



Talking Conservation

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"The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth"

No political, religious, spiritual or economic leader before, or since, has ever expressed a more profound statement about the state of our environment than the above statement of the Late Pope Francis.

Pope Francis in his encyclical letter of 24 May 2015 titled "Care for our Common Home" said that protecting the planet is a moral and ethical "imperative" for believers and non-believers alike and it should supersede political and economic interests. He further stated that time is running out to save the planet "and that it is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" which could lead to "an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems" this century.

The messages of Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment, can be summarised as follows:

1. The environment becomes part of the spiritual perspective and discussion.

The greatest contribution of the encyclical letter is the overview of the environmental crisis from a religious point of view. The dialogue about the environment has always mainly been from a political, scientific and economic view. Now, the language of faith enters the discussion in a clear, decisive and systematic manner.

2. Less is more.

Pope Francis takes aim at the "technocratic" mindset, in which technology is seen as the key to human existence. He also critiques the reliance on market forces, in which every technological advancement is embraced before considering its impact on our world. By contrast, we should have a growth marked by "moderation and the capacity to be happy with little".

3. Discussions about ecology can be grounded in the Bible.

The pope reminds readers that the call to care for creation extends as far back as the Book of Genesis, when humankind was called to "till and keep" the earth. Sadly, we have done too much tilling and little keeping. Pope Francis also explicitly states that environmental teaching "is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching".

4. Everything is connected -- including the economy.

The encyclical letter is a systematic" approach to the problem. "We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it". But our decisions have an inevitable effect on the environment. He states that a blind pursuit of money has set aside the interests of the marginalised and established the ruin of the planet.

5. Widespread indifference and selfishness worsen environmental problems.

Pope Francis accepts the best scientific research available today and builds on it.

He critiques those who ignore

the problem of climate change, and its effects on the poor. Furthermore, decision-makers are "far removed from the poor". The effect of environmental change on the poor is strongly highlighted in almost every page of the document. The pope invites dialogue and debate amongst "all people" about our "common home".

Some excerpts from his encyclical letter

- "We must realise that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach. . . to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor".

- "A true "ecological debt" exists . . . and there is a disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time".

- "The alliance between" the economy and technology ends up sidelining anything unrelated to its immediate interests".

- "Economic powers continue to justify the current global system ... and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to consider the effects on human dignity and the natural environment".

- "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 ... showing no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations".

Further environmental quotes from the pope

- "Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity. Cowardice in defending it is a grave sin."

- "We must never forget that the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone,"

- "Nature never forgives. If you give her a slap, she will give you one. I believe that we have exploited nature too much."

Whether you are a believer, or non-believer, you cannot but concur with the pope's statements on the environment.