**Ecology, Pope Francis, and *Laudato si’***

November 17, 2015

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* + - 1. Introduction (Russ): Pope Francis addressed an encyclical (*Laudato si’*, “Praise be to you”) to all people in the world, beginning with problems that everyone can observe: pollution, climate change, the issue of fresh water, and the breakdown of society and unruliness of cities. Today we will look at the encyclical and see what Christians can do about the problem.
      2. Jared Goldfarb, a “Jewish Environmentalist.”

1. The value of the pope. “There is no top-down authority in Judaism like the pope in Christianity, and he has issued a call to service.” If we are beholden to faith or a covenant with God, there is an obligation to be an environmentalist. The encyclical has had reverberations in the Jewish world. The politics of the encyclical, its timing, and its social impact, has affected the entire world, including the Jewish world.
2. How to Interpret Ecology in Religious Terms.

Religious people have, in the past, not been known as ecologists.

Jared delivers a handout: “God is a Treehugger: Jewish roots of ecology.”

1. “God Is a Treehugger.”
2. Genesis 1:26-29. Then God said: Let us make[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1#01001026-1) human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. 27God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female[**\***](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1#01001027-1) he created them. 28God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1" \l "01001028-1)** Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.[**m**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1#01001028-m)29**[\*](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1" \l "01001029-1)** [**n**](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/1#01001029-n) God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food;
   1. Jared: the emphasis is on God’s blessing. “Be fruitful and multiply.” We have succeeded to such an extent that we now face seeming overpopulation.
   2. “Fill the earth and conquer it.” We are “conquering,” subduing, pressing down.
   3. “Have dominion over.” Be a dictator or a despot. Humanity has a right to dictate to and control the other creatures. But with ultimate control comes ultimate responsibility. Over “living things,” i.e., animals. But inanimate creation – plants, water – but seed-bearing plants and fruit are good for food. So perhaps we are not meant to eat animals. “And now Jewish veganism is beginning to be talked about, after a silence of millennia.
3. Genesis 2:15. The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.**[h](http://www.usccb.org/bible/genesis/2" \l "01002015-h)**
   1. “To cultivate” is “working” and “worshiping.”
   2. “To care” is to be proactive. We have to preserve and guard it
   3. Is cultivate in tension with care? Russ: Pope Francis mentions both Genesis texts, and does not set them against one another. But he gives priority to chapter two. God is the one who guards or watches over Israel (Ps. 21).
4. Midrash Raba on Ecclesiastes 7:13. “When the Holy Blessed One created Adam, God took him and led him around all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: Behold my works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! All that I have created, I created for your benefit. Take care that you do not ruin and destroy my world, for it you destroy it, there is no one to repair it after you.”
   1. This text means that humanity is meant to care for the world.
   2. *Tikkun olam*. Repairing the world. Eccl. 7:13 is the foundation text. Tikkun olam (Hebrew: תיקון עולם or תקון עולם‎) (literally, "repair of the world", alternatively,"construction for eternity") is a concept in Judaism, originating in the early rabbinic period, given alternative meanings in medieval kabbalistic literature, and given new meanings in modern movements of Judaism.
   3. The pope uses a passage from Leviticus 25:23. The land shall not be sold irrevocably; for the land is mine, and you are but resident aliens and under my authority.
5. Deuteronomy 20:19. When you are at war with a city and have to lay siege to it for a long time before you capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are the trees of the field human beings, that they should be included in your siege? 20However, those trees which you know are not fruit trees you may destroy. You may cut them down to build siegeworks against the city that is waging war with you, until it falls.
   1. Are the trees to be forced to serve the needs of the army?
   2. This passage is used to criticize the settlers who cut down Palestinian olive trees. It’s a transgression of a biblical precept. The Talmud discusses what a “fruit bearing tree” is.
6. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings 6:8 and 10. “It is forbideen to cut down fruit trees outside the city and it is forbidden to dam their irrigation trenches in order that they wither, as it is written: *You shall not destroy its trees . . .* Anyone who does so is subject to lashes. This does not only refer to a siege, but rather anyone who cuts down a fruit tree in a wasteful manner is subject to lashes. However, the tree may be felled if it is damaging another tree, if it is damaging a field, or if its financial value is great. The Torah only prohibited [cutting down trees] in a wasteful manner. This prohibition applies not only to fruit trees: one who breaks utensils, tears clothing, destroys building stops up a spring, or spoils food in a wasteful manner has transgressed the prohibition *You shall not destroy*.
7. *Bal tashchit*([Hebrew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language): בל תשחית) ("do not destroy") is a basic [ethical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics) principle in [Jewish law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_law).
   1. Wikipedia: The principle is rooted in the [Biblical law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_law) of Deuteronomy 20:19–20. In the Bible, the command is said in the context of wartime and forbids the cutting down of fruit trees in order to assist in a siege.
   2. In early rabbinic law however, the *bal tashchit*principle is understood to include other forms of senseless damage or waste. For instance, the [Babylonian Talmud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_Talmud) applies the principle to prevent the wasting of lamp oil, the tearing of clothing, the chopping up of furniture for firewood, or the killing of animals.  In all cases, *bal tashchit*is invoked only for destruction that is deemed unnecessary. Destruction is explicitly condoned when the cause or need is adequate.
   3. In contemporary [Jewish ethics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_ethics) on [Judaism and ecology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judaism_and_ecology), advocates often point to *bal tashchit*as an environmental principle.
8. Sometimes the text is there, but people ignore it.
9. Exodus 23.
10. Texts.
    1. Exodus 23:5. When you notice the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you should not desert him; you must help him with it.
    2. Exodus 23:12. For six days you may do your work, but on the seventh day you must rest,**[g](http://www.usccb.org/bible/exodus/23" \l "02023012-g)** that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and that the son of your maidservant and the resident alien may be refreshed.
11. Rashi on Exodus 23:12. Rashi is Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105). “*That your ox and donkey may rest* – by permitting it to graze and eat grass from the ground. You may have thought [it should rest] inside its home, but it is said that is not rest but rather suffering.”
12. Interpretation. Pope Francis points to this text. We rest on the Sabbath so that our animals may rest.
13. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hullin 7b.

