

10 key excerpts from Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment

By [Sarah Pulliam Bailey](#) June 18 at 6:45 AM

Pope Francis is calling for an “ecological conversion” for the faithful in his [sweeping new encyclical on the environment](#). In “*Laudato Si*,” or “Be Praised” (or “Praised Be,”) he warns of harming birds and industrial waste and calls for renewable fuel subsidies and energy efficiency.

Here are some of the key passages people will read closely, everything from climate change and global warming to abortion and population control.

1) Climate change has grave implications. “Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever,” he writes.

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. Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited. Point 25 page 20

2) Rich countries are destroying poor ones, and the earth is getting warmer. “The warming caused by huge consumption on the part of some rich countries has repercussions on the poorest areas of the world, especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming.”

There is also the damage caused by the export of solid waste and toxic liquids to developing countries, and by the pollution produced by companies which operate in less developed countries in ways they could never do at home, in the countries in which they raise their capital: “We note that often the businesses which operate this way are multinationals. They do here what they would never do in developed countries or the so-called first world.” Point 51 page 37

3) Christians have misinterpreted Scripture and “must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.”

The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (*Gen* 2:15). Point 66 page 48

4) The importance of access to safe drinkable water is “a basic and universal human right.”

Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet *access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.* Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack 24 access to drinking water, because *they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.* This debt can be paid partly by an increase in funding to provide clean water and sanitary services among the poor. But water continues to be wasted, not only in the developed world but also in developing countries which possess it in abundance. Point 30 page 23

5) Technocratic domination leads to the destruction of nature and the exploitation of people, and “by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion.”

Some circles maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems, and argue, in popular and non-technical terms, that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth. They are less concerned with certain economic theories which today scarcely anybody dares defend, than with their actual operation in the functioning of the economy. They may not affirm such theories with words, but nonetheless support them with their deeds by showing no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough. Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion. Point 109 page 81

6) Population control does not address the problems of the poor. “In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.” And, “Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion.”

Instead of resolving the problems of the poor and thinking of how the world can be different, some can only propose a reduction in the birth rate. At times, developing countries face forms of international pressure which make economic assistance contingent on certain policies of “reproductive health”. Yet “while it is true that an unequal distribution of the population and of available resources creates obstacles to development and a sustainable use of the environment, it must nonetheless be recognized that demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development”.²⁸ To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. Point 50 page 35

7) Gender differences matter, and “valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different.”

The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any

genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek "to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it". ^{Point 155 page 115}

8) The international community has not acted enough: "recent World Summits on the environment have not lived up to expectations because, due to lack of political will, they were unable to reach truly meaningful and effective global agreements on the environment." He writes, "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." And, "there is urgent need of a true world political authority, as my predecessor Blessed John XXIII indicated some years ago."

Politics must not be subject to the economy, nor should the economy be subject to the dictates of an efficiency-driven paradigm of technocracy. Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life. ^{Point 189 page 137}

9) Individuals must act. "An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness," he writes. We should also consider taking public transit, car-pooling, planting trees, turning off the lights and recycling.

People may well have a growing ecological sensitivity but it has not succeeded in changing their harmful habits of consumption which, rather than decreasing, appear to be growing all the more. A simple example is the increasing use and power of air-conditioning. The markets, which immediately benefit from sales, stimulate ever greater demand. An outsider looking at our world would be amazed at such behaviour, which at times appears self-destructive. ^{Point 55 page 40}

10) By the way, why are we here on Earth in the first place? "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" he writes.

When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results. But if those issues are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions: What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. ^{Point 160 page 118}

This might whet your appetite for reading the whole document or at least giving it a skim read! You can find the English translation at:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf