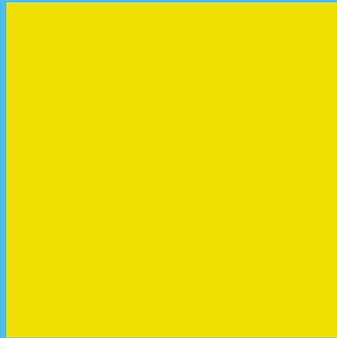


3



ENCOUNTER WITH THE
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

MODULE THREE

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This teacher's book is a didactic package that elaborates on the following theme: 'encounter with the environment: social and ecological issues'. It has been developed for a 12 to 18-year-old age group and offers the teacher or supervisor of a learning group the opportunity to develop this theme at the level of their class group.

In this teacher's book, the teacher can work around various topics that fit in with the overarching theme of 'encounter with the environment: social and ecological issues'. By means of impulses and didactic suggestions, it is possible to approach this theme from different perspectives. Impulses are elements that the teacher can bring into the classroom to start the conversation. This book contains a diversity of impulses with different levels of difficulty. These impulses aim to contribute to the learning process and exist in different forms. It is not the intention to use all impulses. The teacher can select the most appropriate impulses based on the initial situation in the learning group. The didactic suggestions are concrete proposals to get to work with the impulses and focus on philosophical reflection and communication. This allows the teacher to approach the different impulses in a varied way that suits their learning group.



Figure 3.1
Image: © Guillaume de
Germain | Unsplash

The different chapters:

- The first chapter on climate change, polarization, and social inequality is an introductory part providing more information on the impact of the environmental crisis and climate change on human relations at a local, national and international scale.
- The second chapter on 'Creation Faith and Ecology' is the basic subject matter for the students. This chapter analyses the criticism directed at the Judeo-Christian tradition as the responsible party for the current climate crisis because of the belief in creation. This chapter analyzes Genesis 1 and how this biblical story can teach us more about human attitudes towards nature, animals and fellow human beings.
- The third chapter discusses the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), written by Pope Francis. This encyclical is a call from the Pope to all Catholic believers and people of goodwill to take care of our common home, the earth. This chapter briefly discusses the core thoughts of this encyclical.

Finally, this teacher's book contains a glossary in which all difficult terms are explained concisely and at the level of the pupil. This is followed by a bibliography per chapter of this didactic collection.

3.1.2 CONTENT OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This didactical package deals with the theme 'the encounter with the living environment: social and ecological issues'. Ecology as a theme is strongly present in the social debate. Climate change has consequences for the whole world and can therefore contribute to polarization. Christians today find themselves challenged and called by the issue of dealing with and caring for God's creation. In this module, the students get familiar with a symbolic reading of Genesis 1 and the corresponding vision of the Church on the care for the earth, including a discussion of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. It offers the opportunity to reflect together with the learning group on social and ecological issues.

The starting point of this didactic package is a video clip enacting a potential real-world scenario from the daily life of the students. This visual fragment is a general introduction to the theme of 'the encounter with the living environment: social and ecological issues' for the learning group, providing the teacher a basis upon which to develop the theme through one or more of the impulses and didactic suggestions prepared in this teacher's book.

3.2 ECOLOGY AND CATHOLICISM: VIDEO CLIP

3.2.1 SCENARIO

We see four friends, Lindsay, Sarah, Ariella and Michael, walking outside a classroom at school. Suddenly Lindsay gets a message. Her online order, a new dress, has arrived at her home. Sarah and Michael react irritably: does she really need so many clothes? Doesn't this contribute to the negative consequences of climate change? Shouldn't we all think more about our buying behavior and our (over)consumption? Ariella gets involved in the discussion and defends Lindsay: climate change is not Lindsay's fault. Ariella points to Christianity as the big culprit of the current climate crisis. Michael and Sarah are confused, how can Christianity be to blame for the climate crisis? And is this really the truth? Is it really true that Christians are responsible for all of this? Are today's Christian believers not interested in this problem? When the friends leave on a camping trip, they get an answer to all their questions...



Figure 3.1
Video Clip

After viewing the video clip, the teacher can start working with one or more of the impulses from this didactic package, according to the level of his/her own learning group.

3.2.2 QUIZ: CORRECT ANSWERS

Several questions are introduced in the video clip and focus on the outcome and the concluding message of the story. Through these questions, the students will be stimulated to reflect on the content and meaning of Christianity and ecology. After watching the video clip, these questions can also be a starting point for a class discussion.

Question 1: What is Genesis?

- Genesis is a rock band that is named in the Bible.
- Genesis is the name of the first book of the Bible.
- Genesis is the first book of the New Testament.

