



Laudato Si': Chapter 4 – Integral Ecology

In the fourth chapter, “Integral Ecology”, the encyclical charts a path to recapture awareness of the interconnectedness of creation. To do so, it is essential to appreciate the impact of environmental degradation on “cultural ecology”, such as those social networks and ways of life which are bound up with the environment in which communities are placed. The experience of indigenous peoples is specifically referred to in this regard.

c. Section III – roots the dominance of the “technocratic paradigm” in “modern anthropocentrism”

- Explain this connection in your own words. (HINT: pay special attention to §116, where Francis seems to argue that we don't limit our use of power because we don't attend to the limits reality imposes, we don't do that because we are in the grip of technocratic paradigm, and we are in it because we have a Promethean view of ourselves.
- Having traced the roots of the ecological crisis to anthropocentrism, Francis can then argue “There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology.” (§118) How does the argument go?
- Note that having said we need a sound anthropology, Francis thinks he can then argue: An unsound anthropology manifests itself in relativism – understood as the view things are valued only to the extent that they satisfy our “immediate interests” (§122)
- Relativism so understood leads to a throw-away culture – to an economy of exclusion (recall EG, §51; see also LS, end of §196) and to abortion
- A correct understanding of humanity's dignity and its relationship to the world is: human beings have a vocation to work. What does the Pope mean by ‘work’? (HINT: see §125)
- Once we appreciate the vocation to work, we see importance of employment to human dignity. This sort of sweeping cultural analysis and critique is a staple of Papal writing. How would one go about verifying the claims? Who would do it – political scientists? Anthropologists?

What do you think of the Pope's remarks about business at the end of §129? What would most business people think of them?

Chapter 4 Reflections:

CREATING A CULTURE OF SOLIDARITY, ENCOUNTER AND RELATIONSHIP

"We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family." (no. 52)

"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." (no. 82)

"An interdependent world not only makes us more conscious of the negative effects of certain lifestyles and models of production and consumption which affect us all; more importantly, it motivates us to ensure that solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries." (no. 164)

Questions

1. Reflecting on the above quote, and also on paragraphs 96 to 100 of *Laudato Si'*, how is the vision of "might is right" at odds with Jesus' life, witness and teaching?
2. What values should instead be reflected in our local, national and global relationships, and in our conversation around addressing environmental issues? What changes in attitudes, perspectives, and actions might these values lead to?
3. As Pope Francis points out, we live in an interdependent world. What is our responsibility to other members of the human family, given this interdependence?

Chapter 4 Reflections:

CLIMATE CHANGE

“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. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades.” (no. 25)

“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.”
(no 23)

Questions

1. What are you observing locally or in other parts of the country or world that causes you to think about climate change?
2. What changes can we make to our lifestyles, production and consumption to better care for one another and creation?

Chapter 4 Reflections:

PROTECTING HUMAN LIFE

“Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity. So we cannot fail to consider the effects on people’s lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture.” (no. 43)

“When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.” (no. 117)

“To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized.” (no. 50)

Questions

1. How can we work to protect all God’s creatures, including those who live in poverty and the unborn?
2. What contributions does our unique Catholic perspective bring to the environmental movement?

Chapter 4 Reflections:

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

“In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.” (no. 158)

“A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water.” (no. 164)

“Enforceable international agreements are urgently needed. . . . Global regulatory norms are needed to impose obligations and prevent unacceptable actions, for example, when powerful companies dump contaminated waste or offshore polluting industries in other countries.” (no. 173)

Questions

1. Why does Pope Francis speak of the need for a “global consensus” to address environmental challenges effectively?
2. How is the United States called to fulfill our obligations in justice to those who are poor in developing countries?

Chapter 4 Reflections:

EUCHARIST AND CREATION

“The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God’s hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, ‘creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself.’ Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.” (no. 236)

“Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption.” (no. 222)

Questions

1. How does the Eucharist inspire and motivate our concern for the environment? How should Sunday worship impact weekday witness?
2. How does (or should) our Christian spirituality influence our lifestyles?