

Pope Francis Themes on the Ecology

Theme: Integral Ecology: Human Ecology and Natural Ecology

Pope Francis is likely to speak about something called “integral ecology.” This idea tells us that the way we relate with one another and how we relate to the environment are intimately connected. Integral ecology means that “natural ecology”—the environment, our natural resources, the precious gift of Creation—is decidedly linked to “human ecology”—how we respect life, treat one another, regard the poor, structure our economic decisions and policy, mold and shape our society.

- “Respect for nature also calls for recognizing that man himself is a fundamental part of it. Along with an environmental ecology, there is also need of that human ecology which consists in respect for the person, which I have wanted to emphasize in addressing you today.” [Address delivered by Pope Francis to members of the European Parliament 11/25/14](#)
- “But to ‘cultivate and care’ encompasses not only the relationship between us and the environment, between man and creation, it also regards human relationships. The Popes have spoken of human ecology, closely linked to environmental ecology” ([General Audience 6/5/13](#)).
- “There are other weak and defenseless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation. I am speaking of creation as a whole. We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations” ([Evangelli Gaudium](#), No. 215).

Theme: Care for Creation

The pope is expected to emphasize the virtue inherent in proper care for creation, linking it explicitly to love of God and neighbor. We are called to care for and steward creation, this gift from God intended to nurture and sustain us, even as we cultivate and rely on it. When we fail to care for creation, we risk destroying a vital sign of God’s love for us.

- “The vocation of being a ‘protector’ means ‘[P]rotecting creation,’ the beauty of the created world, as the Book of Genesis tells us and as Saint Francis of Assisi shows us. It means respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment in which we live. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about” ([Inaugural homily 3/19/13](#)).
- “Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude” ([General Audience 5/21/14](#), No. 3).
- “[F]or us there is a responsibility to nurture the Earth, to nurture Creation, to keep it and make it grow according to its laws. We are the lords of creation, not its masters” [Homily 2/9/15](#)

Theme: Climate Change

Pope Francis discusses climate change and provides examples of how climate change disproportionately impacts poor and vulnerable communities.

- Climate change “is a serious ethical and moral responsibility” ([Message to the UN Convention on Climate Change](#)).
- “An effective fight against global warming will be possible only through a responsible collective action, which overcomes particular interests and behaviors and develops unfettered by political and economic pressures” ([Message to the UN Convention on Climate Change](#)).
- “Climate change, the loss of biodiversity, deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in terrible cataclysms which we see and from which you the humble suffer most – you who live near the coast in precarious dwellings, or so economically vulnerable that you lose everything due to a natural disaster” ([Address of Pope Francis to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements](#)).

Theme: Throw Away Culture

A culture of waste is a part of an economy of exclusion. What the pope has termed the current “throwaway culture” is unsustainable and threatens to drain our moral and natural resources, exploiting persons and creation.

- “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers’” ([Evangelii Gaudium](#), No. 53)
- “This ‘culture of waste’ tends to become a common mentality that infects everyone. Human life, the person, are no longer seen as a primary value to be respected and safeguarded, especially if they are poor or disabled, if they are not yet useful — like the unborn child — or are no longer of any use — like the elderly person. This culture of waste has also made us insensitive to wasting and throwing out excess foodstuffs, which is especially condemnable when, in every part of the world, unfortunately, many people and families suffer hunger and malnutrition. There was a time when our grandparents were very careful not to throw away any left over food. Consumerism has induced us to be accustomed to excess and to the daily waste of food, whose value, which goes far beyond mere financial parameters, we are no longer able to judge correctly.” ([General Audience 6/5/13](#)).
- “Let us remember well, however, that whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor, from the hungry! I ask everyone to reflect on the problem of the loss and waste of food, to identify ways and approaches which, by seriously dealing with this problem, convey solidarity and sharing with the underprivileged.” ([General Audience 6/5/13](#)).

Theme: Call to Build a Culture of Solidarity and Encounter

In contrast to an economy of exclusion and culture of waste, Pope Francis discusses the need for a culture of solidarity and encounter. We need to take part in collective action to protect one another and the environment, overcoming particular interests and behaviors and not being swayed by economic and political pressures.

- “I would therefore like us all to make the serious commitment to respect and care for creation, to pay attention to every person, to combat the culture of waste and of throwing out so as to foster a culture of solidarity and encounter” ([General Audience 6/5/13](#)).
- “The word ‘solidarity’ is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” ([Evangelli Gaudium](#), No. 188).
- “And this tells us that when the food was shared fairly, with solidarity, no one was deprived of what he needed, every community could meet the needs of its poorest members. Human and environmental ecology go hand in hand” ([General Audience 6/5/13](#)).