

## 10 Central Ideas from Laudato Si (James Martin, S.J.)

### 1) **The spiritual perspective is now part of the discussion on the environment.**

- The greatest contribution of “Laudato Si” is its systematic overview of the crisis from a religious point of view.
- Now, the language of faith enters the discussion.
- Pope Francis does not impose his beliefs, aware that not all are believers (No. 62).
- He invites others to listen to a religious point of view, particularly its understanding of creation as a holy and precious gift from God to be revered by all.
- He hopes to offer “ample motivation” to Christians and other believers “to care for nature” (No. 64).
- Francis also highlights the teachings of his predecessors, particularly St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

### 2) **The poor are disproportionately affected by climate change.**

The disproportionate effect of environmental change on the poor is highlighted in almost every section of the encyclical. He provides many examples of the effects of climate change, whose “worse impacts” are felt by those living in the developing countries.

*This results from:*

- decisions made by the rich
- inability of the poor to easily adapt to climate change.
- the natural resources of poor countries “fuel” the development of the richer countries “at the cost of their own present and future” (No. 52).

*The pope regularly:*

- appeals to the Gospels, to Catholic social teaching to critique the exclusion of anyone from benefits of the goods of creation.
- calls for an appreciation of the “immense dignity of the poor” (No. 158).

### 3) **Less is more.**

**Pope Francis critiques:**

- the “technocratic” mind-set, in which technology is seen as the “principal key” to human existence (No. 110).
- an unthinking reliance on market forces before considering how it will affect the environment and “without concern for its potential negative impact on human beings” (No. 109).
- the idea that every increase in technology is good for the earth and for the poor
- “extreme consumerism” in which the earth is despoiled and billions are left impoverished (No. 203).

Pope Francis proposes:

- the acceptance of “decreased growth in some part of the world, in order to provide recourse for other places to experience healthy growth” (No. 193).
- Christian spirituality that encourages “moderation and the capacity to be happy with little” (No. 222).
- a redefinition of our notion of progress.

4) **Catholic social teaching now includes teaching on the environment.**

- “Laudato Si” “is now added to the body of the Church’s social teaching” (No. 15).
- an encyclical is a type of teaching that enjoys the highest level of authority in the church.
- it continues reflection on modern-day problems that began with Leo XIII’s “Rerum Novarum,” on capital and labour, in 1891.
- Pope Francis uses the idea of the “common good,” to frame his discussion.
- he explicitly links St. John XXIII’s “Pacem in Terris,” which addressed the crisis of nuclear war, with “Laudato Si,” which addresses this newer crisis.

5) **Discussions about ecology can be grounded in the Bible and church tradition.**

- Pope Francis begins the encyclical with an overview of the crisis—including issues of water, biodiversity and so on.
- in Chapter Two he turns to “The Gospel of Creation,” as far back as the Book of Genesis, when humankind was called to “till and keep” the earth.
- his view can be summarized that there has been too much tilling and not enough keeping.
- he traces the theme of love for creation through both the Old and New Testaments.
- he reminds us that God, in Jesus Christ, became part of the natural world.
- Jesus himself appreciated the natural world,
- the insights of the saints are also recalled, most especially St. Francis of Assisi.

6) **Everything is connected—including the economy.**

- He links all of us to creation: “We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it” (No. 139).
- Our decisions impact the environment.
- He links a “magical conception of the market,” which privileges profit over the impact on the poor, with the abuse of the environment (No. 190).
- a heedless pursuit of money that sets aside the interests of the marginalized and leads to the ruination of the planet are connected.
- St. Francis of Assisi shows how “inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace” (No. 10).
- Far from offering a naïve condemnation of capitalism, Pope Francis provides an intelligent critique of the limits of the market, especially where it fails to provide for the poor. “Profit,” he says, “cannot be the sole criterion” of our decisions (No. 187).

7) **Scientific research on the environment is to be praised and used.**

- Pope Francis admits that the church does not “presume to settle scientific questions” (No. 188).
- His encyclical accepts the “best scientific research available today” and builds on it, rather than entering into a specialist’s debate (No. 15).
- Referring to the forests of the Amazon, glaciers and aquifers he says, “We know how important these are for the earth...” (No. 38)
- As other Catholic social encyclicals analysed such questions as capitalism, unions and fair wages, “Laudato Si” draws upon both church teaching and contemporary

findings from other fields—particularly science, in this case—to help modern-day people reflect on these questions.

8) **Widespread indifference and selfishness worsen environmental problems.**

- Pope Francis reserves his strongest criticism for the wealthy... “Many of those who possess more resources seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms...” (No. 26).
- frequently decisions makers are “far removed from the poor,” physically, with no real contact to their brothers and sisters (No. 90, 49).
- Selfishness leads to the evaporation of the notion of the common good.
- One cannot care for the rest of nature “if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (No. 91).

9) **Global dialogue and solidarity are needed.**

- More than any encyclical, Pope Francis draws from the insights of bishops’ conferences from around the world (Brazil, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Bolivia, Portugal, Germany, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Australia and the United States)
- This embodies the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, which, in part, looks to local experience and local solutions.)
- Moreover, the “new dialogue” and “honest debate” he calls for is not simply one within the Catholic Church (No. 14, 16).
- This dialogue involves other churches (Patriarch Bartholomew), religions (a Sufi poet) and “all people” about our “common home” (No. 62, 155).
- A global dialogue is also needed because there are “no uniform recipes (No. 180).

10) **A change of heart is required**

- This document, addressed to “every person on the planet” calling for a new way of looking at things, a “bold cultural revolution” **(No. 3, 114)**.
- For Pope Francis, the earth has begun to look more and more like “an immense pile of filth” (No. 21).
- Because God is with us, we can strive both individually and corporately to change course.
- We need an “ecological conversion” in which we see the intimate connection between God and all beings, and more readily listen to the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (No. 49).