Genesis is the first book of the First Testament. 'Genesis' is Hebrew for 'in the beginning'. This Bible book tells the story of creation, the Fall, and the history of Israel. Genesis contains stories of faith and does not aim to give a factual or historical account of the creation of the world.

Question 2: All people are created in the image of God. What does this mean?

- All human beings are equal and deserve respect.
- Human beings are like gods in the world.
- Human beings can use animals and plants without any restrictions.

Genesis 1 teaches us that all people are created in the image of God. This means that all humans must take care of God's creation, the earth, just as He would. It implies that all humans are responsible for nature, animals and for each other. Creation is a precious gift from God that humanity needs to treat with care.

3.3 DOES CLIMATE CHANGE EXACERBATE SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND POLARIZATION?

“Experience shows that any ruthlessness towards the environment damages human society and vice versa. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is an indissoluble link between peace with creation and human peace.”

– Pope Benedict XVI

Ecology is a topic that is strongly present in the social debate. There is increasing attention for this subject from various angles: from politics, through the work of volunteers and civil society organizations, thanks to the media highlighting **the negative effects of global warming**, through numerous national and international climate marches, and so on. The idea that there is an urgent need to change the way the (Western) world deals with our planet is becoming more and more common in our everyday reality.

Climate change does not only lead to disastrous consequences for nature. It also poses a **real threat to human relations at a local, national and international level**. The climate crisis can lead to the polarization of social inequality and unrest, which can lead to new tensions and conflicts. Even within existing conflicts and under-the-surface tensions, climate change can exacerbate tensions. All this can lead to a downward spiral of equality and peace, losing sight of the vulnerability of certain population groups and of nature.

In 2020, it is estimated that approximately 26 million people will be forced to flee as a result of natural disasters. Scientific research predicts an increase in climate refugees up to 150 million by 2050, due to flooding, extreme drought and the associated shortage of drinking water. These consequences will be especially felt in the southern hemisphere. In other words, due to the overconsumption of mostly the rich Western countries, the non-industrialized world of the poorest countries will suffer the most severe consequences of the climate crisis.

In the past, as in the Syrian civil war that started in 2011, the consequences of climate change were also at the root of a prolonged armed conflict. Between 2007 and 2010, climate problems caused extreme drought, water shortages and crop failures. Consequently, food prices rose, unemployment rose, rural exodus and so on. It must be emphasized that it was not only the consequences of climate change that caused the war in Syria. It was a combination of political, economic, ideological and environmental problems that ignited this conflict. Wars and acts of war as such often have a far-reaching negative impact on nature, the environment and the climate.

The impact of climate change is not just a far-off problem. Locally, pollution, poor air and water quality have a negative impact on the living environment, health and life expectancy of citizens. As with the large-scale consequences of the climate crisis, at the local level, the most vulnerable members of society are more often the victims of this problem, both mentally and physically. In other words, climate change exacerbates social inequality. Not only are environmental problems forcing us to take better care of the wealth of nature, but a global approach to these problems is also undeniably important in the pursuit of global social justice.



Figure 3.3
Image: © Ben White
Unsplash

3.4 THE STORY OF CREATION AND ECOLOGY

3.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Christians today are also challenged by the issue of dealing with and caring for God's creation. The connection between faith and nature ensures that, from a Christian point of view, the climate issue is an important theme that connects to the respect and care for the whole of creation. How do Christians express this? What are people's place and role in creation? What points of reference can we find in the Bible concerning this theme?

"The Christian does not place true ecological care on the periphery, but at the heart of his faith. [...] It is above all a matter of faith in God's creation and of the loving and compassionate relationship to things. But it is also a matter of commitment and action. Real ecology is in the head, in the heart and in the hands. There is also something to do!"

– Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels (1933-2019)

3.4.2 THE STORY OF CREATION AND ECOLOGY

The vision of critics

Today, the Catholic Church takes a clear stance on caring for the earth and emphasizes its importance. Thus, in 2015, Pope Francis published the encyclical *Laudato Si'* in which he calls upon every individual, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to take care of God's creation.

Despite the contemporary commitment of the Catholic Church to the care of creation, the Christian faith has been the focus of criticism on this issue, especially in the past. Through the Judeo-Christian vision of creation, the Church would, after all, be jointly responsible for the way in which the West in particular has dealt with nature and its inhabitants in the past. Especially certain verses from the first chapter of Genesis are criticized and questioned.

Well-known critics who portray the Jewish and Christian traditions as *"the mother of all environmental pollution"* are for example the Australian philosopher Peter Singer and the American historian Lynn White. We focus mainly on Lynn White's vision. In his article, *The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis* (1967), he states that human interaction with nature is always strongly dependent on the vision of the relationship between man and nature. Through their faith in the Bible, Christians have, according to him, adopted an exploitative attitude towards the earth.

