

# *Laudato Si* and the Acceptance of Our Bodies

**PRO TIP**  
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grades for alternate  
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## CONNECTIONS TO THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

CCC 339

CCC 358

CCC 373

## MATERIALS

- ▶ [The Human Ecology of \*Laudato Si\*](#)

## SUGGESTED TIME

45–50 minutes

## Teacher Background

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes, “Acceptance of our bodies . . . is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift. . . , whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology” (155). The Pope’s words speak to one of the key ways the human person can live out the universal call to holiness and discover how to be good stewards of God’s creation.



### HOW DOES THIS LESSON HELP INOCULATE STUDENTS AGAINST GENDER IDEOLOGY?

Gender ideology asserts that we own our bodies and that they are ours to do with as we wish. But the truth is that being good stewards of creation begins with accepting the gift of our own bodies and taking care of them. Our bodies, like all of creation, should be received as a gift and not manipulated, dominated, or controlled.

## Activity

- A. Begin by arranging your students into pairs or trios and have them create a list on their own paper of ten amazing things the human body can do.
- B. When they have finished, call on groups to share their responses and keep a list on the board. *Accept reasoned and appropriate responses. Consider sharing the following amazing world records related to the human body.*
  - The longest mustache on a living person belongs to Paul Slosar of the United States (as of November 2022) and measures 2 feet 1 inch long.
  - In November 2023, Irfan Mehsood of Pakistan recorded the world record for the heaviest weight lifted with toes: 138.89 lbs.
  - Miguel Ballesteros and José Francisco Dopcio de Pablo of Spain together threw a washing machine weighing 103.61 lbs. a distance of 20 feet 10.6 inches, a world record as of October 2001.
  - In August of 2017, Davinder Singh of India earned the world record for fastest typing with the nose by typing a prescribed 103-character statement on a standard keyboard in 40.19 seconds.
  - American Florence Griffith-Joyner set the women’s world record for the 100-meter sprint in 1988, running it 10.49 seconds.

- C.** Next, explain that the human body is capable of amazing things! From everyday activities and endurances to world records that are the results of years of discipline, dedication, and hard work, the amazing things our bodies can do show the awesomeness of how God has designed us. While most of us will never set nose typing world records, or be the fastest or strongest man or woman on the planet, we have all been uniquely designed by God and have been given our bodies as an incredible gift.
- D.** Then show the video of an Olympic couples' ice dancing found at **[SophiaOnline.org/IceDancing](https://www.sophiaonline.org/IceDancing)**.
- E.** When finished viewing the video, conduct a class discussion using the following questions:
- What did you see in the video? *A male ice skater and female ice skater performed together an ice dancing routine at the Olympics.*
  - What are some things the skaters did in the same way? What were some ways they skated differently? How do those differences relate to the differences between men's and women's bodies? *Many of the movements they made were the same, such as when they would skate in a particular direction or spin; other times the man would lift the woman, providing a stable base and showing the man's greater strength. Many of the movements highlight the strength and stability of the man alongside the grace and beauty of the woman. None of this is to say that women can't be strong and men can't be graceful. But their bodies are designed to complement each other, as shown in the couples' ice dancing. Accept additional reasoned answers.*
  - How did the couple's costumes enhance their performance? *The man wore a plainer costume with more muted colors that tended to showcase the woman's more colorful and more visually interesting costume. Their costumes complemented the role they played in the ice dancing routine and drew the viewers eye towards the beautiful movements of the woman, who was supported by the movements of the man. Accept additional reasoned answers. You may wish to add that admiring a person's beauty when it is displayed in a modest way is good and normal – even a person of the same sex. It does not mean, as the culture often wants to say, that someone is gay. People of the same sex can admire one another, and even the movements of their bodies, without it meaning they have homosexual inclinations. Modesty highlights beauty – think of a beautiful bride. Her veil enhances, rather than detracts from, her beauty. The bride's veil doesn't make you want to look away – quite the opposite, it makes you want to look closer and see beyond the veil.*
  - Why might some people not like their bodies? *They may not like their facial features or hair, they may think they are too skinny, overweight, not coordinated or athletic enough, not muscular enough, not pretty enough, and so forth. Accept additional reasoned answers.*

- What are the culture’s standards for determining what makes a body “good”? What does God tell us makes our bodies good? *Allow for reasoned discussion. Some may say that a body is thought of as good if it is attractive to others; others may say each individual decides for themselves if the body is good. On the other hand, God tells us that our bodies are good simply because they exist. God gave us our bodies as a gift, so they, along with their design, are good in and of themselves.*
- What are some examples of things that are good for us to do that can keep our bodies healthy? *Exercise, eating a healthy diet, adequate sleep, drinking plenty of fluids, brushing our teeth, practicing good hygiene, getting fresh air and sunshine, and so forth. Accept additional reasoned answers.*
- What are some examples of things that our culture tells us are good to do to our bodies, but which are actually harmful? *Allow for reasoned and appropriate discussion. Possible answers include drug use, excessive alcohol intake, excessive plastic surgeries, puberty-blockers or high-dose cross-sex hormones, “gender-affirming” surgeries, and so forth. Accept additional reasoned answers.*

