

“The Church is likewise conscious of the responsibility which all of us have for our world, for the whole of creation, which we must love and protect.”

— Pope Francis, Address, March 20, 2013



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One World with a Common Plan

Pope Francis says that to solve the issues facing us today, we must think of ourselves as “one world with a common plan.” Finally, he asks us to begin “redefining our notion of progress,” explaining that “a technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress.”

Pope Francis concludes with a hopeful and hope-filled call to action. He calls each of us to a new lifestyle and stresses that education and training are key to real transformation: “Change is impossible without motivation and a process of education.” He notes that all educational sectors are involved, primarily “at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis, and elsewhere.”



What Are We Called to Do?

The pope lists many concrete ways in which individuals, communities, and nations can make a real difference, urging leaders to put aside short-term gains and embrace courageous long-term solutions. He reminds us that “there is nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions,” and he asks all believers to return to the habit of giving thanks to God before and after meals and to contemplate God in nature as well as through the Eucharist. He asks us to pay attention to our water consumption, to sort our waste, and even to simply “turn off the lights.”

At the same time, Pope Francis is calling us to care for one another in a new way, to place human dignity and the interconnectedness of all creation above all else. In this way, “we must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.” Indeed, “as believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us with all beings.”



Laudato Si' calls each of us to broaden our examination of conscience, to reflect seriously on how we are living in communion, not only with God, others, and ourselves, but also with all creatures and with nature as a whole.

Additional Resources

The Environment, Pope Benedict XVI (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012).

God Is Always Near: Conversations with Pope Francis (Our Sunday Visitor, 2015).

Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home, Pope Francis (Our Sunday Visitor, 2015).

A Year of Mercy with Pope Francis: Daily Reflections, Ed. Kevin Cotter (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

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POPE FRANCIS

ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Laudato Si'

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“Now, faced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet.” With these all-encompassing words, Pope Francis lays out his vision in *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si’)*, his encyclical on the environment and interconnectedness of all creation. The pope speaks to the “ecological crisis” of our time but also reminds each of us that “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.”

Official Church Teaching

An encyclical is a “circular letter” containing authoritative papal teaching. *Laudato Si’* is a social encyclical, meaning that it teaches about the state of society, building on a tradition that began with Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. What’s new in *Laudato Si’* is that Pope Francis says that concern for the environment is no longer “optional” but is an integral part of the Church teaching on social justice.

OUR COMMON HOME

Pope Francis pulls no punches when he writes that the earth “cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her,” saying that “the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.” He laments atmospheric pollution, a warming climate, a lack of clean water as well as the privatization of water, a loss of biodiversity, and an overall decline in human life and breakdown of society. “Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years,” he adds.



He is equally critical of responses to the crisis made from a position of privilege and comfort, which often go hand in hand with a “green” rhetoric. One example is the attempt to reduce poverty and the ecological crisis by reducing the birthrate. Another is the belief that “ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change.”

PRAISE BE!

Laudato Si’ takes its name from St. Francis of Assisi’s famous “Canticle of the Creatures,” which begins: “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.” The encyclical is developed along the idea of an “integral ecology” that addresses the fundamental relationships each of us has with God, oneself, our fellow human being, and with our planet.



Timely Words, Timeless Message

The imperative to maintain the earth goes back as far as the story of creation in Genesis, in which humanity was charged to care for all the world and its creatures. Pope Francis’ predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, was famously called the “Green Pope” for his commitment to environmental issues, and Pope St. John Paul II stressed that our “responsibility within creation” and our “duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part” of our faith (World Day of Peace address, 1990).

THE GOSPEL OF CREATION

The pope explains that the traditional view of man having “dominion” over the earth, meaning the right to subdue, must give way to an understanding that “everything is interconnected” and that all of creation is a “kind of universal family.” Faith tells us that the earth is a gift



given to us to administer, not a possession to be used and destroyed, and “creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all.... Each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love.”

Pope Francis states: “I am well aware that in the areas of politics and philosophy there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant.... Others view religions simply as a subculture to be tolerated. Nonetheless, science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both.”

The Human Roots of the Crisis

Pope Francis sees the cause of the current crisis in what he calls a “technocratic” mentality, one that considers “the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests.” This relativism puts human beings, rather than God, at the center, producing a view that sees no intrinsic value in lesser creatures — and even in other human beings.

Pointing out that that concern for nature is incompatible with abortion or embryo research, he writes: “How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties?” He goes on to say that everyone must be able to have work, because it is “part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development, and personal fulfilment,” while “to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society.”



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ALL CREATION IS CONNECTED

Pope Francis stresses that “nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live.” Rather, “the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related, and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves.” Because of the interconnectedness of all creation, the pope points out that we are in the midst of one complex crisis:



“We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which 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.”

Pope Francis asks: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? ... It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.”

