

## What About the Unconceived?

The seventh and final theme of Catholic Social Teaching is Care for the Environment. I have come to see this as an inseparable companion to our professed care for every human life. Pope Francis addresses this concern in *Laudato Si*, which is likely to become one of the most significant papal documents of our time:

*A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor...everything is connected. Concern for the environment that needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.* (Laudato Si, 49, 91)

We started this journey through Catholic Social Teaching with a good deal of reflection on the unborn — why their lives are so important to us, why we place such a premium on defending their right to life. They have become our guides, in a sense, through all seven of these themes.

While we proclaim the value of every human life, we simply do not practice that belief consistently. “They are innocent,” we say. But the guilty deserve the opportunity to repent. “They have no voice,” we say. But the poor — especially the poor who do not live in our country — have no voice here, where we consume the fruits of their labor. “They have no one to speak for them,” we say. But who speaks for the earth, without which no human person can live?

Caring for the environment, for the earth itself, is directly related to caring for every human person. The book of Genesis says that humans were given “dominion” over the earth and all its creatures. But Jesus redefines “dominion” as service, servanthood, stewardship. We are stewards of a planet that is given to us, not to rule, but to cherish; not to consume, but to care for, so that the unborn, as well as those yet to be conceived, will have a place to live in justice and peace.

Catholic Social Teaching is the place where our Respect for Life is rooted. The first theme is the dignity of every human person. But if you pay close attention, every one of the seven themes underscore the first: who respects the dignity of every human person will work for a more just society in which every human person can thrive.

As Catholic Christians, we simply cannot dismiss this crucial teaching. If every unborn human life is precious, then equally precious is the life of everyone who is already born, and everyone who has yet to be conceived.

“At St. Peter,” Fr. Fabio likes to say, “our politics are only one thing: Our Father, who art in heaven...”

Life and all creation are the gifts of our Creator. How shall we care for the gifts entrusted to us? Read more: <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>