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Jeff Ploegstra

Dordt College, jeff.ploegstra@dordt.edu

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Divorce and a Broken Home

Abstract

"Reflections on the encyclical letter "Laudato Si" of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home."

Posting about reframing all of creation to bring glory to God from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/divorce-and-a-broken-home/>

Keywords

In All Things, creation, encyclical, Popes, God, Bible, relationships

Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Divorce and a Broken Home

all [inallthings.org/divorce-and-a-broken-home/](https://www.inallthings.org/divorce-and-a-broken-home/)

Jeff Ploegstra

It should be unsurprising to everyone that a pope who chose to be named after St. Francis of Assisi would write an [encyclical](#) elaborating on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of environmental care. In his letter, the pope had much to say about what needs to change in our approach to “our common home,” but the real beauty of what he wrote is in how clearly he elaborated on *why* we need change.

It is also, perhaps, unsurprising that much of the discussion in the news is about who is going to like what he has to say and who isn’t. ¹

Very little actual thoughtful critique exists. Some immediately glom onto “climate change” and declaim the pope as some sort of demagogue pandering to the environmentalists, while others praise him because he denounces abortion. Rather than engaging the merits of the content, much of the coverage has simply engaged a few political hot topics... Too bad.

A blog [post](#) by Maureen Mullarkey from “First Things,” self-proclaimed as “America’s most influential Journal of Religion and Public Life”, typifies the rhetoric. She said, “Man cannot destroy ‘Creation.’ It is not within his power. Francis sullies his office by using demagogic formulations to bully the populace into reflexive climate action with no more substantive guide than theologized propaganda.”

I would have to say that she A) has not actually read the encyclical and B) has not bothered to take a look around the world lately — unless she means that we cannot destroy “creation” in the sense that we can’t knock it out of existence. I would consider rampant water and air pollution, massive deforestation, dewatering of rivers and seas, unprecedented erosive soil loss, mountain top removal, state-sized islands of plastic trash in our oceans, a huge hole in the ozone layer, and accelerating loss of biodiversity all to be clear evidence that we can indeed destroy creation — one piece at a time, one relationship at a time. Creation is a complex system whose parts and pieces we barely understand, let alone the relationships among those parts and pieces. Undermining any part or piece of a complex system has the potential to undermine the rest. In fact, this is one of the things I appreciate most about the encyclical: it highlights relationships and interdependence. Like a marriage or family, the *relationships* are as important as the members.

Early in the encyclical, the pope clearly articulates broken relationships as a theological foundation to his understanding of the problem:

The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity, and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship

| between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19). [Pg.19] [tweet](#)

Throughout the encyclical, the pope speaks eloquently of the importance of the interdependence of all creation, and states that we should seek an "...integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically." In an elaboration on Thomas Aquinas he says,

The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas wisely noted that multiplicity and variety "come from the intention of the first agent" who willed that "what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another," inasmuch as God's goodness "could not be represented fittingly by any one creature." Hence we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships. We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God's plan. As the Catechism teaches: "God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other". [pg.25] [tweet](#)

The complementarity of "broken relationships" as both a theological and ecological concept represents beautifully how our scientific and theological understandings of the world can complement one another to engage us in fruitful activity and the bringing of shalom. We are motivated out of our love for God and our reasoned examination of what He has made, and we become disciples as we study the world and engage our brokenness. We repent and seek to draw nearer to God as we pursue right *relationship* and God's good purposes for all He has made.

We must reframe all of creation, including human social, technological, and political systems, as a *whole thing* purposed to bring God glory. The encyclical unfolds a number of themes throughout that are all clearly connected to the foundational relational breaks mentioned above. The pope develops and elaborates on themes related to the intimate relationship between the poor and environmental decline, the interconnection of ecosystems, our frequent idolization of technological solutions, alternative ways of understanding the economy and progress, the appropriate value of created things, and the need for our serious engagement with socio-environmental issues through debate, policy, and lifestyle change. He engages these things because the problems inherent in them represent a misdirection of their collective, central purpose.

Many critics of the encyclical are representing it as foundationally about climate change policy. I can't help but believe that this is purely political maneuvering. Even if you think climate change (or at least anthropogenic climate change) is off the mark, you should be able to clearly understand the arguments made about human interdependence with the rest of creation, the fragility of interconnected systems, and the differential vulnerability of the poor. More importantly, you should also be able to understand that this is a clarion call to activity more clearly aimed at loving God (by caring for what he made and called "very good"), and loving our neighbor (by loving where they live and supporting our shared systems they depend upon much more immediately than we do).

As I read it, I see that the encyclical is an attempt to redirect us toward the central purpose of creation. It does not simply elaborate on problems. While pointing out brokenness, it is also incredibly hope- and praise-filled. I hope everyone will take the time to read the encyclical, not only to evaluate its merits for

yourself, but to be challenged and *inspired* – in the truest sense – to be moved by the Spirit.

When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. [pg.25] [tweet](#)

Dig Deeper

For more information about the interrelatedness of creation, read [Everything Is Related](#).

Footnotes

1. It is notable that the Christian Reformed Church released a [statement](#) yesterday affirming the encyclical and standing in solidarity with its central message. Dr. Steven Timmermans, the CRC's executive director echoes the encyclical,

The Christian Reformed Church affirms that the gospel must always be both proclaimed in word and demonstrated in deed, and that a central component of this task includes taking seriously God's command in Genesis 2:15 to serve and to protect the rest of the created order and to exercise responsible stewardship. Along with the original goodness of creation, we affirm the integrity of creation as an evangelical witness to the power and glory of God and the cosmic scope of God's redemptive work in Jesus as encompassing all of creation. [tweet](#)

