

We are all in this together

Ten Green Commandments #5 - The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis

The debates which surround climate change, global warming, species extinction and other ecological crises often focus on the extent and impact of human driven causes. Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si*, does not hesitate to situate human activity firmly at the centre of the ecological crisis:

... scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentrations of greenhouse gases ... released mainly as a result of human activity (#23).

The question of why human activity, including land clearance, mining, over-fishing, pollution and plastic use is allowed to continue, further harming the global environment, steers us into more complex territory. Pope Francis uses his landmark encyclical to look at the deeper issues involved:

1. There is a dominant worldview that the natural world exists to serve humanity. The understanding of the natural world as sacred and complementary to human existence has largely been lost as human progress imposes more and more 'development' across the planet. *... we have come to see ourselves as her (Earth's) lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will... (#2).*

2. Technology has given human beings *...an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world (#104).* Unfortunately, technological advances and improvements to human life have not always been matched by development of human moral responsibility. Weaponry is one example: *...we need but think of the nuclear bombs... or the array of technology ... employed to kill millions of people... (#104).*

3. The economic paradigm which dominates our global systems preferences profit over people: *... the economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings (#104).*

4. There has been a loss of connection with the common good. In a culture of consumerism and instant gratification the impact of our actions on others is often ignored. The greatest human rights violations in the world today are all linked to profit or lack of respect for the humanity of others: slavery, forced labour, sexual exploitation of women and children, organ farming, the drug trade, genocide, war, to name but a few. *... when the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, then laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions ... (#123).*

Laudato Si is a radical call for reform to the *natural and moral structure (#115)* of our communities and nations. A call to open our eyes to the injustices which are inherent in a world focused on profit, power and wealth. For Pope Francis there can be *... no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself... (#118).* We need a global revolution, not just to save the planet from environmental destruction, but also to save millions of people from the impact of rampant and insatiable greed. It is indeed human behaviour which is at the root of the environmental crisis, but more widely, human denial, indifference, resignation and selfishness which also sustains a looming humanitarian crisis.



REFLECTION

What part can you play in the global revolution called for in *Laudato Si*?

REFERENCES: 1. Pope Francis. (2015). *Laudato Si'* [Encyclical Letter]. Retrieved from www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html
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