According to White, the Bible story Genesis 1 is full of **anthropocentrism** in which man, created in the image of God, is simply elevated to the apogee of creation and thus assigned seemingly unlimited power over the earth. Because man was created in the image of God, White argues, this creature has been given the unlimited task of **subduing and controlling nature**.

According to critics, the current climate problem is therefore the result of a *"typically Christian arrogance"* towards nature, whereby creation is instrumentalized for the benefit of humankind. An arrogance which nature thus regards only as a desanctified object of arbitrariness and self-glorification. Is this really the way in which Catholic believers look at the earth and its inhabitants today?

Genesis 1: a literal or symbolic interpretation?

Critics such as Lynn White and Peter Singer consider the Jewish and Christian tradition to be anthropocentric and therefore the biggest cause of the current climate crisis. To substantiate their argument, they point their finger at the Bible, and more specifically at the **verses below from Genesis 1**.

Is Christianity really an anthropocentric religion? What exactly is the place of people and their role in God's creation? What can we learn today from Genesis 1?

[26] Then God said, "Let us make humankind **in our image, according to our likeness**; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

[27] **So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them**; male and female he created them.

[28] God blessed them, and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

[29] God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

[30] And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

[31] God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Source: *NRSV, Genesis 1:26-31.*

Bible interpretation: the importance of context

Are the Jewish and Christian traditions the major cause of today's environmental problems? The Genesis creation narrative can seem problematic on an ecological level if it is read in a literal way. Interpretations of Genesis that give man the right to rule the earth without limits are literal and fall short. Such interpretations detract from **the rich symbolic meanings** behind the stories.

To discover the symbolic value of the Genesis creation narrative, and the whole Bible in general, one must always be aware of the corresponding **context of the text**. It is in fact the context in which a story originates that sets the reader on their way to grasping its underlying symbolism. The Bible is not just any science or history book, but an ancient book of faith that tries to express all kinds of human experiences and questions in relation to God. Biblical research has shown that Genesis was written at the time of the Babylonian Exile. During the Babylonian Exile, the Israelis were enslaved. Within this context, the creation stories were written as liberation stories to give courage to the oppressed. There was no environmental crisis, as we know it today, at that time either.

In a symbolic reading of Bible stories both the context in which the story originated and the **contemporary context** in which the story is read is important. This is also called **recontextualization**. In recontextualization, aspects of the Christian faith, such as biblical stories, are looked at from a contemporary perspective in which the interaction between text and context can lead to new possibilities of interpretation.

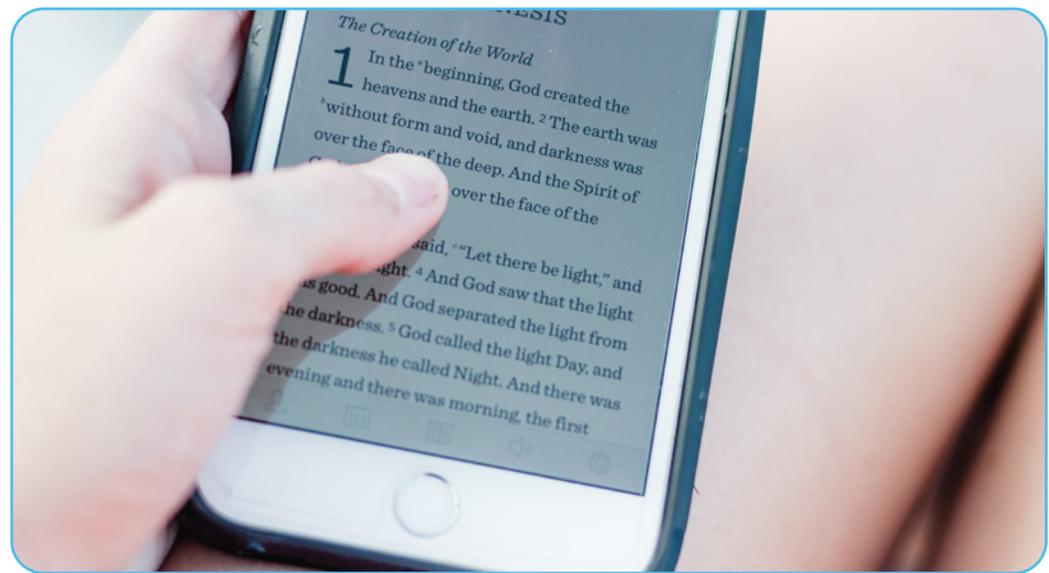


Figure 3.4
Image: © Jenny Smith
Unsplash

Man created in the image of God?