* “When [R. Pinchas ben Yair] came, he entered Rabbi [Yehuda’s residence] through the entrance where [his] white mules were standing. [R. Pinchas] said: The Angel of Death is in this one’s house and I will dine with him? Rabbi [Yehuda] heard this and went out to him. He said [to R. Pinchas]: I will sell [the mules]. *Rabbi Yehuda was wealth, with white mules. Rabbi Pinchas thought that this wealthy man may not have been treating his animals well.*
* “[R. Pinchas] replied: You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind person. (Leviticus 19:14) [R. Yehuda said]: I will abandon them. [R. Pinchas replied]: You will increase the harm done. [R. Yehuda said]: I will cut [their hooves]. [R. Pinchas replied]: Then there is [the situation of] suffering of living creatures. *The suffering of creatures is the issue.*
* “[R. Yehudah said]: I will kill them. [R. Pinchas replied]: There is [a prohibition] against wasteful destruction. As [R. Yhudah] pleaded with him excessively, a mountain rose between them.” *The Jewish tradition about the suffering of animals is extremely subtle.*

1. Babylonia Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 151b. “A teaching of Rabban Gamliel son of Rabbi: *You shall grant mercy and mercy shall be upon you*. (Deuteronomy 13:18). One who is compassionate to creatures, compassion will be bestowed on that person from Heaven. One who is not compassionate to creatures, Heaven will not bestow compassion upon him.”
2. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part 3, 48:3. “*No animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered with its young on the same day* (Leviticus 22:28) – in order that people should be restrained and prevented from killing the two together in such a manner that the young is slain in the sight of the mother, for the pain of the under such circumstances is very great There is no difference in this case between the pain of humans and the pain of other living beings, since the love and tenderness of a mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning, but by imagination, and this faculty exists not only in humans but in most living beings.”
   * + 1. Relatively Recent Jewish Texts from Medieval Times.
     1. Texts.

