



*Laudato Si*

*On Care for Our Common Home*

*Pope Francis*

Bruce Rittenhouse

# As Protestants, why does this encyclical matter to us?

- ▣ It is addressed to all persons. (3) Francis appeals for a dialogue that includes everyone. (14)
- ▣ The problem is global. Earth is our common home, and it is our problem too. (3)
- ▣ On matters of ethics, Francis speaks for one billion of the world's inhabitants.
- ▣ Francis does not, in this document, claim authority on the basis of his office, but on the basis of Scripture, reason, and tradition.
  - As Protestants, we acknowledge the authority of Scripture and reason (if not Catholic tradition).
  - If we find Francis's reading of Scripture correct, then we must recognize that we are answerable to it.

# Ecology and spirituality influence each other

- Spiritual sickness produces environmental sickness. (2)
- Environmental destruction degrades humanity. (5)
- Our throwaway culture discards persons as well as things.



Jonathan McIntosh

# CHAPTER 1: OUR COMMON HOME

## Climate change

- ▣ Francis recognizes the scientific consensus that human causes (fossil fuels, deforestation, etc.) are responsible for climate change (24)
- ▣ The worst impacts of climate change will be felt by poor countries. (25)
  - Francis is concerned with distributive justice, not just intergenerational justice.
- ▣ The world's poor are suffering from climate change now — this is not just a future problem — but the rich nations are indifferent to their suffering. (25)

# Water quality and biodiversity

- ▣ There are serious problems with the quality of water available to the world's poor. (29)
- ▣ Access to safe drinking water is a basic and universal human right. (30)
- ▣ Human beings have no right to destroy species being lost. (33)



Bob Metcalf

# The social dimension of the ecological crisis

- ▣ Our culture adds to its offering of consumer goods while destroying goods of nature, diminishing our lives' richness and beauty. (34)
  - We were not meant to be deprived of nature. (44)
- ▣ Social consequences of current technological and economic changes: (46-47)
  - Unemployment
  - Social exclusion
  - Loss of identity
  - Isolation
  - Social breakdown
  - Violence
  - Drug trafficking
- ▣ Noise, media, technology, and information overload impede moral development. (47)

# Social ecology

- ▣ The environment, society, and individual well-being all thrive or suffer together. (48)
  - Ecology must incorporate justice. (49)
- ▣ Environmental and social destruction disproportionately affect the world's poor. (48)
  - The world's majority, the poor, should be the focus in understanding environmental issues. (49)
- ▣ The environmental problem arises from consumerism, not population growth. (50)
  - The wealthy have no right to maintain wasteful consumption patterns. (50)
  - The global north owes an “ecological debt” to the global south for past resource use. (51)

# Obstacles to addressing the environmental crisis

- ▣ The crisis cannot be solved through technology. We lack the understanding of nature. (20)
- ▣ We lack the culture and the leadership to confront the crisis. (53)
  - Our politics allows special interests to override the common good. (54)
  - Our ecological awareness has not changed our consumption habits. (55)
- ▣ Our distraction feeds denial of moral responsibility. (59)
- ▣ We embrace uncertainty and blind ourselves to the situation to evade our responsibility. (59)
- ▣ We are reaching a breaking point as evidenced by natural and social disasters. (61)

# CHAPTER 2: THE GOSPEL OF CREATION

## Creation in relation to nature

- ▣ Faith leads us to care for nature and neighbor. (64)
- ▣ The value of each person is shown by our creation in God's image (Gen. 1:26) (65)



Michaelangelo

- ▣ Our lives are grounded in a threefold relationship: to God, neighbor, and nature. All are damaged by sin. (66)

# Dominion over the earth

- ▣ God's gift of dominion over nature (Gen. 1:28) does not authorize human beings' unbridled exploitation. (67)
- ▣ We are to "till and keep" the garden of the world (Gen. 2:16), which is a relationship of mutual responsibility between human and nature. (67)
- ▣ God rejects every human claim to absolute ownership of the earth. The earth is God's (Ps. 24:1, Deut. 10:14, Lev. 25:23). (67)
  - Nature is a collective good, and thus the responsibility of all. (95)
  - The earth is a shared inheritance meant to benefit all. Private property is subordinate to this principle. (93)