In Genesis 1 it is written that God created man in the image of God:

[27] So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:27

“God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them”, how can we comprehend this? First of all, it should be clear that this does not legitimize a dominant human attitude towards the earth. The Genesis creation narratives show God’s presence in creation. This creation is not just a possession of man, but a gift from God. In other words, man has received autonomy from God and is not responsible for his own origin. Being created in the image of God imposes a **responsibility** towards God’s creation. Man was last created but punished first. Creation is a precious gift from God and as an image of God, man must deal with this in a caring manner and bear responsibility for it.

Theologian Roger Burggraeve explains this as follows: “God puts His world in the hands of man to deal with the world in His place - and thus like God. This relationship can therefore not be arbitrary, but only creative, just as God Himself began to create and unfold the world. In other words, as an ‘image of God’ man is called to be ‘co-creator’.” So, the biblical view of the world is not anthropocentric, but **theocentric**. It is God who is at the core of the existence of creation, not humankind.

“Since all humans are created in the image of God, humans can ‘manage’ nature. But there are also limits to this ability to manage nature. It concerns a relationship between Creator and creature in which man is co-responsible for the preservation of creation in humbleness, reverence and solidarity. Humans are responsible for the preservation of the world in which they live.”²

– Theologian Marc Vervenne

²M. VERVENNE, *Mens, kosmos en aarde. Een exegetische reflectie over Genesis 1-3*, in J. DE TARVERNIER & M. VERVENNE (ed.), *De mens. Verrader of hoeder van de schepping?*, Leuven, Acco, 1991, p. 27-62.

Mankind as ruler of creation?

Human beings are not only created in the likeness of God, but in Genesis 1 it is also written that God calls man to 'rule' over creation and to 'subdue' it:

[26] Then God said, "Let us make humankind **in our image, according to our likeness**; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

[27] **So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them**; male and female he created them.

[28] God blessed them, and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:26-28.

How can we understand these verses? They can be read as a release for humans to claim authority over animals, plants and nature in general.

A literal reading of Genesis 1 which labels humans as rulers over the earth detracts from a symbolic reading. Those who read Genesis 1 with a contemporary and symbolic reading can see that the Bible emphasizes human responsibility and connection with creation. The Genesis creation narrative does not grant humans the absolute right to arbitrarily rule over the earth. This 'reign' and 'submission' should be understood as '**servicing**'. Man can only 'rule' and 'submit' from **a servitude for creation**. From a caring and life-giving attitude, people are called upon to serve the fruitfulness and well-being of all creation.

"Ruling is not synonymous with exploitation. It has to do with authority. Real authority, in the true sense of the word, is at the service of the other and contributes to the development of the world. Although Genesis 1 emphasizes the importance of man, it continues to emphasize that man is and remains (only) a creature. [...] As such the poem of creation is a call to man to strive, as an image of God, for a world of peace and harmony."

– Theologians Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn

³H. AUSLOOS & B. LEMMELIJN, *De bijbel: een (g)oude(n) gids. Bijbelse antwoorden op menselijke vragen*, Leuven, Acco, 2005, p. 111-114.

3.4.3 CHRISTIANITY AS THE MAIN CAUSE OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS? CONCLUSION

What is the human person's place and role in creation? How do people relate to the earth, to the (natural) environment? The interpretation of Genesis 1 plays an important role in the question of how to deal with and care for creation, the earth, the environment, fellow human beings and fellow creatures. From a Christian point of view, the issue of the environment and climate is an important matter that connects to the respect and care for creation. A symbolic interpretation of Genesis 1 plays an important role in the issue of dealing with and caring for God's creation.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a contemporary symbolic interpretation of Genesis 1 emphasizes the serving and nurturing of the earth, rather than its unlimited submission or control. An anthropocentric reading of Genesis 1 detracts from the central beliefs of **theocentric Christianity**.

Thus, men and women must be seen as **guardians or stewards** of creation. After all, being created in the image of God brings with it a responsibility for His creation. Men and women, as stewards, must govern and take care of the earth in a responsible manner in the same way that God would. In this they not only bear responsibility for **nature**, but also for their **fellow human beings**. After all, the earth must be a just place for everyone.



Figure 3.5
Michelangelo - 'The
Creation of Adam'
Image: Wikimedia
Commons: [https://
commons.wikimedia.
org/wiki/File:Creation_of
Adam.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Creation_of_Adam.jpg)

Michelangelo's famous fresco on the creation of Adam was painted around 1511 on the vault of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City. This fresco shows an energetic and dynamic God who does not touch the hand of Adam. This particularly powerful image shows the biblical story from the book of Genesis in which God breathes life into Adam. The painting is experienced as the representation of the following Bible verses: *"So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1:26)

3.4.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Caring for our planet: time for action?!

