
Awakening to a New Consciousness

*Listening to the Cry of Earth
and the Cry of the Poor*

Mercy's Theological Reflection Process



Laudato Si' Lens

This encyclical by Pope Francis is one of the most significant documents about creating *mutually enhancing relationships* among humans and the rest of creation. Like any encyclical, its purpose is to assist the reader in the formation of conscience on a specific issue. If you have time, you may want to reread the whole encyclical. Through poetic, scientific and religious imagery and language, Pope Francis challenges us to *Care for our Common Home*. ([Click here for the whole document](#)).

For our purposes, we will be focusing on a few sections of *Laudato Si'* that will help us move toward a new consciousness related to extractivism. Allow yourself time to savor the words and be formed by their meaning.

You are invited to read and mull over each of the following quotes and connect them with extractivism as it impacts our Common Home—Earth.

What ideas from *Laudato Si'* do you want to keep in mind as you view videos and read materials about extractivism?

Chapter One—What is Happening to Our Common Home? (par 17-61)

#52) The foreign debt of poor countries has become a way of controlling them, yet this is not the case where ecological debt is concerned. In different ways, developing countries, where the most important reserves of the biosphere are found, continue to fuel the development of richer countries at the cost of their own present and future. The land of the southern poor is rich and mostly unpolluted, yet access to ownership of goods and resources for meeting vital needs is inhibited by a system of commercial relations and ownership which is structurally perverse. The developed countries ought to help pay this debt by significantly limiting their consumption of non-renewable energy and by assisting poorer countries to support policies and programmes of sustainable development. The poorest areas and countries are less capable of adopting new models for reducing environmental impact because they lack the wherewithal to develop the necessary processes and to cover their costs. We must continue to be aware that, regarding climate change, there are differentiated responsibilities. As the United States bishops have said, greater attention must be given to “the needs of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests”. [31] We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference.

Chapter Two—The Gospel of Creation (par 62-100)

#92) Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.

#93) Whether believers or not, we are agreed today that the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone.

Chapter Four—The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis (par 137-162)

#138) Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. This necessarily entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production and consumption.

#139) When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.

#145) Many intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community. The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems.

#156) An integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics. The common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment”.

Chapter Five—Lines of Approach and Action (par 163-201)

#182) An assessment of the environmental impact of business ventures and projects demands transparent political processes involving a free exchange of views. On the other hand, the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project, in exchange for favours, usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and to allow for full debate.

#183) Environmental impact assessment should not come after the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or programme. It should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure. It should be linked to a study of working conditions and possible effects on people’s physical and mental health, on the local economy and on public safety....The local population should have a special place at the table; they are concerned about their own future and that of their children, and can consider goals transcending immediate economic interest.

#185) In any discussion about a proposed venture, a number of questions need to be asked in order to discern whether or not it will contribute to genuine integral development. What will it accomplish? Why? Where? When? How? For whom? What are the risks? What are the costs? Who will pay those costs and how? In this discernment, some questions must have higher priority. For example, we know that water is a scarce and indispensable resource and a fundamental right which conditions the exercise of other human rights. This indisputable fact overrides any other assessment of environmental impact on a region.

Chapter Six—Ecological Education and Spirituality (par 202-246)

#202) Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.

#217) Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

#220) This ecological conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works ... It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings.

#225) An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence "must not be contrived but found, uncovered".

#229) We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.

#230) Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise 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. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms.

#231) 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. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also "macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones". [156] That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a "civilization of love". [157] Social love is the key to authentic development: "In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity". [158] In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a "culture of care" which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied.

Questions for reflection:

- What ideas from this document speak to your conscience around the impact of extractivism on people, communities and Earth?
- As we learn about relationships between extractive industries corporations and local communities what do we need to keep in mind about *creating mutually* enhancing relationships? How do our option for Earth and our option for the poor impact where we stand?
- What from the lens of *Laudato Si'* is important for you to keep in mind and heart as you grow in awareness of the impact of extractivism on people, communities and Earth?