**F.** Next, explain that we can know our bodies are a good gift simply because they exist. God gave us our bodies as a gift and so they and their design are good in and of themselves. We should recognize our bodies, like all of creation, are a precious gift to care for lovingly and use them to honor and praise God, our Creator, who gifted them to us. Today, the transgender movement has pushed a false narrative that, rather than being a gift to cherish, our bodies are ours to shape as we see fit because they are unfairly assigned to us against our wills and without our choice. There is no design to the human body, says gender ideology, rather, we just happen to have “parts.” For those suffering from body and identity-related distress, that can mean taking drastic steps to change parts on their bodies to fit the sex they feel they really are.

**G.** Continue to explain that, in 2015, Pope Francis issued an encyclical titled *Laudato Si* about care for the environment. In it, he emphasized that proper care for the environment begins with properly accepting and caring for our bodies, writing, “Acceptance of our bodies ... is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift.” (*Laudato Si* 155). Let’s now take a closer at Pope Francis’ teaching regarding the importance of accepting our bodies.

**H.** Distribute **The Human Ecology of *Laudato Si*** and have students work independently to read about Pope Francis’ teaching about accepting our bodies as gifts from God and answer the critical thinking questions.

**I.** When they have finished, call on students to share and discuss their answers to the critical thinking questions.

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### The Human Ecology of *Laudato Si*

**Directions:** Read about Pope Francis’ teaching on an authentic human ecology from the encyclical *Laudato Si*; then answer the critical thinking questions.

In 2015, Pope Francis issued the second encyclical of his pontificate, *Laudato Si* (“Praise Be to You”). With the document, subtitled “On Care for Our Common Home,” Pope Francis invited “every person living on this planet” to reflect on the present state of the environment, which he says is in “ecological crisis” (*Laudato Si* 13) and how we, as one human family, can respond to the environmental challenges we face and their “human root” that “concern and affect us all” (*Laudato Si* 14).

At first glance, *Laudato Si* may seem like an odd place to find the pope teaching about the topic of gender ideology. But, from the beginning of the encyclical, Pope Francis makes it clear that, while care for our planet and its resources is important and good, our responsibility toward

our common home is fundamentally intertwined with our dignity as human persons made in God’s image and likeness. Pope Francis’ teaching is for the first time a pope has made this connection. From Pope Leo XIII in 1891 to Pope St. Paul VI, to Pope Francis’ immediate predecessor, Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, the popes have made it clear that proper stewardship of our common home is a fundamental responsibility of mankind as a condition for safeguarding and honoring the dignity of the human person.

To begin his reflection on the environment in *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis quotes from Pope St. John Paul II’s warning that human beings often seem “to see no other meaning in their individual environment than what serves



St. Francis of Assisi by Joaquin de Ribera (1642)

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- J. Conclude by inviting your students to close their eyes and prayerfully reflect on St. Francis of Assisi's song of praise to God, our Creator, The Canticle of the Sun:

*Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessings.*

*To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures;  
especially Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light.*

*And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor,  
and bears a likeness to You, Most High One.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars;  
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom You light the night;  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and governs us and who produces  
varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.*

*Praised be You, my Lord,  
through those who give pardon for Your love,  
and bear infirmity and tribulation.  
Blessed are those who endure in peace  
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.*

*Praised be You, my Lord,  
through our Sister Bodily Death,  
from whom no living man can escape.*

*Woe to those who die in mortal sin.  
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,  
for the second death shall do them no harm.*

*Praise and bless my Lord,  
and give Him thanks,  
and serve Him with great humility.  
Amen.*

# The Human Ecology of *Laudato Si*

**Directions:** Read about Pope Francis' teaching on an authentic human ecology from his encyclical *Laudato Si*. Then answer the critical thinking questions.

In 2015, Pope Francis issued the second encyclical of his pontificate, *Laudato Si* ("Praise Be to You"). With this document, subtitled "On Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis invited "every person living on this planet" to reflect on the present state of the environment, which he says is in "ecological crisis" (*Laudato Si* 15), and how we, as one human family, can respond to the environmental challenges we face and their "human roots" that "concern and affect us all" (*Laudato Si* 14).

At first glance, *Laudato Si* may seem like an odd place to find the pope teaching about the falsehoods of gender ideology. But, from the beginning of the encyclical, Pope Francis makes it clear that, while care for our planet and its resources is important and good, our responsibility toward

our common home is fundamentally intertwined with our dignity as human persons made in God's image and likeness. Pope Francis' teaching is far from the first time a pope has made this connection. From Pope Leo XIII in 1891, to Pope St. Paul VI, to Pope Francis' immediate predecessors, Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, the popes have made it clear that proper stewardship of our common home is a fundamental responsibility of mankind as a condition for safeguarding and honoring the dignity of the human person.

