

Pope Francis' new Encyclical on ecology named "Laudato Si : on care for our common home"

Here follows a two-page summary which I found on the **ZENIT** webpage and then a short article published in the NCR

'Laudato Si', an Overview: Vatican Radio offers this summary of the Pope's encyclical, released June 18, 2015

By Staff Reporter

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Pope Francis' [encyclical](#) is focused on the idea of "**integral ecology**," connecting care of the natural world with justice for the poorest and most vulnerable people. Only by radically **reshaping our relationships with God, with our neighbours and with the natural world**, he says, can we hope to tackle the threats facing our planet today. **Science**, he insists, is the best tool by which we can listen to the cry of the earth, while **dialogue and education** are the two keys that can "help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us."

At the heart of the Pope's reflections is the question: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" The answers he suggests call for profound changes to political, economic, cultural and social systems, as well as to our individual lifestyles.

Chapter 1 sets out **six of the most serious challenges** facing "our common home":

- Pollution, waste and our throwaway mentality: "the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth"
- Climate change: "one of the principle challenges facing humanity in our day" but "many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms"
- Water: "access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right" yet entire populations, and especially children get sick and die because of contaminated water
- Biodiversity: "Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species" and the consequences cannot be predicted as "all of us, as living creatures, are dependent on one another". Often transnational economic interests obstruct this protection
- Breakdown of society: Current models of development adversely affect the quality of life of most of humanity and "many cities are huge, inefficient structures, excessively wasteful of energy and water
- Global inequality: Environmental problems affect the most vulnerable people, the greater part of the world's population and the solution is not reducing the birth rate but counteracting "an extreme and selective consumerism"

And Chapter 3 explores six of the deep root causes of these growing crises:

- Technology: While it can bring progress towards sustainable development, without "a sound ethics", it gives "those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources... an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity"
- The technocratic mentality: "the economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit.....yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion"
- Anthropocentrism: we fail to understand our place in the world and our relationship with nature. Interpersonal relations and protection of human life must be set above technical reasoning so environmental concern "is also incompatible with the justification of abortion"
- Practical relativism: environmental degradation and social decay is the result of seeing "everything as irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests"
- Employment: Integral ecology needs to take account of the value of labour so everyone must be able to have work and it's "bad business for society" to stop investing in people to achieve short-term financial gains
- Biological technologies: GMOs are a "complex environmental issue" which have helped to resolve problems but bring difficulties such as concentrating land "in the hands of a few owners", threatening small producers, biodiversity and ecosystems

So where do the solutions lie? Here are six of the best:

- In "The Gospel of Creation": Chapter 2 examines the Old and New Testaments to show how human life is grounded in our relationships with God, with our neighbours and with the created world. We must acknowledge our sins when we break these relationships and realize our "tremendous responsibility" towards all of God's creation
- In Integral Ecology: Chapter 4 explores this new paradigm of justice which means "the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts", while solutions must be based on "a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters"
- In Dialogue: Chapter 5, entitled 'Lines of Approach and Action' stresses the need for "honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good". The Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics, but it can promote dialogue on global and local governance, transparent decision-making, sustainable use of natural resources, as well as engaging in respectful dialogue with other people of faith and with the scientific world
- In Education: Chapter 6 urges schools, families, the media and the churches to help reshape habits and behavior. Overcoming individualism, while changing our lifestyles and consumer choices, can bring much "pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power" causing significant changes in society.
- In Ecological Conversion: Chapter 6 also highlights St Francis of Assisi as the model of "a more passionate concern for the protection of our world", characterized by gratitude and generosity, creativity and enthusiasm
- In Spirituality: Finally Chapter 6 and the two concluding prayers show how faith in God can shape and inspire our care for the environment. The Sacraments, the Trinity, the model of the Holy Family and our hope for eternal life can teach, motivate and strengthen us to protect the natural world that God has given us.

Here is a short article written by Joshua J. McElwee in the National Catholic Reporter:

"Pope Francis has clearly embraced what he calls a "very solid scientific consensus" that humans are causing cataclysmic climate change that is endangering the planet. The pope has also lambasted global political leaders for their "weak responses" and lack of will over decades to address the issue.

In what has already been the most debated papal encyclical letter in recent memory, **Francis urgently calls on the entire world's population to act, lest we leave to coming generations a planet of "debris, desolation and filth."**

"An outsider looking at our world would be amazed at [our] behavior, which at times appears self-destructive," the pope writes at one point in the letter.

Addressing world leaders directly, Francis asks: **"What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?"**

Francis writes, **"As often occurs in periods of deep crisis which require bold decisions, we are tempted to think that what is happening is not entirely clear. ... Such evasiveness serves as a license to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen."**

Such sharp words on the situation facing humanity pervade the more than 40,000-word letter, which has a far-ranging scope -- first reviewing scientific conclusions on climate change and other environmental degradation before going into deeper implications for both the church and the global international system.

The document also shows a notable reorientation of the church's understanding of the human person, from a being that dominates to one that responsibly serves creation.

The title *Laudato Si'* comes from St. Francis of Assisi's famous 13th-century prayer "The Canticle of the Creatures." Translated into English as either "Be praised" or "Praised be," it is an Umbrian-Italian phrase used throughout the prayer to give thanks to God for creation.

The Vatican's Thursday launch of the encyclical has already drawn public criticism from two Catholic U.S. presidential candidates and from right-wing groups that deny climate change science.....

Tackling climate change in the first of its six chapters, Francis states bluntly: "A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system." He continues, "Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it. It is true that there are other factors (such as volcanic activity, variations in the earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases ... released mainly as a result of human activity."

Among other main issues and themes touched upon by the letter:

Environmental degradation causing lack of access to drinking water, loss of biodiversity, and decline in quality of human life;

Pervasive global inequity that leaves billions experiencing "ecological debt";

The search for long-term solutions to replace fossil fuels and other unsustainable energies;

Tying together the ecological crisis with a global social crisis that leaves the poorest in the world behind and does not make them part of international decision-making;

Changes in global lifestyle that could "bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power."

Starting his letter with a short preamble on the purpose for his writing, Francis refers to his predecessor **John XXIII**, who famously addressed his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* to "all men and women of good will."

"Now, faced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet," Francis states. "In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home."

"I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet," he says. "We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all."