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Pope Francis' passionate call for change

Progressio's interactive guide to Laudato Si'



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People powered development

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Cover: Woman farmers irrigating crops with buckets of water in Zimbabwe where Progressio has trained hundreds of women in resilient livelihoods.

Introduction

Laudato Si' is Pope Francis' passionate call to humanity for a change in direction. He has no doubt that our actions are destroying our planet. While we have made enormous progress in science and technology, we haven't matched this with moral, ethical and spiritual progress. This imbalance is causing our relationships with creation, with our sisters and brothers, and with God to break down. When this happens, our hearts are hardened to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. We become arrogant and too often neglect creation and everyone that is part of it, forgetting that this is what God has entrusted to us for our care.

↓
"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." (84)

While ecological concerns aren't new to Catholic Social Teaching (the body of papal documents or encyclicals published on a range of social issues over the last 120 years), this is the first time it has been the main focus of an encyclical. There is a rich history of Christian thought about how we relate to creation, going all the way back to the foundation of the church, as well as a tradition shared with Judaism that goes back centuries before this. Pope Francis draws upon this wellspring of thought and experience in *Laudato Si'*.

Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of

ecology, is held up as an example throughout the world as someone who was in communion and in harmony with all of creation. It is from one of his prayers about 'our sister, Mother Earth' that the encyclical finds its name, *Laudato Si'* – "praised be!" Pope Francis also draws on the thought of many others, including Romano Guardini, a priest who resisted the Nazis in Germany, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit scientist and theologian, and Ali al-Khawwas, a Sufi mystic, to name just a few.

This short guide is not a comprehensive summary or academic analysis, nor is it intended as an alternative to reading the encyclical itself. We hope it will give you a taste of the richness of *Laudato Si'* and provide you with a way in, giving you the confidence to pick up and engage with it.

While many documents of Catholic Social Teaching can seem dense and technical to many readers, *Laudato Si'* has a more readable style. A huge amount of ground is covered, which means it isn't a short document, but don't let that put you off: it's broken down into chapters that are much more manageable. Each paragraph in *Laudato Si'* is numbered and, at the end of each section of this guide, we'll highlight some of these so you can have a look

yourself. The whole encyclical is online, so this is a really easy way for you to start engaging with it.

Some have said that Catholic Social Teaching encyclicals can feel distant and aloof, because they can have a tendency to deal with concepts and ideas and shy away from tangible examples. This isn't the case in *Laudato Si'*. One of Pope Francis' beliefs is that "realities are more important than ideas," and while he doesn't avoid talking about difficult concepts, the text is littered with examples – from discussing the damage of mining and mineral extraction, to the benefits of good public transport. It's not a document about policy, but rather highlights the different moral implications of our actions. This guide won't be looking at these specific examples, but rather picking out the main themes that weave their way like threads through the whole of this ground-breaking encyclical and give it unity.

This study guide is designed to be used in a group setting, aiding further understanding and encouraging action based on the text. We would suggest that read about each theme and then respond to the different points of reflection, discussion and action. You can either elect someone to read the analysis provided and

facilitate the reflection and discussion, or you can rotate this role as you please. Together with friends and fellow members of your parish, we hope you can use these tools to draw further inspiration from the Pope's seminal message in *Laudato Si'* and take steps towards applying the teachings to your daily life.



"I will point to the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, that everything is connected... and [to] the proposal of a new lifestyle."

(16)



Pope Francis has issued a passionate call for the world to change its ways

The modern myth

KEY LINES
27, 50,
54-56,
189-195



**“We need to grow in the conviction that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development.”
(191)**

Pope Francis dedicates the first chapter of *Laudato Si'* to discussing the many ways that we are degrading our world. His goal is not to make a comprehensive list, but to jolt us into action by recognising the extent of the damage so that we take it on ourselves as our own suffering. Pope Francis believes we can only understand what we can do about it when we look beyond the symptoms to the human origins of the ecological crisis.

