

PRAISE YOU, LORD! POPE FRANCIS AND THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CREATION AS A SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

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I. CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME:

1. Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* ("On Care for Our Common Home") and its meaning for Catholic theology and ethics.

--published in June 2015. Title *Laudato Si'* taken from Canticle of the Sun by Francis of Assisi composed in 1310:

--Notes that all modern popes have spoken of crisis in the environment and have drawn on the biblical theology of creation as the basis for a Christian response.

--Especially noteworthy about *Laudato Si'* is the strength of the Pope's raising this to a central moral issue of our time, and the alliance throughout the encyclical with science and all people of good will who are concerned with this problem.

2. The moral crisis we face as a common humanity and as a Christian people:

--General pollution we are facing, generated by a "throw-away" culture..

--Use of fossil fuels and cumulative impact on atmosphere; resulting in global warming/ climate change.

--Problem of water supply; impurities (fertilizer, chemical runoffs, sewage, etc.); commercial overuse; loss of fish; impact especially on poor.

--Loss of biodiversity (loss of species); demolition of wetlands, forests, oceans.

--Impact on human life:

--expansion of cities; urban poverty; crime.

--degradation of human life; lack of proper nourishment.

--global economic inequity.

--culture of indifference ("why, me worry?")

3. An overview of Creation Theology:

--In speaking directly to Catholic/Christians, Pope affirms that faith and dialogue can offer motivation to respond to the ecological crisis humanity is facing.

--rooted in reflection on the creation accounts of Genesis 1 & 2, and the Bible's portrayal of origin of the universe and humankind.

--the essential interrelationships of us as human beings: with God, with our neighbors, and with the earth and universe.

--the Bible's epic view of creation, fall, and restoration.

Some Basic Biblical Convictions:

1. God comes first and God is revealed as a God of love, whose impulse to create the universe is an act of love.

2. God speaks—the dynamism that God is "outgoing" not a silent or distant architect. Reveals the heart of the Trinity as a vortex of mutual love that spills over into creation.

3. God is the creator of all reality; reality is therefore fundamentally a gift and is fundamentally good. Created reality is a grace.
4. In the order of God's creating, the human person, male and female, is unique because made in "the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:16)—which gives human capacity to be self-aware, to respond in love to God, to assume some of God's responsibility for creation. The human is "clay" and thus connected to the earth but also filled with the breath of God that makes the human "a living being" (Gen 2).
5. The creation story extends to the "fall"; the appearance of evil, sin, and violence in the world. But also to the notion of "restoration"/redemption. Here we see the full epic dimensions of the biblical view of the world: creation, fall, restoration (eschatology).
6. These dynamics extend throughout history, finding their culmination in the Word Made Flesh who institutes the ultimate restoration of humanity and of creation itself.
7. From the Christian point of view, Jesus the Word Incarnate is the summit of creation and the complete exemplar of the human as sacred and responsible.

II. A SPIRITUALITY OF CREATION:

Pope Francis' description of a spirituality aware of creation: 'Human beings endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ are called to lead all creatures back to God their Creator.' (#83).

1. Moving away from an "obsessive consumerist lifestyle".
2. Moving out of ourselves toward the other and their needs and dignity.
3. Need to "grow in a sense of solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care" with each other and with the world to which we belong.
4. The summons to a profound interior conversion.
5. The call for a spirit of gratitude, joy, peace, sobriety and humility.
6. A realization of the "sacramental" view of life: elements of nature become revelations and channels of God's presence, particularly in the Eucharist.

The enormity of the challenge can lead to discouragement and paralysis ("What can I do?"). Need for faith (trust in God) and dialogue (with others of good will). We need both macro-solutions on political and social level but also "small gestures" (St. Therese of Lisieux's "little way").

"St. Therese of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness...Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.... That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a 'civilization of love'." (Laudato Si' par. 230-231).