

Laudato Si

Readings from Pope Francis's 2015 Encyclical

The following are excerpts from the introduction and first chapter of the encyclical "Laudato Si: On the Care of Our Common Home," by Pope Francis, the first papal encyclical that deals specifically with climate change. This is a digest of his crafted discussion of creation, its beauty and glory, and the human relationship to it. Perhaps it will inspire you to read the entire encyclical for yourself. As you can see, the language is both graceful and straightforward. He builds an argument from scripture, theology, science, economics, and ethics concerning the state of the environment today and the human responsibility to solve the climate crisis for the sake of the earth's creatures, the poor, and future generations.

The Arabic numbers below refer to paragraphs.

Introduction

- 1: The title *Laudato Si*, "praise be," is taken from the canticle of St. Francis of Assisi, who "reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."
- 2: "This sister now 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 . . . We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."
- 3: "I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home."
- 4-5: teachings concerning the environment by Pope Paul VI in 1971, and John Paul II several times. "The destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement."
- 6: Pope Benedict XVI "urged us to realize that creation is harmed 'where we ourselves have the final word, where everything is simply our property and we use it for ourselves alone. The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.'" (2008)
- 7-8: Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew said, "For human beings . . . to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins." (1997)
- 9: Bartholomew also said, "It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God's creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet." (2012)
- 10: Introduction to his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. "He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace."

11: “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.”

12: “Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”

13-16: Preview of what the encyclical will discuss and why it is important.

14: “I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all... Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest... All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.”

Chapter 1: What is happening to our common home

17-18: The problems that are troubling us today are intensified by “rapidization,” referring to the speed of change. “The goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or to integral and sustainable human development.”

19: “Some sectors of society are now adopting a more critical approach. We see increasing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet.”

I. Pollution and Climate Change

Pollution, Waste, and Throwaway Culture

20-21: “Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive, from homes and businesses, from construction and demolition sites, from clinical, electronic and industrial sources. The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish.”

22: Human throwaway culture contrasted with the circular model of nature’s use of materials.

Climate as a Common Good

23: “The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all... A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events.” “The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes.”

24: "If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us."

25: "Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day."

26: "There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy."

II. Water

27: "The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty."

28: "Water supplies used to be relatively constant, but now in many places demand exceeds the sustainable supply, with dramatic consequences in the short and long term."

29: "Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances. Dysentery and cholera, linked to inadequate hygiene and water supplies, are a significant cause of suffering and of infant mortality."

30: "In some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights."

31: "Greater scarcity of water will lead to an increase in the cost of food and the various products which depend on its use."

III. Loss of Biodiversity

32: "The earth's resources are also being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species.... "

33: "Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species.... 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."

34: "A sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves."

36: "Caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation."

37: “Some countries have made significant progress in establishing sanctuaries on land and in the oceans .”

38: The Amazon rainforests and Congo basin, the planet’s biodiverse lungs: “The ecosystems of tropical forests possess an enormously complex biodiversity which is almost impossible to appreciate fully, yet when these forests are burned down or levelled for purposes of cultivation, within the space of a few years countless species are lost and the areas frequently become arid wastelands.”

39: “The replacement of virgin forest with plantations of trees, usually monocultures ... can seriously compromise a biodiversity which the new species being introduced does not accommodate.”

40: “Oceans not only contain the bulk of our planet’s water supply, but also most of the immense variety of living creatures, many of them still unknown to us and threatened for various reasons.”

41: “In tropical and subtropical seas, we find coral reefs comparable to the great forests on dry land, for they shelter approximately a million species, including fish, crabs, molluscs, sponges and algae. Many of the world’s coral reefs are already barren or in a state of constant decline.”

42: “Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.”

IV. Decline in the Quality of Human Life and the Breakdown of Society

43: “Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity.”

44: Discusses “the disproportionate and unruly growth of many cities, which have become unhealthy to live in, not only because of pollution caused by toxic emissions but also as a result of urban chaos, poor transportation, and visual pollution and noise.”

45: “The privatization of certain spaces has restricted people’s access to places of particular beauty.”

46: Notes “the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity.”

47: “Real relationships with others, with all the challenges they entail, now tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication which enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim, thus giving rise to a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature.”

V. Global Inequality

48: “The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: ‘Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.’” (Bolivian Bishops’ Conference, 2012)

49: The poor are “the majority of the planet’s population, billions of people. These days, they are mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage.” “A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

50: “To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues.”

51: “A true ‘ecological debt’ exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.”

52: “The foreign debt of poor countries has become a way of controlling them, yet this is not the case where ecological debt is concerned. In different ways, developing countries, where the most important reserves of the biosphere are found, continue to fuel the development of richer countries at the cost of their own present and future.”

VII. Weak Responses

53: “Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. Yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness. The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations.”

54: “There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.”

56: “In the meantime, economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.”

58: “In some countries, there are positive examples of environmental improvement: rivers, polluted for decades, have been cleaned up; native woodlands have been restored; landscapes have been beautified thanks to environmental renewal projects; beautiful buildings have been erected; advances have been made in the production of non-polluting energy and in the improvement of public transportation.... For all our limitations, gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us, since we were made for love.”

VIII. A Variety of Opinions

61: “We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems. Still, we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and

degradation; these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises, for the world's problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation.”