The students are introduced to the theme of ecology and the issues surrounding the environment and climate. Based on several statements, the students answer the following reflection questions:

- Are you worried about climate change? Why do/do you not? What worries you the most?
- How do you try to take care of the earth?
- Do you have any idea how the Catholic Church deals with caring for our planet?

The Catholic Church and the care for our planet: introduction

The students read the introduction individually.

The importance of Genesis 1

The students read the following Bible verses from the story of the creation of the earth: Genesis 1:26-31. The students indicate the verses that they do not like; that surprise them; that they do not understand.

All human beings are created in the image of God. What does this mean?

The students analyze Genesis 1:26. What does this Bible verse mean? The students answer the following multiple-choice question:

In the Bible fragment, it is written that man was created in the image of God. What does this mean?

- Being created in the image of God means that man resembles God in physiognomy. You can see this, for example, in the painting 'The Creation of Adam' by the artist Michelangelo.
- Being created in the image of God means that man must take care of the earth as God would.
- Being created in the image of God means that man must reign over the earth. So man is in charge of the earth and can do with it what he wants. This is literally written in Genesis 1.

Next, the students are given a text about the meaning of the creation story in which they have to fill in some missing words:

care – responsible – symbolic meaning – reign – literally

If you read the Bible story in a literal way, it may indeed seem that man, as the one in charge, can **reign** over the earth and thus do what he wants with nature and animals. Yet this is not the message of the story. You should always look at the **symbolic meaning** of every Bible story. This means that you must look and think beyond the words that are **literally** written down. Moreover, in Bible texts, you should not look for facts, but rather look at the images and symbols used to express a vision of God, the world and humankind.

Genesis 1 teaches us that man was created in the image of God. This means that man must **care** for the creation of God, the earth, just as God would do. It means that man is **responsible** for nature, animals and other people. Creation is a precious gift from God with which man must deal in a caring manner.

Man will 'rule'. What does this mean?

The students read Genesis 1:26-31. They indicate the verses that make it seem that man is allowed to rule over the earth.

Using the Bible text Genesis 1:26-31 the students answer the following reflective questions:

- Do you think that humans today, as rulers, abuse the earth, nature and animals? Why yes/no? Is this an appropriate attitude?
- *"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good"* (Genesis 1:31). Would he think so today? Why yes/no? What would you 'recreate' in the existing world?

Based on this last question, a deepening assignment can be given to the students:

- *"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good"* (Genesis 1:31). Do the students agree with this statement? To answer this question, the students write an alternative creation story. How would they 'recreate' the world?

And what about caring for our fellow human beings?

In conclusion, the students understand that caring for nature and the environment is directly linked to caring for each other, their fellow human beings. In particular, climate change also has a strong impact on people and the interrelationships between people, different population groups, countries, and so on.

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.”

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (202)

This quote can be found in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*. More information can be found in the deepening chapter on this encyclical.

Using this quote, the students answer the following reflection questions:

- Do you agree with this quote? Why do you/do you not?
- What can you personally do to take more care of the earth and of others?



Figure 3.6
© Li-An Lim | Unsplash

3.5 LAUDATO SI': THE CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

This teacher's book makes a distinction between 'basic material' and material for 'deepening' student understanding. This chapter can be used as 'deepening' by the teacher and is not part of the basic package.

3.5.1 POPE FRANCIS AND THE ENCYCLICAL LAUDATO SI'

On 18 June 2015 the **encyclical *Laudato Si'*** – “Praise be to you!” - written by Pope Francis was published. This encyclical is a call from the Pope to all Catholic believers and people of goodwill to **take care of our common home**. After all, creation today is under pressure from pollution, the loss of biodiversity, water shortages, an ever-widening gap between rich and poor, and so on. The encyclical deals with today's environmental problems in which Pope Francis not only calls on governments and businesses, but on all people to take more care of the earth. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis pleads for a global approach to the climate problem and an integral ecology and calls on everyone to look for bold answers to the climate crisis.



Figure 3.7
Pope Francis
Image: © Ashwin Vaswani
Unsplash

What is an **encyclical**? Literally, the word encyclical means ‘a letter that passes by’. In particular, it is a letter written by the Pope to the bishops and to all Catholic believers in the world. Since 1963 with the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* by Pope John XXIII, encyclicals have also been addressed to ‘all people of goodwill’, and therefore not only to Catholics or Christians. An encyclical is considered an important letter by the Pope, but it does not have the value of an ecclesiastical law and does not belong to the domain of the Pope's ‘infallible statements’.

