



INSIGHTS FROM CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON Ecological Justice

Pope Francis emphasizes recognizing our interconnectedness with nature in *Laudato Si'* and *Laudato Deum*. *Laudato Si'*, the 2015 papal encyclical and the first to focus on ecology, frames climate change as a moral and spiritual concern. *Laudato Si'* encourages us to revere and care for "our common home," which will allow us to encounter kinship and universal communion, a sense of belonging, peace, and social harmony. *Laudate Deum*, published in 2023, asks individuals "to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful" (6.69).

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching also call us to care for creation and respect human life and dignity. The concept of the common good holds that we exist "with and for" others and must protect our world for future generations. Climate change is deeply intertwined with poverty, as its consequences often stem from actions that go against the fundamental values of humanity. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly evident that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all creation.

Reflections from Catholic Social Teaching

"Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all of creation." USCCB, *Renewing the Earth*

"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it, we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations, and towards humanity as a whole." *Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, 48*

"As stewards of God's creation, we are called to make the earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil, and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling." *Pope Francis, Speech in Manila, Philippines, 2015*

"The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters." *Pope Francis, Laudato Si, 2*

Environmental Statistics

- Sea levels are rising rapidly due to climate change. Since 1880, average sea levels have increased by over 8 inches (about 23 cm), with approximately 3 inches of that rise occurring in just the last 25 years. Currently, sea levels are rising by about 0.13 inches (3.2 mm) annually. Research from February 2022 reveals that this rate is accelerating, with projections indicating an additional rise of about a foot by 2050. Sources: *National Geographic, Climate.gov, Smithsonian.*

- If current greenhouse gas emissions continue unchecked, global warming could drive over one-third of Earth's animal and plant species to extinction by 2050. This would lead to a catastrophic loss of biodiversity, permanently altering ecosystems and human societies worldwide. In fact, more than a million species are at risk of future extinction due to climate change. *Source: Center for Biological Diversity.*
- Between 1980 and June 10, 2024, the United States experienced 387 confirmed weather and climate disasters, each causing over \$1 billion in losses. These included 31 droughts, 44 floods, nine freeze events, 195 severe storms, 62 tropical cyclones, 22 wildfires, and 24 winter storms. Collectively, these disasters claimed 16,434 lives and caused widespread economic damage. *Source: National Centers for Environmental Information.*
- Black Americans, on average, receive less financial relief from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) than white Americans. As a result, their communities face longer recovery times after natural disasters and are less likely to relocate to areas with fewer disaster risks. *Sources: Harvard Kennedy School: Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy, CNN.*
- Indigenous communities face loss of traditional knowledge and livelihoods, increased food insecurity, changing water availability, permafrost thaw, and relocation from historic homelands as a result of climate change. *Sources: U.S. Global Research Program – Indigenous Peoples, National Climate Assessment, EPA, U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit, United States Department of Agriculture*

Questions for Candidates to Public Office on Ecological Justice



- What is your response to the acceleration of climate change? Do you plan to support legislation that seeks to mitigate environmental damage? What specific policies will you propose or advocate (e.g., reduce greenhouse gas emissions, institute a carbon tax, support research into alternative power sources, or transition away from coal and oil)?
- In what ways can the United States emulate other countries that have adopted stronger environmental protections? How can the U.S. better use its position to encourage developing and industrialized nations to coordinate a global effort to combat climate change?
- How will your administration prioritize the concerns of indigenous communities over wealthy interests? Do you commit to fighting against the construction of oil pipelines on Indigenous lands, mountaintop removal and strip mining, deforestation of the Amazon, and the violent displacement of communities to plant oil palm?
- How does Pope Francis's words on the environment and caring for creation inspire you?

Catholic Resources

- *Laudato Si'* Movement - laudatosimovement.org
- Catholic Climate Covenant - catholicclimatecovenant.org
- USCCB: Why does the Church Care About Global Climate Change? - bit.ly/4eCzUgl

Education For Justice Resources

- Prayer Service for Earth Day - bit.ly/4ejfGlb
- Fact Sheet: Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change - bit.ly/3XZdwlr
- Reflection: CST and Canaries in the Coal Mine - bit.ly/3zE0iYd
- *Laudato Si'* and Ecological Conversion - bit.ly/4eDiujr