

Laudato Si' as a Framework for Christian Response to Environmental Injustice

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THE LAUDATO SI AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

We have seen that ***Climate Change and Environmental Degradation*** are resulting undesirable effects to the environment and are threatening the existence of human, plant and animal life.

Both climate change and environmental degradation have been ***attributed to human activity and how we are managing the environment.***

Pope Francis is concerned about how mankind is abusing the environment as he says in the Laudato Si that ***“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”.***

What is happening to Our Common Home Pope Francis identifies pressing modern ecological challenges: Pollution and Climate Change (Page 20-26); The Issue of Water (Page 27-31); The Loss of Biodiversity (Pages 32-42); Decline in the Quality of Human Life and the Breakdown of Society (Pages 43-47); and Global Inequality (Pages 48-52). Regarding climate change, Pope Francis:

- » Emphasizes that “the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all” and recognizes that “a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity” (page 23).
- » Stresses that “climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods” and laments that the poor (who are least responsible for causing the problem) are disproportionately vulnerable to its harmful effects (page 25).
- » Recognizes “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” (Page 26).

- » Challenges those, that in the face of ecological degradation, would “blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism”(page 50).
- » Recognizes that an “ecological debt” exists between countries of 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” (page 51).
- » Criticizes the “weak international responses” to climate change that have been repeatedly undermined by “economic interests [that] easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected” (page 54).

The Pope says that ***“pollution and Climate Change are closely related to the throwaway culture and hence the need for a change in mind-set towards reducing things to rubbish and preserving resources for present and future generations, as well as limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources”***.

The Pope also calls everyone to an education for the Covenant between humanity and the environment, where he notes that environmental education must focus on establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures and with God.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO MANAGE OUR ENVIRONMENT?

LAUDATO SI'

ON THE CARE OF
OUR COMMON HOME



POPE FRANCIS



ENCYCLICAL LETTER

1. Change of Mindset Towards Caring for the Earth:

In 2015, Pope Francis wrote an encyclical letter called the *Laudato si*, where he urges ***“all men and women of good will to become wise stewards of God’s creation”***

We are being urged to ***change our mindset towards caring for the earth*** and avoid the throwaway culture and a culture of consumerism, which is causing us to accumulate excess belongings, most of which ends up as Rubbish.

2. Awareness on Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Legislation on Managing the Environment:

Most of the harmful actions to the environment are done as a result of the ignorance of the damage being caused to the environment, especially when we can't see how we are directly affected by our. (*e.g. "if I throw away an empty plastic bottle, how will I be affected?"*)

People need to be made aware of their actions and the long term effects of their actions on the earth and its inhabitants.

In one study, which JCTR in 2020, it was noted that the majority of the people interviewed were ignorant of environmental legislation, especially regarding solid waste management.

People need to be aware of this legislation for them to know what is permitted and help them adopt practices aimed at sustainable management of the environment.

So *as we become aware* of these laws and policies, *we need to continue sensitising our fellow community members.*

3. Planting of Trees and Vegetation:

Trees and other vegetation play a big role in protecting our environment. Trees are an integral part of the ecosystem providing benefits to wildlife and biodiversity.

Trees contribute to their environment by providing oxygen, improving air quality, climate amelioration, conserving water, preserving soil, and supporting wildlife.

1. During photosynthesis, ***trees take in carbon dioxide and produce the oxygen we breathe***. This benefits us in two ways

a) By ***maintaining an oxygen balance in the atmosphere*** and providing us with the much needed oxygen.

b) By ***reducing the “Greenhouse” effect*** through the removal of carbon dioxide from the air and releasing oxygen.

Scientists say that one mature tree produces enough oxygen for 10 people.

2. ***Trees reduce pollution by actively removing it from the atmosphere.*** The pores on the leaves known as stomata take in polluting gases which are then absorbed by water inside the leaves.

3. Trees improve air quality by acting as natural air filters ***removing dust, smoke and fumes from the atmosphere by trapping them on their leaves,*** branches and trunks. Just 1 hectare of woodland can extract 4 tons of dust per year from the atmosphere.

4. Growing ***trees take water from the soil and release it into the atmosphere.*** This process is known as transpiration and the water released into the atmosphere forms part of the atmospheric moisture seen as clouds and falling back as rain.

5. ***Tree leaves also act as interceptors, catching falling rain,*** which then evaporates causing rain precipitation elsewhere — a process known as evapo-transpiration.

6. **Trees** and other vegetation also **form a rain barrier where the leaves trap rain water** and holding it on the leaves that fall to the ground thus **reducing soil erosion** and enabling the water to sink to the ground and contribute to the underground water systems.

7. **Trees**, especially those in the woodlands, **provide habitats for many species of animals**, insects, reptiles and invertebrates.

8. **Trees are** an effective **sound barrier and can limit noise pollution**. Recent research shows that trees act as sound mufflers breaking sound waves from noise. The same effect one gets about sound in an empty room.

9. **Trees provide aesthetics** to the environment as they bring colour and contrast to the environment.



With these many benefits of trees everyone is encouraged to grow trees at their homes and in their fields.

4. Developing and Implementing Policies Aimed at Enhancing Environmental Management:

The Pope recognises “*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” (Page 26).

It is the duty of every citizen to participate in the policy formulation process as well as monitoring the implementation of legislation and policies aimed at enhancing environmental management.

5. Dialogue and Engagement with Other Stakeholders:

In the baseline study by JCTR, 88% of community members interviewed indicated that they had not participated in any dialogue with stakeholders regarding environmental management and Climate Change.

Community members must be involved in dialogue on issues of environmental management. Community members must ensure that they participate and that there is transparency in the planning and decision making regarding the management of waste in their communities. This will in turn guarantee integral development.

Community members and other Stakeholder must also ensure that platforms exist for their participation and dialogue on issues of environmental management.

6. **Sense of Responsibility on the Care for the Earth:**

Every community member must understand their duty and participate in caring for the earth if we have to preserve it for our future generation.

Saint Francis of Assisi in his article entitled “***Praise be to you, my Lord***”, 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. “***Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs***”.

Saint Francis continues to say that “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 come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life”.

This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (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.

Lines of approach to Action:

A guiding principle of Chapter Five is the Catholic Social Teaching principle of subsidiarity, which teaches that challenges should be addressed at the lowest possible – but highest necessary – level of society needed to protect and promote the common good. Pope Francis asserts that:

» *“Technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels—especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay”* (Page 165).

» *“Until greater progress is made in developing widely accessible sources of renewable energy, it is legitimate to choose the lesser of two evils or find short-term solutions”*.

» The move to affordable renewable energy should be expedited with, “subsidies which allow developing countries *access to technology transfer, technical assistance and financial resources,*” and asserts that *“the costs of this would be comparatively low, given the risks of climate change”* (Page 171).

» *“Even if stringent [greenhouse gas reduction] measures are taken now, some countries with scarce resources will require assistance in adapting to the effects already produced”* (Page 170).

Lines of approach to Action:

Pope Francis notes the “need for common and differentiated responsibilities” among nations and quotes the bishops of Bolivia who said:

\“the countries which have benefited from a high degree of industrialization, at the cost of enormous emissions of greenhouse gases, have a greater responsibility of providing a solution to the problems they have caused” (Page170).

Pope Francis calls for dialogue in which the marginalized are especially enabled to participate (Page 183) and emphasizes the “precautionary principle” such that “if objective information suggests that serious and irreversible damage may result, a project should be halted or modified, even in the absence of indisputable proof” (Page 186).

With this realization, What is our way forward?



HAVE A WONDERFUL WEEK

GOOD BLESSES



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