

LAUDATO SI': ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Encyclical Letter

Pope Francis

Chapter Three: The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis

READ:

This chapter gives an analysis of the current situation, “so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes”(15), “It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis. A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us.(101).

Pope Francis asks us to look at our understanding of the causes of the ecological crisis and to consider what changes we need to make so that all might share in the benefits of technology. He calls for dialogue to create an ethical framework of principles and behaviors, and suggests several areas for discussion and decision-making.

Technology gives “those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world” (104). Francis suggests we are enthralled with a technocratic paradigm, which promises unlimited growth; however, this paradigm “is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.”(106) A reductionism...affects every aspect of human and social life. Technological products create a framework which ends up conditioning our lifestyles and shaping social possibilities, but these are dictated by certain powerful groups that dominate economic and political life. Those supporting this paradigm show “no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behavior shows that for them maximizing profits is enough.”(107).

This mentality of domination by economics, technology, and financial wealth has led to the destruction of nature and the exploitation of people and the most vulnerable populations as well as the domination of economics and political life”, keeping us from recognizing that “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion” (109). Francis sees that the problems of global hunger and poverty cannot be resolved simply by market growth. Wasteful consumerism offers an unacceptable contrast to dehumanizing privation. From this perception, Francis notes that the deepest roots of our present failures have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth. We must realize that our struggle to constantly accumulate novelties can lead to a superficial life (#106-114).

“Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism” (116): human beings no longer recognize their right place with respect to the world and take on a self-centered position, focused exclusively on themselves and on their own power. God has given earth to us, and we must use it with respect for its original good purpose. We are not called to mastery over the world, but to responsible stewardship. We are also God’s gift to one another. When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities, it is difficult to hear the cry of nature itself. We cannot underestimate the importance of our relationship with the environment, with others and with God. Pope Francis calls for a new synthesis capable of overcoming the false arguments of recent centuries (#115-121).

The Pope calls us beyond the logic of discarding, trashing, or a throw-away culture that justifies wasting environmental resources and human gifts, treating both the other and nature as simple objects and leads to a myriad of forms of domination, which give rise to crimes against each other, the earth and humanity. In this light, the Encyclical addresses two crucial problems of today's world, 1) *practical relativism*: seeing something as relevant only if it serves immediate interests can lead to environmental degradation and social decay and promote the "use and throw away culture." (#122-123). 2) Work: "any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labor" (124), because "to stop investing in people, in order to gain greater short-term financial gain, is bad business for society" (128). Pope Francis suggests that work understood in relationship to others is what gives meaning and purpose to our human activities. Further, the Pope says that when our capacity for contemplation and reverence is impaired, it is easy for us to misunderstand the meaning of work. Our lives need to have a balance of reflection and work. He encourages work as a means to express our human dignity. As such it should be a setting for rich personal growth, where many aspects of life enter into play: creativity, planning for the future, developing our talents, living out our values, relating to others, giving glory to God. Thus, helping the poor financially is only provisional; the poor need to be allowed a dignified life through work. When the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines, this is not necessarily progress, he says; "it is imperative to an economy which favors productive diversity and business creativity", and "civil authorities have the right and duty to adopt clear and firm measures in support of small producers and differentiated production" (124-129). About human intervention in plants and animals, permissible when it pertains to the necessities of human life, he says a broad, responsible, scientific and social debate needs to take place, considering all available information and including those directly and indirectly affected. Technology separated from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power (130-136).

Reflect:

What does this chapter of *Laudato Si'* call forth in you? What emotions and feelings rise up within you? What will you reflect on in your private meditation time?

Act:

What changes, if any can you try to make within your living situation? What is rising up within you? Will your life change for the better or remain the same?

Closing Prayer:

Provident God, thank you for this time of information and reflection. Give me the courage to make a difference for the sake of our common home – Mother Earth. I pray this in the name of You, the Source of All Being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit. Amen.