3.5.2 KEY IDEAS FROM THE ENCYCLICAL



With the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis brings together both the ecological and the social issues in an integral ecology, which is discussed further below. Caring for the environment cannot be seen in isolation from our dealings with other people, especially the most disadvantaged. Like social encyclicals such as *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Populorum Progressio* (1967), the Church with *Laudato Si'* seeks to provide answers to major global challenges such as poverty, inequality and injustice. Pope Francis does not want to limit his message to Catholics but appeals to everyone who inhabits this planet. Below you will find

some key ideas from this encyclical.

"In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home." (LS 3).

The limits of our growth

Pope Francis gives a clear analysis of the current situation of our planet, based on scientific research results. The warnings of scientists are taken seriously, and Pope Francis describes them as *"a cry of creation"*. In concrete terms, various problems are mentioned, such as the global water problem. In every case, Pope Francis has an eye for the harmful consequences for people and the environment.

The Pope opposes the neoliberal development model in which progress is synonymous with 'growth'. On the other hand, the Pope wants to increase his commitment to renewable energy and sustainable development. It is time for new forms of growth and development.

A global ecological conversion

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis encourages everyone to engage and act. It is now time for global ecological conversion. Every individual is called upon to help take care of our *"common home"* so that future generations can also live in a sustainable and just way.

An integral ecology

Caring for the environment is always related to caring for people, especially the poorest. With the term integral ecology, Pope Francis brings together ecology and social (in)justice. The poorest of our planet are hardest hit by climate change but are least responsible. The way in which we treat nature and creation also has consequences for how we treat our fellow human beings.

A different way of living

The term integral ecology is subsequently also applied in reality: the call to live differently implies that from now on we must apply this integral ecology in our own lifestyles. Pope Francis calls for an 'ecological citizenship' in which one consciously opts for solidarity and sobriety.

3.5.3 POPE FRANCIS AND SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

When the Argentine Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Bishop of Rome and Pope on March 13, 2013, he decided to be the first Pope in the history of the Catholic Church to adopt the symbolic name Francis, in reference to St. Francis of Assisi.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) is the patron saint of the environmental movement, Italy and animals. On his feast day, October 4, World Animal Day is celebrated. Francis of Assisi had great respect for nature and creation. He looked at nature with awe, wonder, a sense of solidarity and brotherhood. Pope Francis' choice of the name shows that Francis of Assisi can still be a source of inspiration for people today.

"Laudato si', mi' Signore", or "Praise be to you, my Lord", are the opening words of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The title *Laudato Si'* and the opening words of this encyclical refer to the famous Canticle of the Sun of Saint Francis of Assisi. **The Canticle of the Sun**, originated in 1224-1225, shows the great love of Francis of Assisi for nature, creation and God the Creator. In this song, man is portrayed as a humble creature who knows his place within the great, beautiful whole of creation and who feels connected to the Creator and all that He has created. The song shows that respect for nature means that man is not just above nature, but part of it. It shows the connection between man, creation and the Creator. It is also from this threefold relationship that Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* is not an isolated initiative to demand more attention and care for nature and creation. Numerous organizations, actions and initiatives are striving for more attention to the environmental issue. This is done by both religious and non-religious initiatives, such as

'the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation 2020', 'Earth Overshoot Day', and so on.

3.5.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Encyclical

The students seek more information about the encyclical *Laudato Si'* and write a paper in which the following questions can be addressed:

- In what context did this encyclical occur?
- How was this encyclical received by church leaders and/or the wider audience of believers?
- Were there supporters and/or opponents of this encyclical?
- Which passage did you find inspiring? With which passage do you agree or disagree?

Individually, the students seek and select a videoclip, newspaper article, image, painting, and so on, with a focus on *Laudato Si'*.⁴ Next, the students present Pope Francis and the encyclical using the source material of their own choice. Other questions that can also be discussed regarding this theme:

- How does the Church approach care for creation and ecological problems?
- Should the Church play a role in today's environmental problems? How can the Church do this?

Quotes

The students themselves receive or search for (radical) quotes from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Do the students agree or disagree? What arguments can the students give for their positions?

How can we take care of creation?

What can students do in response to the papal call to take more care of creation? How can this encyclical be applied in daily life?

⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, <https://www.rkddocumenten.nl/rkd docs/index.php?mi=650&dos=427> (access 18.09.2020).

⁵ LiveLaudatoSi, *10 ways to live more simply*, <https://livelaudatosi.org/10-ways-live-simply/> (access 18.09.2020).

The encyclical calls for a more sober way of living according to the principles of *Laudato Si'*. The students get ten concrete tips to apply this themselves.⁵ The students go through these concrete tips and then formulate their own examples of how they themselves can contribute to the care for creation.