Hidushei HaRan, Tractate Shabbat 154b. “Even for one who say that [the prohibition against] unnecessary animal suffering is from the Torah this commandment only applies when the animal is used for something unnecessary to humans. However, using an animal for one’s needs or to protect one’s money is certainly permitted, for if not it would be prohibited to even have a donkey grind in a mill because of unnecessary animal suffering. Rather, for certain in cases of human need there is no fear of transgressing unnecessary animal suffering at all.”

Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer 4:92. “Although animals may be used for human needs such as food, working, plowing and hauling, gratuitously injuring an animal is forbidden even if one is paid to inflict the pain to that animal . . . unless it is part of a people’s culture.”

* + 1. Interpretation. Jared says that, in later rabbinical thought, the prohibition against injuring animals is neglected, when there is an overriding reason. “Most kosher meat is imported from Argentina, because it is cheap, but ironically, the animals of Argentina are treated with less regard than they are in the more developed parts of the world, i.e., the Temple Grandin model.
       1. Russ: “Highlights of Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

1. The Symptoms.

What are they?

* Pollution and climate change.
* Issue of water.
* Loss of biodiversity.
* Decline of quality of life and breakdown of society.

Interpretation.

1. The Diagnoses. Ultimately the problem is rooted in human sinfulness.
2. What are the diagnoses?

* Genesis creation account: three relationships: to God, to the neighbor (“It is not good to be alone,” Gen. 2:18), and to the earth (“The Lord God formed the human being from the dust of the ground,” Gen. 2:7).
* Dominion over the earth. “Till” or “serve” the earth and “keep” it, watch over and guard it (Gen. 2:15).
* Sin. “Cursed be the ground because of you . . . thorns and thistles shall it bring forth for you” (Gen. 3:17-18).

1. Interpretation.
2. The Cure. See below.
   * + 1. The Cure. We need a “profound interior conversion” (*Laudato* 6.3.217) that calls for a cultivation of a number of attitudes:
3. Gratitude: the world is God’s gift.

The land is God’s (*Laudato* 2.2.67). Cf. Ps. 24:1, Dt. 10:14, and Lv. 25:23).

God loves creation (*Laudato* 2.3.77 and 2.5.89).

Wisdom 11:24-26. “You shall love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made . . . You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, who love the living.”

Dante, *Paradiso* XXXIII, 145. Love moves the sun and the other stars.

1. Awareness that we are joined with creation in a communion.
2. Sacred Scripture reflects our relations with humanity and all creation.
   1. Dt. 22:4-6. Don’t withhold help when your neighbor’s animal in trouble.
   2. Ex. 23:12. Sabbath is given so that your donkey and ox may also rest.
3. The Gaze of Jesus.
   1. Lk. 12:6. Among 5 sparrows & 2 pennies, none are forgotten by God.
   2. Mt. 6:26. The birds of the air don’t sow, but God feeds them.
4. Awareness that each creature reflects something of God.
5. “Living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes” (*Laudato* 2.2.69).
6. Psalm 104.31. The Lord rejoices in al his works.
7. Critique by the German bishops of utilitarianism. There is a “priority of *being* over *being useful*.” Pope decries utilitarianism (*Laudato* 6.2.209 ff.)
8. Catechism 229: Respect the goodness of creation.
9. Each creature is a message from God to human being. Jesus invites his disciples to perceive the divine message in all thing in Mt. 13:31-32. The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.
10. Each creature has a Trinitarian structure: “As the divine Persons are subsistent relations, the world, created in God’s image, is a web of relationships” (*Laudato* 6.7.239)
11. Human destiny is bound together with that of all creation.
12. First Corinthians 15:28. “God will be all in all.”
13. Rev. 21-22. “I make all things new.” The Book of Revelation harkens back to Genesis and envisions a renewal of creation, Eden restored, with the tree of life growing along the river that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.
14. Russ’ Concluding Remarks. Pope Francis on the salvation of all creation (creatures have souls?). “At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1. Cor. 13:12), and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude. Even now we are journeying towards the Sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven. Jesus says: “I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all. In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast” (*Laudato* 6.6243-244).