# The value of nonhuman life

- ❑ The value of nonhuman life is given by God. It doesn't depend on what use we make of it. (69)
  - Creatures, like human beings, have their end in God. (79)
  - God dwells in every living creature. (88)
- ❑ Creation is not an object to use but a gift, an act of God's love. (76)
- ❑ Nature is a revelation of the divine. (85)



# Ecology entails care for humanity

- ▣ Creatures, still, do not have equal worth with persons. Our moral concern should be greatest for persons who are marginalized. (90)
- ▣ There is no true care for nature that excludes care for human beings. Concern for the poor is integral to ecological thought. (91)

# CHAPTER 3: HUMAN ROOTS OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

## The spiritual origin of the crisis

- ▣ “A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us.” (101)
  - Technology shapes lifestyles, concentrates power. (107)
- ▣ Technological development has not be matched by moral development. (105)
  - Human beings surrender freedom to desire.
  - Increased power is not regulated by responsibility.

# The technological paradigm

- ▣ The paradigm of human beings' relation to nature is one of control and self-serving manipulation. (106)
  - The idea of infinite growth assumes infinite resources. (106)
  - Technology is not value-neutral. It shapes lifestyles and concentrates power. (107)
- ▣ The technological paradigm guides economics and politics as well. Profit drives development without concern for the quality of human lives. (109)
  - The market is not self-directed towards serving the human good. (109)

# A failure of vision

- ▣ Technology's fragmentation of knowledge blinds us to larger meanings, leaving us unable to address complex global problems. (110)
  - We have lost touch with the values and goals that should direct science and technology. (114)
  - We give absolute priority to immediate convenience and interest. All else becomes relative. (122)
  - The structures of nature should instruct us in how to respect natural systems, but we are failing to listen. (117)
  - We end up destroying the foundations of human life. (117)
- ▣ Ecological healing requires a change of culture and a renewal of the human spirit. (111, 118)

# Human and ecological priorities

- ▣ We have a vocation to work. We should not seek technological change that replaces human work. (128)
- ▣ Government has the right and duty to favor small producers and differentiated production. (129)
- ▣ Biotechnology should be limited to advances that favor development of nature “in its own line.” (132)

# CHAPTER 4: INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

## The environment

- ▣ *Environment* is a relationship between nature and human beings. It is not separable from humanity (139)
  - Social and environmental problems are not separable. (139)
  - Ecosystems have a value independent of their use. (140)
- ▣ We must support research to understand natural systems better. (140)
- ▣ *Sustainable use* must consider ecosystems' regenerative ability. (140)

# Social ecology

- ▣ *Social ecology* is the health of a society's institutions. It affects both the quality of human life and the environment. (142)
- ▣ *Cultural ecology* is the preservation of humanity's cultural treasures – i.e., the history, culture, and architecture than preserve the identity of place. (143)
  - Consumerism undermines cultural ecology. It has a leveling effect on culture that diminishes humanity's cultural heritage. (144)
  - Development must occur within cultural contexts. (144)

# Ecology of daily life

- ▣ *Ecology of daily life* means that authentic human development must consider the setting in which people live their lives. (147)
  - Noise, chaos, and over-stimulation detract from quality of life. (147)
- ▣ Access to homeownership is a major issue for human ecology. (152)
- ▣ Human ecology requires relationships between persons that are governed by the moral law. (155)

# The common good

- ▣ The *common good* is the sum of the conditions of social life which allows groups and persons access to their personal fulfillment. (156)
  - Respect for the individual person's rights underlies the common good. (157)
- ▣ The common good demands *solidarity* and a *preferential option for the poorest*. (158)
  - Universal destination of the world's goods
  - Recognizing the dignity of the poor
- ▣ The common good extends to future generations. (159)
  - Sustainable development is *intergenerational solidarity*. This is a basic issue of justice. The world we have received belongs also to those who will follow us. (159)

# The ecological question

- ▣ “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (160)
  - How we answer this question has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly lives. (160)
- ▣ The question can only be answered here and now. (161)
  - The pace of consumption, waste, and environmental change has so stretched the planet that our lifestyle can only lead to catastrophes. (161)
- ▣ Our difficulty in answering this challenge has to do with an ethical and cultural decline: rampant individualism, self-centeredness, instant gratification, and narrowed moral concern. (162)

