratic paradigm, which promises unlimited growth. But this paradigm "is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit." Those supporting this paradigm show "no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behavior shows that for them maximizing profits is enough."

For reflection: How do I feel as I reflect on Pope Francis statement that the technocratic paradigm of unlimited growth is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit"?

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Chapter 4: Integral ecology

Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior, and the ways it grasps reality. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

For reflection: How does the environment of my home, workplace, and neighborhood affect my quality of life (147)?

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Chapter 5: Lines of approach and action

What is to be done? Francis calls for dialogue on environmental policy in the international, national and local communities. This dialogue must include transparent decision-making so that the politics serve human fulfillment and not just economic interests. It also involves dialogue between religions and science working together for the common good.

For reflection: Francis is critical of many business practices, has no faith in the marketplace to safeguard the environment, and sees a robust role for government in the regulation of the economy and protecting the environment. How do I feel about this? What is my feeling when I think about how the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty."

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Chapter 6: Ecological education and spirituality

We need to change and develop new convictions, attitudes and forms of life, including a new lifestyle. This requires not only individual conversion, but also community networks to solve the complex situation facing our world today. Essential to this is a spirituality that can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. Christian spirituality proposes a growth and fulfillment marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.

For reflection: Francis is critical of a consumerist lifestyle (204). How do I feel about this? How would this new lifestyle affect my life?