Coffee Break

* + - 1. My reflection. The environmental movement can be seen as one aspect of a wider movement, a movement about justice. One dimension that interests me is the connection between environmentalism and social justice. A recent example is the discussion about the Israeli soda machine maker, SodaStream. The company advertizes itself as an ecological way to make soda without plastic bottles. But its factory is in the West Bank. The Palestinian BDS (boycott, divest, and sanction) movement has accused SodaStream of “colonizing” the West Bank, that is, extending Israel’s reach into the West Bank and utilizing inexpensive Palestinian labor. So last week a story appeared in the paper that SodaStream is closing its West Bank factory and opening a factory in the south of Israel. The BDS movement is claiming a victory. They have forced an Israeli company out of the West Bank. But hundreds of Palestinians have lost well-paying SodaStream jobs. Is there a connection between the environmental movement and quest for justice for an improved standard of living for Palestinians?
      2. Conversation.
    1. Philip Perreau. We have to live more simply. Jared: there are in effect two economies. One is the “stock market” economy, which is focused globally. The other is the “local” economy. The local economy offers us an alternative. Here is Israel, we’re obsessed with the land. So we can convince Israelis to produce local food and local clothing. Why import everything from China? Ask the question, “What can I do for my community, my neighborhood, my land?” Obama recently admitted that there are small communities that have influenced him. The USA has “done a 180” in its relation to global warming. Obama has vetoed the Keystone Pipeline. He attributed it to small local voices.
    2. Russ. We have to ask, “What does God call me to do?” There’s a political issue at Tantur. We’ve tried to recycle. Gilo won’t give us recycling containers to use inside our property. Gilo has been annexed and we’re part of the municipality of Jerusalem. But in terms of recycling, Gilo is not entitled to recycling bins. Jared and I are hoping to plead to the Jerusalem official in charge. The other issue is solar energy. Tantur will be renovated in the next few years.
    3. Jared. We in the religious world should inspire our followers. We have built-in guilt. [Karl Rahner said, in his treatment of original sin, that we are all “guilty” of original sin. It is not “personal” guilt but “communal” guilt, the guilt of the human family. We may not have committed a personal sin, but we are enmeshed in sin. In the face of guilt we say that God forgives. And that means that God gives us an opportunity to recognize our wrong-doing and make other choices.]
    4. Michael Flattery. We are all busy, and we violate the Sabbath. We need to rest. Jared: it is valuable to be part of the Jewish tradition. Religious doctrine is given authority, even in the secular domain. Even in secular Tel Aviv, people have to stop being consumers, stop earning money, stop working, at least one day.
    5. James Cassidy. Parliament prevents big firms from opening for longer than six hours on a Sunday. In my town, we say that our workers should be paid a living wage. Jared: Are we facing the issue of Sabbath rest?
    6. Chris Bedding. People who control the invest funds of the diocese are in tension with the religious leaders and the people. Progressive voters say, “The trustees should disclose where our funds are invested.” They are unable (the investment people say) to tell us what they are investing in. We want to divest our funds from fossil fuels. The Uniting Church has divested from fossil fuels without bad consequences.
       1. Conclusion. It’s not easy to make changes in our own lives. We can educate ourselves and others. As people discover what is good for themselves and the community, they will demand it from suppliers.