

## The one theologian you need to know about when reading Laudato Si'



With so many interpretations being presented for Pope Francis' new encyclical, Fr. Robert Barron says only one theologian can give us the proper context for reading Laudato Si': Romano Guardini.

“Whatever (the Holy Father’s) views on global warming, they are situated within the far greater context of a theology of nature that stands athwart the typically modern point of view,” Fr. Robert Barron wrote in his June 23 column “Laudato Si and Romano Guardini.”

“As I read through the document, I saw, on practically every page, the influence of Romano Guardini and his distinctive take on modernity.”

Indeed, Laudato si' includes no fewer than five references to Guardini's work *The End of the Modern World*.

Guardini was an Italian-born, German-raised theologian and priest whose works influenced the Second Vatican Council as well as St. John Paul II and, particularly, Benedict XVI. His best-known writings include *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, *The Lord*, and *The Art of Praying*.

While working toward a doctorate degree, the future Pope Francis made Guardini the focus of his research. Although he did not complete his degree, Bergoglio’s “immersion in the writings of Guardini decisively shaped his thinking,” Fr. Barron said.

According to him, it is Guardini’s *Letters from Lake Como*, a collections of essays, that best articulate the theologian’s views on modern man’s treatment of nature.

In the book, Guardini lauds not only the physical beauty of the lake region of Milan, but also the “manner in which human beings, through their architecture and craftsmanship, interacted non-invasively and respectfully with nature” Fr. Barron said.

However, as the region continued to develop, Guardini noticed a disturbing trend in the 1920s with the

way that homes were being built on a much larger scale and with little consideration given to the natural surroundings. Similarly, the boats that once rose and fell with the waves now used motors to cut through them.

Guardini was aware of what Fr. Barron calls “a distinctly modern sensibility” that began with Francis Bacon and René Descartes, who both saw nature as something to be conquered and extorted.

The “typically modern subject” of science “became aggressive and self-absorbed, and the natural world simply something for him to manipulate for his own purposes,” Fr. Barron explained.

Bearing that in mind, it’s clear to see that the Pope’s views on our throwaway culture – from violence against the unborn to a lack of clean drinking water – were shaped largely by this twentieth century thinker.

“These lessons, which he learned many years ago from Romano Guardini, are still worthy of careful attention today,” Fr. Barron said. “What strikes the Pope as self-evident is that the nature we have attempted to dominate, for the past several centuries, has now turned on us, like Frankenstein’s monster.”

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