



# A Prophetic Call to “Wake up the world” By Ricardo Simmonds



image: St. Francis, by Reinier Vinkeles from the Rijks Museum Collection

When I embarked on my “*Laudato Si’*” walking pilgrimage from Rome to Krakow last year, one of the highlights of the trip was Umbria in Italy. There, I followed in the footsteps of St. Francis and happened to stumble upon the cave where the saint of Assisi composed the famed “Canticle of the Sun.” As the sunlight broke into the dark cave and the birdsongs echoed in the forest I got a glimpse of why this Canticle was such an appropriate inspiration for our latest encyclical on ecology.

*Laudato Si’* is intended to be read and understood by everyone. It opens, “I would like to enter into dialogue with all people.” Therefore, the language of the encyclical is simple and accessible. Pope Francis uses phrases like “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth (*porqueria*)” (21). Just like Francis of Assisi’s “Canticle of the Sun,” *Laudato Si’* is filled with passages of lyrical and poetic beauty: “There is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face” (233). This is unusual language for an encyclical, and its style is distinctly colloquial, accessible, and down to earth. *Laudato Si’* is something that anyone can read.

Indeed, it almost seems that everyone has read it. The encyclical was highly anticipated, praised, and criticized even before it was published. Upon its release, major media outlets published multiple articles about it. Even the president of the United States and several world leaders made remarks about the encyclical. Of course, not everyone was happy with *Laudato Si’*. Some Catholics were expecting an air-tight doctrinal treatise on creation, while others thought of it as a political manifesto or climate policy white paper. The encyclical was none of these... which leads us to the final point, concerning the genre of the encyclical.

The title *Laudato Si’* is somewhat ground breaking, or “edgy.” This “edginess” anticipates what I will call the “prophetic” genre of the encyclical. *Laudato Si’* is Francis’ example of a prophetic “wake up” call. We must recognize the novelty of the style of this encyclical.

Austen Ivereigh, a Francis biographer familiar with the Pope’s language and style, came to the following conclusion, “The pope is almost saying: ‘You may not believe in God, but if you believe in ecology, you can’t ignore this.’” *Laudato Si’* invites people of all beliefs to stop, reflect and pay attention. Much like the legacy of the saint of Assisi who shook up the world in his time, the encyclical that bears his mark has had and continues to have its desired effect.

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