The Canticle of the Sun

The students analyze the Canticle of the Sun. What does this teach us about a responsible handling of creation?

Answer: the Canticle of the Sun shows us how we, as human beings, can have respect for nature: as human beings we are not above nature, but a part of nature. It shows us how everything is connected with each other: man, nature and the Creator. From this connection Pope Francis also calls us to have more respect for the planet.

3.6 GLOSSARY

In this glossary you will find more information and an explanation of certain concepts.

Note: The words marked with an asterisk () are also listed in the basic vocabulary list for students.*

* Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism is the tendency to put the human being at the center of the universe and consider him as the only point of reference. In this view, man is seen as the culmination of creation and can therefore rule over the earth.

Encyclical

The word encyclical literally means 'a letter that passes by'. It is a letter written by the Pope to the bishops, to all Catholic believers in the world and to all people of goodwill.

* Genesis

Genesis is the first book of the First Testament. 'Genesis' is Hebrew for 'in the beginning'. This Bible book tells the story of creation, the Fall, and the history of Israel. Genesis contains stories of faith and does not aim to give a factual or historical account of the creation of the world.

* The story of creation

The story of creation is a very old text written a long time ago in a very different culture than ours. The story of creation can be found in the book Genesis. This is the first book of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is more than 2000 years old. Although Bible stories were written a long time ago, they can still have an important meaning for us.

Laudato Si'

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* was published the 18th of June 2015. It is a call from the Pope to all Catholic believers and people of goodwill to take care of our common home. After all, today the creation is under pressure due to the current environmental and climate problems. Pope Francis calls not only governments and businesses, but all people to take more care of our climate.

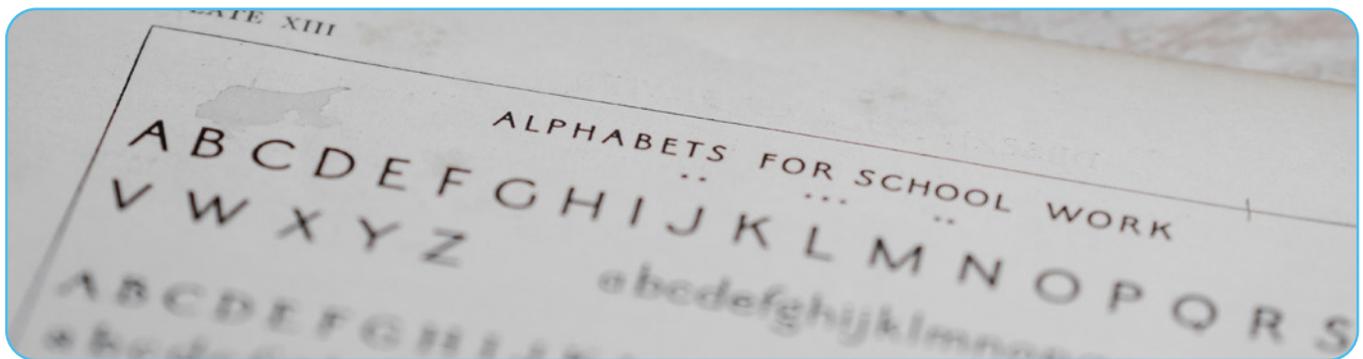


Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

3.7 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

SCHOOL

We can see the back of a classroom; you can see a movie playing about climate change, the bell rings and the students get out of the classroom.

Teacher (while the students are leaving): Everyone, don't forget to be on time for our camping trip! The bus leaves on time!

We see four friends (playground/hallway): Lindsay, Ariella, Sarah and Michael. Lindsay gets a text message: the package she ordered online has arrived at her house.

Lindsay: Yes, yes! My new online order has arrived! I hope this new dress will look good on me!

Lindsay's friends look bewildered and irritated by her.

Sarah: Wow, Lindsay, did you order new things AGAIN? Do you really need all that stuff? We just saw a movie on climate change..

Lindsay: Oh, come on! Don't be such a buzzkill. I really need it, you know.

Michael (sarcastically): Yes, you really need the same dress in three different colors.

Lindsay: Michael, you should shut up, you know. You should be happy I don't call the fashion police on you. They would put you in jail for all the weird clothes you are always wearing.

Sarah: Do you hear yourself? Michael is totally right. The Earth is sick. It is exhausted by our consumerist society. More and more people, people like you, have more and more needs! And a lot of conflicts in the world are a consequence of a struggle for resources.

Ariella: Hey guys, calm down. You're right, but don't be so hard on Lindsay. Climate change is not only her fault. Do you want to know who we really have to blame for all this? It is mostly the fault of Christians! Christians like you, Michael and Sarah. Christians believe they can rule over the Earth, according to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament.

