

Chapter 1 What is Happening to our Common Home

In chapter 1, the Pope challenges us to become aware of what is happening to our common home and turn it into our own personal suffering so that we may discover what each of us can do about it.

In the first part of chapter, the Pope lays the groundwork for the problems we face today - pollution, waste, depletion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity and climate change. He uses the term “rapidification,” to describe the acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet and how the speed of human activity contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution. He describes how natural ecosystems work in a circular fashion to eliminate waste as opposed to our industrial system that does not have the capacity to fully utilize waste and by-products and he links these issues to our throwaway culture.

In the second part of the chapter, the Pope discusses the effects of these problems such as the decline in quality of life, breakdown of society and global inequality. In discussing these issues, he plainly states “We were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt glass and metal, and deprived of physical contact with nature.” He goes on to explain that the natural environment and human environment deteriorate together and therefore both issues must be addressed simultaneously.

In the closing section, the Encyclical discusses our weak response to these problems and provides an overview of the variety of options available to confront them. The Pope calls us to be “instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness.”