



# God's Earth – Our Home

## Study 3

*Human roots of our ecological crisis  
– the vandalism of shalom*

*Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for instead of carrying out his role as a co-operator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature... There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology... Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used.*

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (117, 118, 104)

## Comment

Pope Francis is very concerned about the “technocratic paradigm” that dominates our world. Francis argues that scientific discovery along with its sibling technologies and industry, has produced many good things – and he celebrates these – but it has also brought us to the brink of destruction. (101-104)

Francis is especially concerned that our ability to accumulate knowledge in all areas of human life has outstripped our ability to handle this wisely. This has a huge impact on our environment where dominion of the rich and (technologically/ politically) powerful runs unchecked. This especially impacts the poor unfairly.

Fr. Barron says that giving into the temptation to be “as God”, “knowing good and evil” – being independent, acquiring knowledge autonomously and without restraint – is at the root of human sin. This has deep implications not just for humanity but the rest of creation as our relationships with ourselves, each other and the creation of which we are apart, are corrupted.

## Task 1<sup>a</sup>

Carefully read Genesis 3:1-7 – the story of ‘the fall’ – then discuss together...

- What motivated Eve to make her choice?
- How might these motivations affect choices I/ we/ society make regarding how we live and act in God’s world?
- Do you agree that human capacity to make wise decisions is flawed and needs restraint – or even areas where we shouldn’t go?
- Is there a tension between Frances’ hope for cooperative action on behalf of creation (80, 167) and the Genesis view of the human condition?

If a “deep change” (60) in the way *all* humanity thinks and acts in God’s world is what Frances argues has to happen ...

- What areas of our lives do *we* need to be mindful of as we make decisions on how we live in our world? (Think about what desires drive our decision making. We will come back to this at the end of our series).
- How would you put the above to someone who has an optimistic view of human nature and our global future?

## Task 2

Carefully read Genesis 3:12-24 then discuss together...

- What are the effects of human wilfulness upon our relationship with ourselves, each other and the rest of creation – including upon human activity in ‘the garden’?
- How would you talk about this with someone who doesn’t share this perspective?

## Comment

Human sin impacts creation at a causal level (e.g. pollution) but also at the level of the deep spiritual connection between human creatures and the rest of creation. Made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), humans are accountable to God and represent God to the creation (Genesis 1:28, 2:15-17). When they break this special relationship there is corruption of *all* relationships (the ‘good’ functioning of creation is vandalised).

In Romans 8:18-27, having previously discussed the origin and nature of sin (especially Romans chapters 5-7), Paul expresses a very mysterious (and very Jewish) understanding of humanity’s intimate connection with the rest of creation – it is like he is re-reading for us the Genesis curse. Paul personifies creation as “groaning” (v.22-23) under the weight of futility to which (under the curse) all of creation has been subjected. (v.20) So too, creation “longs” (v.19) for the “glorious liberty” for which “God’s children... patiently hope”. (v.21,23, 25) Creation as we experience it, then, is not the way it was meant to be.<sup>b</sup> Paul holds all this in tension with his understanding of our participation in the life of Christ through the Spirit while we wait for the “redemption of our bodies”. (v.23)

## Task 3

Read Romans 8:18-27 then discuss together...

- How do you understand what Paul is saying?
- Does it encourage a passive or active response to our environmental crisis? How/ why?

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<sup>a</sup> Allow 15 minutes for each task.

<sup>b</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the way it is meant to be: a breviary of sin*, Eerdmans 1995, ch.1