

Some common themes of Laudato Si' ("Praise be to You")

Pope Francis' first 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.

Dialogue and education are the two keys that can "help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us."

"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.



The most serious challenges facing "our common home" (Chapter 1):

1. **Pollution, waste and our throwaway mentality:** "the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth."
2. **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." Why are we cutting down our tree of life?
3. **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.
4. **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 the protection of local species.
5. **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."
6. **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."

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

1. **Technology:** While it can bring progress towards sustainable development, it lacks "a sound ethics."
2. **The technocratic mentality:** every advance in technology must be viewed in terms of human development and social inclusion not just in terms of profit.

3. **Anthropocentrism:** Technical reasoning must be related to interpersonal relations and protection of human life.
4. **Practical relativism:** environmental degradation and social decay is the result of seeing “everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests.”
5. **Employment:** Integral ecology needs to take account of the value of labour so everyone must be able to have work. It’s “bad business for society” to stop investing in people to achieve short-term financial gains.
6. **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?

In “The Gospel of Creation” (Chapter 2):

1. The Old and New Testaments show how human life is grounded in our relationships with God, with our neighbours and with the created world.
2. We must acknowledge the break in our relationships with others and the earth.



Integral Ecology (Chapter 4) explores this new paradigm of justice:

1. “The analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts.”
2. While solutions must be based on “a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.”

Chapter 5, entitled ‘Lines of Approach and Action’ stresses:

1. The need for “honest and open debate, so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good.”
2. That the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics, but it can promote dialogue on global and local governance.
3. The need for 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, Ecological Conversion and Spirituality (Chapter 6)

1. **Education:** urges schools, families, the media and 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.”
2. **Ecological Conversion:** 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.
3. **Spirituality:** 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.