Many of the world's resources are being plundered because of a short-sighted approach to the economy. This short-termism allows profit to trump wider considerations about the common good and the impact on the world's ecosystems. It fails to recognise what Pope Francis calls the modern myth of unlimited material progress.

While some nations have been successful in tackling corruption and regulating those transnational corporations that are driven by purely economic interests, these nations have, at the same time, failed to tackle their own unsustainable levels of consumption.

Laudato Si' talks fondly of cooperatives and business practices that encourage diversity and creativity, the kind that are seen in small-scale

food production, the practices that feed a huge section of the world's population.

Pope Francis isn't against progress or profit. In fact, he makes a point of saying that business is a noble vocation that can do much to contribute to the common good. But progress must be progress that has human dignity at its heart, and profit must be earned responsibly.

Reflection (in silence)

*How do you treat your surroundings?
Do you notice things change over time?*

Discussion

What could you do (collectively or individually) to cut down your own personal consumption?

Action

Pledge to act more sustainably – you might give something up, or just use less of something you know to harm the environment.



**“You cannot
serve both
God and
money.”
(Matt 6:24)**

*Heroína Arasena
standing in the shop
that she bought
in the Dominican
Republic using a
loan and training
provided by the
Mother’s Union,
one of Progressio’s
local partners.*

Technology & responsibility

KEY LINES
46-47,
105-115,
203-215



“We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral.” (112)



As we get further into Laudato Si', Pope

Francis looks deeper to get to the heart of our wilful disregard for creation. He finds that our approach to the world around us is one of domination, which is bad for the environment and also deeply damaging to ourselves and our relationships with those around us.

This attitude has developed in modern times because of the immense technological developments that have given us much more power over nature and the lives of our sisters and brothers. This progress hasn't been matched by a development of responsibility, so we don't know how best to use the power it gives us. Rather than directing technology responsibly so that we work in harmony with nature, it ends up directing us and continues to alienate us from creation.

This alienation breaks down social bonds as it breeds instability and uncertainty in people's hearts. We come to think more and more of ourselves and our interests and become greedy. "The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume." (204) The communal bonds and values that hold our communities together are respected only in so far as they don't clash with the individual's freedom to consume.

Pope Francis calls for a bold cultural revolution. We must overcome individualism and develop a new lifestyle. He passionately believes that we have in us the capacity to come out of ourselves and put the care and concerns of others before our own, that we can move beyond this culture that focuses on consumption and superficiality, and that we should have hope in a better tomorrow.

**"One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."
(Luke 12:15)**

Reflection (in silence)

How many times a day do you turn to technology? How does it make you feel?

Discussion

How do we create community and make more time for each other?

Action

Think about spending an hour a week with someone who wouldn't normally have company. Think about how you'll seek them out.

Opposite: Rhoda Khumalo standing outside her home in Zimbabwe with a solar panel that has given her the power to join the fight against climate change.

In harmony with nature

KEY LINES
9, 66-71,
86-90

↘
“Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself.” (66)

Pope Francis looks to the symbolic and narrative language of the book of Genesis to understand the closely intertwined relationships between humankind, the earth and God. Genesis teaches us that human life is grounded in these closely intertwined relationship and that if this harmony is broken by treating others as objects and by behaving like ‘lords and masters’, we harm our relationship with the environment, with God, with others and with our own self.

From the book of Genesis we learn that creation isn’t just the environment we live in: we are part of it, we have a relationship with it. It isn’t an object to be studied, but rather “it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance.” (76)

This interconnectedness means that our care for the environment is only one part of an integral ecology. We must at the same time defend all human life, as to ignore this in favour of only environmental concerns is to ignore the cry of nature itself.

The more we nourish and develop these relationships, when we put the care of others and the care of the whole of creation before

our own selfish interests, the more we grow. As we do so, we become more fully human and live in closer communion with our Creator.

Reflection (in silence)

Think about how you would feel if your home or livelihood was affected by flooding or climate change. Imagine if climate change was affecting something you love.