Sarah: What? That is not true!

Ariella: It is true! Christians believe that humans are the only creatures made in God's likeness. They believe that God gave His creation, the entire Earth to them. Being the only creature made in God's likeness, Christians think they own the Earth! And because of all their consumerist behavior, we now all have to bear the consequences including many conflicts between peoples, nations and continents.

Michael: What?

Michael and Sarah look confused. They don't know how to react.

Lindsay (smiling): So, we agree that I'm not cancelling my online orders. I'm not the one to blame, haha!

Ariella: You know what? We should do more for the environment. It could also stop many conflicts in the world. It is time for action!

HOME ARIELLA (after school)

Next, we see Ariella going home/at home watching a climate strike on TV. Here you can also see a quote on a sign of one of the protesters: Climate change? Blame Christianity! (in this way, there is also this polarizing element visible in the video). Ariella is inspired by this protest on TV and she is preparing to join a protest by making signs and a T-shirt (slogan on the T-shirt: Climate Justice Now!).

NEXT DAY: CAMPING TRIP

The next morning, we see the students leaving for a school camping trip. Ariella is wearing the T-shirt she made. The students get on the bus and arrive at a place that looks like a forest/camping place where they set up their tents.

Lindsay (teasing): Sarah, what do you think of my new dress? Doesn't this dress look great on me?

Sarah (a bit frustrated): yeah, I especially hope your new dress survives this camping trip, you know we're going for a long hike, right?

We see the students take a walk in the forest, suddenly they arrive at a kind of treehouse/nature looking house where two people are sitting (=Adam and Eve lookalikes). These two people welcome the students.

"Adam": Hello young friends! Welcome to our Garden of Eden, what brings you here?

Michael: Hello! Thank you for welcoming us. We are on a camping trip and stay here a bit further, we are out hiking today.

Ariella: Hi! You live here in the middle of nature?! So quiet and peaceful!

"Eve": Thank you! We really like living in this place. We are happy with everything nature has given us. We live in perfect harmony with nature. And even more, we have respect for all of nature around us. We let the trees live and grow without touching them, as we were told to do.

"Adam" (pointing at Ariella's T-shirt): And I can see you are also interested in taking care of our environment?

Ariella: Yes I am! Actually, we were talking about this yesterday, how the climate deserves more attention! And also that the guilty must take their responsibility, like Christians for example!

"Adam": Can you explain to me what you mean exactly?

Michael: Yes we were discussing this. Is it true that Christians are to blame for the destruction of nature and the climate? And are the cause of a worldwide conflict on natural resources?

Ariella: Yes. Is this true? Because I read that the book Genesis in the Bible says that human beings have a special role to play on Earth because humans are created in the **image of God**. Because of this, Christians believe they can rule over the Earth which has led to all the current ecological problems!!!

Michael and Sarah look sad and confused.

Michael: What does this really mean, being created in God's image? And what does this have to do with the human responsibility for the Earth?

Sarah: Is the Christian tradition really one of the most important causes for today's environmental crisis and all conflicts connected to it?

"Adam": Ok, let's put an end to all this confusion and let's get our facts straight, shall we?

The children nod.

"Adam": First of all, Christians do believe that God created the world.

"Eve": An important aspect of the Christian faith is the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. We can indeed read this in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. However, being created in the image and likeness of God does not mean that Christians believe that human beings can just rule over the Earth and exploit it!

"Adam": It is the opposite: being created in the image of God implies a **responsibility**. The Earth is not just a possession of human beings, it is a gift from God.

Michael: So... We are all responsible for taking good care of the Earth?

"Adam": That's right, Michael.

"Eve": Just to be clear: the world is in no way human property. It is the other way around, because in the Christian tradition, we believe **that human beings are responsible for taking good care of the Earth, and of each other!**

IN LINDSY'S HOUSE

We see the four friends in Lindsay's house (living room). They are clearing all the packages, some stuff goes to aid organizations, some clothes go to Lindsay's closet. Lindsay herself is on her smartphone canceling her next orders.

Ariella: Okay, sorry for everything I've said. I do understand now that we all need to take care of the earth, we should not point our finger at one person or group.

Michael: Don't worry, everything's okay! It was an interesting and fun camping trip!

Lindsay: See, I've already cancelled three orders. [she sees a red dress on her smartphone] Oh but I really need this red dress, so I'm going to order it!

Sarah (showing three different red dresses of Lindsay and smiling to Lindsay): Are you sure? Seems to me that you already have a lot of red dresses in your closet (Sarah winks to Lindsay).

Lindsay: Hmmm, you win! (She cancels the red dress). But hey look, these pants are truly beautiful!

Sarah, Michael and Ariella start laughing.

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