

We hope you enjoy these sample pages. For ordering information, visit Liguori.org.

10 Things Pope Francis Wants You to Know About the Environment



Michael Wright



Liguori

Imprimi Potest:

Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, the Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri 63057

To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

Copyright © 2016 Liguori Publications

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

p ISBN: 978-0-7648-2710-5

e ISBN: 978-0-7648-7123-8

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16 / 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition



Contents

Introduction: Pope Francis Is “Down to Earth”
in *Laudato Si’* 7

1. The Agony in the Garden:
What’s Happening to Our Home 10
 2. Everything’s Connected:
God, Environment, Life 15
 3. Let It Be: The Intrinsic Value of Creation 19
 4. The Common Good: Now and Later 21
 5. Buy Now, Pay Later:
Our Throwaway Culture of Consumerism 25
 6. Stop and Smell the Roses:
Discerning the Spirit 30
 7. The Techno Kingdom:
Using Technology Responsibly 33
 8. Home Is Where the Heart Is:
Development and Culture 37
 9. We’re All in This Together:
A “Culture of Care” 41
 10. Our Calling: What We Can Do 44
- Conclusion: Hopeful Diligence 47



5. Buy Now, Pay Later: Our Throwaway Culture of Consumerism

Pope Francis naturally refers to the earth in Franciscan terms: “This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will” (2). The pope disparages our throwaway culture, characterized by compulsive consumerism: “The pace of consumption, waste, and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes” (161). He refers to everyday things like food, of which one-third produced is thrown away (50), and paper that is usually not recycled (22). Millions of tons of junk mail are distributed annually in the U.S. alone, most of it ending up in landfills (see law.nyu.edu). Even in economic statistics, like “housing starts” and “consumer confidence levels,” more is considered better. Pope

Francis cites the New Zealand bishops who asked what the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” meant when “20 percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive” (95). What gives us the right to take what we want, when others don’t even have what they need?

Our daily consumption and waste, whether from conscious decisions or ingrained habits, contributes to environmental degradation and climate change. We as a society have become quite efficient at taking what we want from the world—and discarding what we don’t. “This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth...based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit” (106).

The Christmas season is a prime example, now four months long in the United States, according to retailers. Each year, Christians and non-Christians alike buy and wrap billions of gifts and travel as many miles. Online shopping requires even more packaging and fuel for delivery. Holidays can be a wonderful opportunity to connect with family and friends, but when we celebrate them with excessive consumption, we are not living up to our ethical responsibilities of sustainability and social justice.

Our first-world diet also impacts our environment. For example, over a million acres of rainforest, the “richly biodiverse lungs of our

planet” (38), are destroyed annually in Brazil alone (NPR, November 6, 2015). Hundreds of thousands of acres are burned or clear-cut *each day* for exotic hardwoods or agriculture for products most consumers wouldn’t associate with climate change: beef, coffee, bananas, coconut, chocolate, cane sugar, and palm oil (used for doughnuts). The pope points out that, “when these forests are burned down or leveled for purposes of cultivation, within the space of a few years countless species are lost and the areas frequently become arid wastelands” (38). He asks: “Is it realistic to hope that those who are obsessed with maximizing profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage which they will leave behind for future generations?” (190). Unless there is a monetary value placed on standing trees as carbon sinks, there is little incentive to avoid either deforestation or consuming the products that drive it.

The pope observes, “People may well have a growing ecological sensitivity but it has not succeeded in changing their harmful habits of consumption which, rather than decreasing, appear to be growing all the more” (55). He contends that our “culture of relativism” and “use and throw away logic” justifies eliminating children when deemed inconvenient or unwanted (123). “When people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own, and consume” (204). In effect, our daily diet and creature comforts affect life halfway

around the world. Despite the difficulties, we need to change our lifestyles.

To help solve our ecological crises, the pope calls for us to consume less and promote environmental education. “Many people,” he says, “feel unable to give up what the market sets before them. In those countries which should be making the greatest changes in consumer habits, young people...have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits” (209). Education can begin in the family, where ideally “we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem, and care for all creatures” (213). Too often, however, “parents [themselves] can be prone to impulsive and wasteful consumption” (162). Institutions like social groups and the Church can help promote ecological awareness (214).

It’s easy to become discouraged by the apparent futility of living a low-carbon lifestyle. The pope asks us to accept the notion that less is more: “Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little (222).

“Those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the lookout for what they do not have...learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them” (223).

When we consume in moderation, we are taking the first steps toward living more sustainably. As with many paradoxes of Christian life, living with less can be liberating and allow us to live life to the full. More important, if our ultimate goal is to become saints through love of God and neighbor, then reducing consumption and waste to serve the common good is a step in the right direction.