Discussion

What can we do more of, to put people and planet before profit?

Action

As a community, why not start something which will bring you closer to nature? You could have a vegetable patch on parish grounds or set up a shared allotment scheme.



**“Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honour him.”
(Proverbs 14:31)**

A Progressio development worker sharing skills on how to grow crops sustainably with a community member in Zimbabwe.

Ecological conversion

KEY LINES
10, 91-98,
216-220



“I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.”
(10)



In Laudato Si', Pope Francis calls us to an ecological conversion and puts forward proposals for an ecological spirituality. He recommends a way of understanding and living out our relationships with God, creation and everyone that is a part of it.

Our fast-paced world, characterised by busy lives, increased consumption and growing distractions, can prevent us from cherishing the beauty in every moment. Pope Francis' ecological spirituality draws us towards a simpler life in which we find joy and peace. It is this joy and peace that, in the Christian tradition, Jesus exemplifies.

Pope Francis takes Francis of Assisi as his model for this spirituality, the saint who approached the world as a joyful mystery to be adored with praise and thanksgiving. Laudato Si' likens this attitude to how we experience falling in love. It's much more than just a reasoned appreciation of recognition based on economic value.

We mustn't mistake this for naive romanticism. It's not being soppy or sentimental, but is an attitude that shapes our thoughts, our behaviours and our passions. It's in cultivating this attitude or spirituality that we can resist a

mentality of consumption and exploitation, and it's through this that Pope Francis wants to do what doctrine alone can't, to "motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world." (216)

**"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."
(Gen 1:31)**

Reflection (in silence)

*Think about what you did yesterday.
Where was the beauty?*

Discussion

How can we encourage people to be more joyful in every moment and live with peace?

Action

Take a photo of your group together, print it out and cherish it (and tweet @Progressio!). Plan a walk in your local area and go and explore something you've always meant to visit.

Opposite: A Haitian woman carries her banana crop through the streets of Port-au-Prince following the 2010 earthquake that devastated homes and livelihoods.

A healthy politics

KEY LINES
13-14,
178-198,
229-232



“We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.” (14)

For Pope Francis, we need a change of heart if we’re to face the challenges facing the planet. But he also sees an essential role for politics at the local, national and international levels.

This politics, however, also needs a culture change, as too often it’s unable to resist short-term solutions, ideologies or powerful economic interests. Politicians must be courageous enough, Pope Francis tells us, to take decisions that might outlast their government, because the political solutions related to climate change and environmental protection take time. International agreements are essential, so too are regional, national and local policy: but for policy to be effective, it has to be the product of a healthy politics.

This healthy politics is one based on love. Love applied to our social, political and economic choices is the only route to authentic development. We mustn’t let this be pushed aside as an irrelevant motivation in our political discourse, but rather let love be the thing that shapes our politics.

Laudato Si’ repeatedly calls for a conversation that includes everyone. We must “regain the conviction that we need one another, that we

have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.” (229) Pope Francis is calling for a politics that is grounded in relationship, is one of love and is courageous.

Reflection (in silence)

Do you regard yourself as a force for change? Think about what you would do if you were in a position of power.

Discussion

As a community, how can you work for progress? Perhaps there is a local project you could invest time in.

Action

Write to your MP, asking them to use their power to represent your desire for a fairer world at an international level. Why not ask them what they’re doing to ensure the success of Sustainable Development Goal 3 – to take urgent action to combat change.



**“I give
you a new
commandment,
that you love
one another.
Just as I have
loved you, you
also should love
one another.”
(John 13:34)**

*A woman
campaigning in
Somaliland ahead
of the elections in
November 2012.*

Perspective of the poor

KEY LINES
48-49, 52,
90, 117

↘
“The
deterioration
of the
environment
and of society
affects the most
vulnerable
people on the
planet.” (48)



All of the encyclicals that make up the social teaching of the Catholic church have a particular concern for the poor and the vulnerable. In fact, one of the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching is the 'Preferential Option for the Poor'. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis makes a subtle but significant change to this: he writes not only out of concern for them, but brings their concerns, their voice and their perspective right to the heart of the encyclical.