# CHAPTER 5: LINES OF APPROACH AND ACTION

## The role of governance

- ▣ Global interdependence forces us to recognize the need for global solutions. (164)
- ▣ The global commons requires global governance. (174)
  - NGOs put environmental issues on public agenda. (166)
  - Environmental solutions require citizen control of government. (179)
- ▣ Successful international environmental accords demonstrate possibility of global governance. (168)
  - Basel Convention on hazardous wastes
  - Convention on international trade in endangered species
  - Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting chemicals

# Responsibilities for responding to climate change

- ▣ “Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most.” (169)
  - There can be no solution when nations place the national good above the common good.
- ▣ Poor nations’ first responsibility is to fight poverty and promote social development. (172)
- ▣ Rich nations must help the poor nations, financially and technically, with climate change mitigation. They should be moved by an ethic of solidarity. (172)
  - True statecraft is evident when it faces difficult situations with a concern for the public good. (178)

# The ethical use of partial scientific knowledge

- ▣ Precautionary principle: “Lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a pretext for postponing cost-effective measures’ which prevent environmental degradation.” (186)
  - This principle protects those who are most vulnerable and politically powerless.
- ▣ Principle of separation of Church, state, science: “The Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good.” (188)

# The inadequacy of economics to make value judgments

- ▣ “Environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits.” (190)
- ▣ “We need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in . . . profits.” (190)
- ▣ We must give thought to the real value of ecosystems and species, their significance for persons and cultures, and for the concerns and needs of the poor. (190)

# A new understanding of human progress

- ▣ Human progress is not defined by economic progress. (191)
  - Profit maximization that ignores externalities does not advance social and environmental well-being. (195)
  - A productive development would invest less in consumption, and more in the family. (192)
  - “The time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.” (193)
- ▣ The environment cannot be preserved by half measures that continue to prioritize financial gain. (194)

# Religion and science

- ▣ Science does not provide a complete explanation of life. (199)
- ▣ Rational ethical principles are expressed in many ways, including religious language. (199)
- ▣ Technical fixes cannot solve environmental problems if we do not recover ethical principles. (200)
- ▣ We need dialogue among the world's religions and among the sciences. (200)

# CHAPTER 6: ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

## Changing the human spirit

- ▣ “It is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone.” (202)
- ▣ Consumerism offers an illusory freedom based on market choices. (203)
- ▣ Consumerism is the consequence of persons whose hearts are empty and self-centered, who lack a sense of the common good. (204)

# Our capacity for change

- ▣ Human beings are capable of rising above themselves, of making a new start. We retain the capacity to respond to God's grace. (205)
- ▣ Lifestyle changes can create pressure for political, economic, and social changes. (206)
- ▣ We can and must reclaim our capacity for a disinterested concern for other persons. (208)
  - "We must regain the conviction that . . . we have a shared responsibility for others and the world and that being good and decent are worth it. We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty." (229)

# Personal change must precede institutional change

- ▣ Environmental education must include a critique of our culture. (210)
  - While young people have an environmental sensitivity, they have grown up in a culture that fosters habits of consumerism and affluence. These habits are difficult to change. (209)
- ▣ “If the laws are to bring about significant long-lasting effects, the majority of the members of society must be adequately motivated to accept them, and personally transformed to respond.” (211)
- ▣ “We need institutions empowered to impose penalties for damage inflicted on the environment. But we also need the personal qualities of self-control and willingness to learn from one another.” (214)

# A call to conversion

- ▣ “The ecological crisis is . . . a summons to profound interior conversion.” (217)
  - Conversion must be practical. It means that faith experience changes our relationship with the world.
  - “I ask all Christians to recognize and to live fully this dimension of their conversion.” (221)
- ▣ Individual conversion is not enough. There must also be a conversion of communities that empowers community networks to act. (219)

# The Christian vision of the good life

- ▣ Christian spirituality encourages a materially simple, prophetic, and contemplative lifestyle, capable of deep enjoyment in small things, and free of an obsession with consumption. (222)
- ▣ This lifestyle is liberating. It is life lived to the full. It finds satisfaction in friendship, service, developing one's gifts, music, art, contact with nature, and prayer.(223)
  - Francis cites the spirituality of Saint Bonaventure and Saint John of the Cross that experiences God in the things of nature. (233-234)
- ▣ An authentic lifestyle that cares for ecology and the common good can give us balance and inner peace in a world filled with distractions and busyness. (225)

# Appreciation?

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