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St. Francis of Assisi by Jusepe de Ribera (1642)

## STUDENT WORKSHEET ANSWER KEY

for immediate use and consumption,” and that “little effort had been made to ‘safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic *human ecology*’” (*Laudato Si* 5). Reflecting on Pope St. John Paul II’s words, Pope Francis adds:

The destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement. . . . Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and “take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system.” Accordingly, our human ability to transform reality must proceed in line with God’s original gift of all that is.



**God as Architect/Builder/Geometer/Craftsman from the frontispiece of Bible Moralisee (ca. 1220–1230)**

Put another way, proper respect for human life and dignity requires care for our planet because it is the environment that God gifted to us in which we are to realize our humanity and flourish. Thus, we must recognize and respect that the flourishing of mankind is intertwined with the flourishing of the earth according to God’s divine Law that governs all things. Human beings, though we have immortal, spiritual souls, are nonetheless part of the created world, and have been given stewardship of creation by God. This stewardship goes beyond caring for the animals, their habitats, and conserving resources – as important as these tasks are. Good stewardship of creation includes and is oriented towards care for humankind itself, including the human body, so that we might realize our humanity in the fullest and offer creation back to God in praise and thanksgiving. While we are uniquely placed in God’s creation with dominion over all God has made and have the ability to transform the world around us, we also must recognize that we are not gods ourselves and cannot recreate or destroy the world and the things of the world at our whim. Because we are part of the created order and not its creators, we must honor and respect the plan of the Creator. Respecting the plan of the Creator also applies to ourselves and our bodies. God has willed our bodies into existence and designed them for a reproductive role (which is our sex). Of this matter, Pope Francis writes:

Human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature

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and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of an “ecology of man”, based on the fact that “man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will.” It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. (*Laudato Si* 155)

In contrast to the false narrative of the transgender movement that would have us believe that our bodies are amazing machines that can be shaped by our own means to fit our feelings and desires, Pope Francis reminds us that it is, in fact, our bodies that connect us to the physical world. True care for the environment begins with accepting the world as a gift from God that we must cherish, which can only happen when we first accept our own bodies – that vital connection to the earth – as a gift from God. The fullest meaning of our bodies, of course, is realized in our ability to make them a gift to another, and

in a very special way, within marriage, to cooperate with God in procreation.

Pope Francis continues:

[V]aluing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek “to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.” (*Laudato Si* 155)

This brings us to the point: our femininity or masculinity, which has been willed by God and gifted to us, is realized and expressed in and through our bodies. Our bodies are not incidental to our human identity; they connect us to the material world, of which God has made us stewards. Gender ideology, in its assertion that we can shape our bodies on our own terms to be whatever we want them to be, seeks to eliminate the sexual difference fundamental to our human identity. In doing so, this false ideology separates the person from the most basic truths of human existence and disconnects them from the created natural order. True care for the environment must begin with and be oriented toward true care for ourselves, which includes accepting and honoring the sex God created us to be.



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### Critical Thinking Questions:

- 1 What is Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si*, about? How does the title of the encyclical (in English, "Praise Be to You"), which quotes St. Francis of Assisi, express the attitude we should have towards the created world, including our bodies?

**Laudato Si is a reflection on the present state of the environment, which the pope says is in "ecological crisis," and how we can respond to the environmental challenges we face. The title expresses the truth that the created world, including our bodies, are gifts we must not only accept in praise and gratitude to God, our Creator, but also honor and use them responsibly to offer praise to God in return.**

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- 2 What has been the shared teaching of the popes in the last almost century and a half regarding the proper stewardship of our common home?

**Proper stewardship of our common home is a fundamental responsibility of mankind as a condition for safeguarding and honoring the dignity of the human person.**

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- 3 What reason does Pope Francis give for taking seriously the issue of the destruction of the human environment? What does he say we must do with our human ability to transform reality?

**Pope Francis says that we must take seriously the issue of the destruction of the environment not only because God has entrusted the world to us, but also because human life is itself a gift that must be defended. Human beings are the crown of God's creation, and He has given us dominion over creation. It is not an end in itself, but rather exists for human beings. Therefore, the condition of our environment has an effect on human life and dignity and, to protect human life, we must also protect the environment. In essence, we must follow God's design for creation.**

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- 4 Why must we honor and respect the plan of the Creator for what He has made?

**Because we ourselves are part of the created order and not its creators.**

- 5 What does the pope say is the result of thinking we have absolute power over our bodies?

**That we have absolute power over all of creation.**

- 6 What is the proper attitude we should have towards all of creation, including our bodies?

**Viewing it as a precious gift to care for lovingly.**

- 7 Why must we accept the sex God created us be? How is accepting this gift connected to caring for the environment?

**We must accept the sex God created us to be because our sex is realized and expressed in and through our bodies, which are part of the created order, of which God has made us stewards. True care for the environment must begin with and be oriented toward true care for ourselves, which includes accepting and honoring the sex God created us to be.**

*Laudato Si*  
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# The Human Ecology of *Laudato Si*

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## Critical Thinking Questions:

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