It's evident from the footnotes in *Laudato Si'* that he wants us to hear the voice of the church in the poorest and least developed parts of the world. The process of putting this document together involved consultation with people from all corners of the world.

This theme comes through most clearly in the way the Pope's own thought is shaped by the needs of those who are hungry, those who are hurting and those who are lonely. In *Laudato Si'*, he writes scornfully about those with power who are far removed from the poor, who never come into contact with them and experience their concerns. Instead, from their comfort, they decide the fate of the most vulnerable on their behalf. For Pope Francis, to help and love the most vulnerable means being close to them.

The perspective of the poor is integral to *Laudato Si'*. Throughout the document, their fate and the fate of the planet are repeatedly linked. This is because they are the ones who most closely share in the pain of the earth. They cry out as it cries out, yet have done so little to cause it.

“We must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35)

Reflection (in silence)

Could you do more to put the poorest people first in your life?

Discussion

Read the case study on the next page and reflect on the steps Joram took to improve his life.

Action

Sign up to the Progressio mailing list to hear more stories from the ground and to take action to put the poorest first in international decisions.

Opposite: Ali Abdirahman, Project Officer of Talowadag Action against HIV and AIDS, makes a home visit for counselling near Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Case study: Joram's story

Like most in his community in Salima, central Malawi, Joram is a farmer. And like his neighbours, the 29-year-old faces a lack of food security. Unpredictable weather, scarcity of farmland and reliance on basic farming methods all mean that often he can't provide enough affordable, nutritious food to feed his family, let alone to sell on. Hunger is common.

"For many years I struggled to produce enough food on the small piece of land my father gave me," says Joram. "I planted maize each year but yields are waning. Pests and diseases were a constant problem and I could not afford herbicides. I almost gave up entirely because, no matter how hard I worked, things just got worse."

In Malawi and Zimbabwe, Progressio partnered with local charity Environment Africa to improve the lives of poor and marginalised people like Joram. Our belief is that if communities turn to diversified farming (where a variety of crops and animals are produced rather than specialising in a single commodity), farmers can manage risks and improve their livelihoods.



Joram on his new bicycle (above). In Malawi and Zimbabwe, farm projects like this one (left) can transform lives.

The partnership provided Joram with a flock of five guinea fowl. It also sent him to a farmers' field school, where he learnt agro-forestry, marketing and business development skills. Since then, Joram's flock of guinea fowl has grown to 14, and he is able to use the meat and eggs to feed his family and to sell for profit.

Following from the lessons he learned at farmer school, during last year's harvest Joram decided to plant sweet potatoes and cassava instead of maize. These crops sold for more at market and the resulting profit allowed him to buy not only enough maize to feed his family, but a new bicycle as well (pictured). He is now using the profit to support a new business buying and selling tomatoes.

The impact of Progressio's work in Salima was three-fold. First, allowing farmers to give their families much-needed food security. Second, encouraging them to see their farms as a profit-making activity, with multiple income opportunities. And third, increasing the self-confidence of individuals like Joram.

"I now feel like a real father to my family," says Joram. "I have five children under 12 who look up to me and are confident that I am leading them somewhere good."

Conclusion

Laudato Si' is a powerful and prophetic document full of many moments of joy and sorrow. Pope Francis thanks campaigners and politicians who have made gains and kept up the profile of environmental questions, and praises all those who are already modelling more sustainable and responsible ways of living. Yet there is still much to be done.

Pope Francis talks of hope in a better future while, at the same time, challenging us all. This document remains, however, just text on a page if we don't take it to heart, accept its challenges and live it out in the everyday of our lives. As Pope Francis himself says, "The poor and the earth are crying out," it's time for us all to do something about it.

"The poor and the earth are crying out." (Pope Francis)

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could educate someone on their rights and teach them to hold their local government to account in Zimbabwe.

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