



## Moral Basis for Collective Living

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*Laudato si'* (Praise Be to You") the second circular letter (encyclical) of Pope Francis, has the subtitle: "On the care for our common home." In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, and calls for "swift and unified global action" to combat environmental degradation. Published on June 18, the letter focuses on the "urgent challenge to protect our common home to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change".

He adds: "Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic and political. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades."

The letter is all about interconnectedness and relationships with fellow-human beings, with mother nature and with god. In the introductory section, Francis, following St Francis of Assisi, calls the earth our "common home," which is like our sister and our mother. But we are damaging this familial relationship as we harm the environment. In so doing, we are damaging our relationship with other humans, particularly those least equipped to defend themselves: the poor and future generations. We are forgetting our interconnectedness with the earth and with those around and ahead of us who depend on our good stewardship of the gift of creation.

Given the universal nature of our common home, Francis makes it clear that the encyclical is addressed not only to Christians but as a means to "enter into

dialogue” with all people who are “united by the same concern”. Chapter 5 of the letter calls for dialogue between different religions and sciences.

Pope Francis holds that “caring for ecosystems demands farsightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation.” He denounces indifference, resignation and obstructionism and announces a more positive vision deeply rooted in his spirituality and helps him to re-locate our place in god’s greater plan for creation. He encourages cooperation, leaving room for the genius of individual “cultures, experience, involvements and talents.”

It is essentially a hopeful letter. “Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful.”

An editorial in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* praised the letter. “The papal calls to end poverty and share the world’s ecological space in a fair way are objectives that mirror the United Nations’ sustainable development goals, to be released in September. The pope’s letter adds an important facet to the discussion.”

Taking this as an example, can religious, scientific and civil leaders come together, draw from our collective wisdom and cooperate to battle the grave threats that humanity faces? Can we really recognise the moral and spiritual basis for the technological and social problems we face? Can our spirituality lead to a more authentic common living? 🌱

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