



# The Storm Cloud of the Twenty-First Century

*John Ruskin, Pope Francis, and global warming*

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Both John Ruskin and Pope Francis observe that “the natural world has been infected with human wickedness.” Examples of this are obvious, like the destruction of rainforests or the pollution of waterways for profit. But Ruskin takes it further: in McCarraher’s words, “the ailing earth had been contaminated by the putrescence of our wounded hearts.” We wound the earth because we ourselves are wounded. Have you ever connected our own woundedness—the result of exploitative systems that prevent human flourishing—to our ecological and environmental crises? In what ways might this be true?
2. Pope Francis condemns the “technocratic paradigm” that sees the world around us as dead matter to be manipulated rather than a sacramental reality to be revered. Christians have often given into seeing the world in this extractive, “confrontational” way. What in our tradition has been perverted to support this view? What in our tradition can help us reorient ourselves to the sacramental reality of creation?
3. McCarraher criticizes Pope Francis for not “naming the system” that he says drives the exploitation of the environment. “Talking about consumerism,” McCarraher writes, “is often just a way of not talking about capitalism.” What is missing from Francis’s critique by not talking about capitalism or economic systems in general?
4. Do you agree that capitalism is incompatible with Christianity? Can you imagine what a more Christian economic system would look like, one that, as Ruskin writes, “nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings”? How would work and consumption change under such a system?
5. Ruskin holds up the virtues of hope, reverence, and love as the antidotes to our “metaphysical contagion.” Where do you see these virtues being put into action to heal ourselves and the world? Where do you see movement from a technological paradigm to a sacramental vision of reality?

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING & LISTENING:

Eugene McCarraher, “Ruskin Was Right,” September 2016: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/ruskin-was-right>

Vincent Miller, “A Cathedral Not Made by Hands,” January 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/cathedral-not-made-hands>

David Bentley Hart, “Three Cheers for Socialism,” March 2020: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/three-cheers-socialism>

Rita Ferrone, “Living into ‘Laudato si’,” January 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/living-laudato-si>