

Laudato Si, chapter 2 excerpts

Readings from Pope Francis's 2015 Encyclical

The following are excerpts from the second 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.”

Chapter 2: The Gospel of Creation

62: “Science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both.”

I. The Light Offered by Faith

63: “If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it.”

64: “If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn ‘realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.’” (quoting Pope John Paul II)

II. The Wisdom of Biblical Accounts

65: Genesis 1 and the creation of a good world, including humans

66: “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.”

67: “The biblical texts ... tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.”

69: “Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”, and indeed, “the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31). By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth” (Prov 3:19).”

70: Story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4): “Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered.”

71: Story of flood, Sabbath and Jubilee

72: Psalms of praise by humans and all creation

73: Prophets: “The God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected.”

74: Defeat and exile: “Injustice is not invincible.”

75: “The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality.”

III. The Mystery of the Universe

76: “Creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.”

77: “God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: “For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it” (Wis 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father’s tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection.”

78: “A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.”

79: “We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction.”

80: “The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge: ‘Nature is nothing other than a certain kind of art, namely God’s art, impressed upon things, whereby those things are moved to a determinate end. It is as if a shipbuilder were able to give timbers the wherewithal to move themselves to take the form of a ship.’” (Thomas Aquinas)

81: Human uniqueness: “The sheer novelty involved in the emergence of a personal being within a material universe presupposes a direct action of God and a particular call to life and to relationship on the part of a “Thou” who addresses himself to another “thou”. The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.”

82: “When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus.”

83: “The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things.”

IV. The Message of Each Creature in the Harmony of Creation

84: “Each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.”

85: “From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine.” (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops)

86: “As the Catechism teaches: ‘God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.’”

87: Hymn of St. Francis:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,

 especially Sir Brother Sun,

 who is the day and through whom you give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;

 and bears a likeness of you, Most High.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,

 in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,

 and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather

 through whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,

 who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,

 through whom you light the night,

 and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

88: “The bishops of Brazil have pointed out that nature as a whole not only manifests God but is also a locus of his presence. The Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with him.”

V. A Universal Communion

89: “As part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. Here I would reiterate that “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement.” (Apostolic Exhortation, 2013)

90: “We should be concerned lest other living beings be treated irresponsibly. But we should be particularly indignant at the enormous inequalities in our midst, whereby we continue to tolerate some considering themselves more worthy than others.”

91: “Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.”

92: “The same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. Every act of cruelty towards any creature is ‘contrary to human dignity’ (Catechism). We can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality: ‘Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism.’” (Conference of Dominican Bishops)

VI. The Common Destination of Goods

93: “The earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone. Hence every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective which takes into account the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged.”

94: “The rich and the poor have equal dignity, for “the Lord is the maker of them all” (Prov 22:2).

95: “The New Zealand bishops asked what the commandment ‘Thou shall not kill’ means when ‘twenty percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive.’”

VII. The Gaze of Jesus

96: “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (Mt 6:26).

97: “The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: ‘Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest’” (Jn 4:35).

98: “Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: ‘What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?’ (Mt 8:27). His appearance was not that of an ascetic set apart from the world, nor of an enemy to the pleasant things of life.”

99: “From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.”

100: The New Testament also “shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: ‘For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to

reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20). “The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.”