

## APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

### *LAUDATE DEUM*

#### OF THE HOLY FATHER

FRANCIS

TO ALL PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL

ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

1. "Praise God for all his creatures". This was the message that Saint Francis of Assisi proclaimed by his life, his canticles and all his actions. In this way, he accepted the invitation of the biblical Psalms and reflected the sensitivity of Jesus before the creatures of his Father: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these" (*Mt* 6:28-29). "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight" (*Lk* 12:6). How can we not admire this tenderness of Jesus for all the beings that accompany us along the way!

2. Eight years have passed since I published the Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, when I wanted to share with all of you, my brothers and sisters of our suffering planet, my heartfelt concerns about the care of our common home. Yet, with the passage of time, I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point. In addition to this possibility, it is indubitable that the impact of climate change will increasingly prejudice the lives and families of many persons. We will feel its effects in the areas of healthcare, sources of employment, access to resources, housing, forced migrations, etc.

3. This is a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life. The Bishops of the United States have expressed very well this social meaning of our concern about climate change, which goes beyond a merely ecological approach, because "our care for one another and our care for the earth are intimately bound together. Climate change is one of the principal challenges facing society and the global community. The effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable people, whether at home or around the world".<sup>[1]</sup> In a few words, the Bishops assembled for the Synod for Amazonia said the same thing: "Attacks on nature have consequences for people's lives".<sup>[2]</sup> And to express bluntly that this is no longer a secondary or ideological question, but a drama that harms us all, the African bishops stated that climate change makes manifest "a tragic and striking example of structural sin".<sup>[3]</sup>

4. The reflection and information that we can gather from these past eight years allow us to clarify and complete what we were able to state some time ago. For this reason, and because the situation is now even more pressing, I have wished to share these pages with you.

#### 1. The Global Climate Crisis

5. Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativize the issue, the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident. No one can ignore the fact that in recent years we

have witnessed extreme weather phenomena, frequent periods of unusual heat, drought and other cries of protest on the part of the earth that are only a few palpable expressions of a silent disease that affects everyone. Admittedly, not every concrete catastrophe ought to be attributed to global climate change. Nonetheless, it is verifiable that specific climate changes provoked by humanity are notably heightening the probability of extreme phenomena that are increasingly frequent and intense. For this reason, we know that every time the global temperature increases by 0.5° C, the intensity and frequency of great rains and floods increase in some areas and severe droughts in others, extreme heat waves in some places and heavy snowfall in others.<sup>[4]</sup> If up to now we could have heat waves several times a year, what will happen if the global temperature increases by 1.5° C, which we are approaching? Those heat waves will be much more frequent and with greater intensity. If it should rise above 2 degrees, the icecaps of Greenland and a large part of Antarctica<sup>[5]</sup> will melt completely, with immensely grave consequences for everyone.

### *Resistance and confusion*

6. In recent years, some have chosen to deride these facts. They bring up allegedly solid scientific data, like the fact that the planet has always had, and will have, periods of cooling and warming. They forget to mention another relevant datum: that what we are presently experiencing is an unusual acceleration of warming, at such a speed that it will take only one generation – not centuries or millennia – in order to verify it. The rise in the sea level and the melting of glaciers can be easily perceived by an individual in his or her lifetime, and probably in a few years many populations will have to move their homes because of these facts.

7. In order to ridicule those who speak of global warming, it is pointed out that intermittent periods of extreme cold regularly occur. One fails to mention that this and other extraordinary symptoms are nothing but diverse alternative expressions of the same cause: the global imbalance that is provoking the warming of the planet. Droughts and floods, the dried-up lakes, communities swept away by seaquakes and flooding ultimately have the same origin. At the same time, if we speak of a global phenomenon, we cannot confuse this with sporadic events explained in good part by local factors.

8. Lack of information leads to confusion between large-scale climate projections that involve long periods of time – we are talking about decades at least – with weather forecasts that at most can cover a few weeks. When we speak of climate change, we are referring to a global reality – and constant local variations – that persists for several decades.

9. In an attempt to simplify reality, there are those who would place responsibility on the poor, since they have many children, and even attempt to resolve the problem by mutilating women in less developed countries. As usual, it would seem that everything is the fault of the poor. Yet the reality is that a low, richer percentage of the planet contaminates more than the poorest 50% of the total world population, and that per capita emissions of the richer countries are much greater than those of the poorer ones.<sup>[6]</sup> How can we forget that Africa, home to more than half of the world's poorest people, is responsible for a minimal portion of historic emissions?

10. It is often heard also that efforts to mitigate climate change by reducing the use of fossil fuels and developing cleaner energy sources will lead to a reduction in the number of jobs.

What is happening is that millions of people are losing their jobs due to different effects of climate change: rising sea levels, droughts and other phenomena affecting the planet have left many people adrift. Conversely, the transition to renewable forms of energy, properly managed, as well as efforts to adapt to the damage caused by climate change, are capable of generating countless jobs in different sectors. This demands that politicians and business leaders should even now be concerning themselves with it.

### *Human causes*

11. It is no longer possible to doubt the human – “anthropic” – origin of climate change. Let us see why. The concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which causes global warming, was stable until the nineteenth century, below 300 parts per million in volume. But in the middle of that century, in conjunction with industrial development, emissions began to increase. In the past fifty years, this increase has accelerated significantly, as the Mauna Loa observatory, which has taken daily measurements of carbon dioxide since 1958, has confirmed. While I was writing *Laudato si'*, they hit a historic high – 400 parts per million – until arriving at 423 parts per million in June 2023.<sup>[7]</sup> More than 42% of total net emissions since the year 1850 were produced after 1990.<sup>[8]</sup>

12. At the same time, we have confirmed that in the last fifty years the temperature has risen at an unprecedented speed, greater than any time over the past two thousand years. In this period, the trend was a warming of 0.15° C per decade, double that of the last 150 years. From 1850 on, the global temperature has risen by 1.1° C, with even greater impact on the polar regions. At this rate, it is possible that in just ten years we will reach the recommended maximum global ceiling of 1.5° C.<sup>[9]</sup> This increase has not occurred on the earth's surface alone but also several kilometres higher in the atmosphere, on the surface of the oceans and even in their depths for hundreds of metres. Thus the acidification of the seas increased and their oxygen levels were reduced. The glaciers are receding, the snow cover is diminishing and the sea level is constantly rising.<sup>[10]</sup>

13. It is not possible to conceal the correlation of these global climate phenomena and the accelerated increase in greenhouse gas emissions, particularly since the mid-twentieth century. The overwhelming majority of scientists specializing in the climate support this correlation, and only a very small percentage of them seek to deny the evidence. Regrettably, the climate crisis is not exactly a matter that interests the great economic powers, whose concern is with the greatest profit possible at minimal cost and in the shortest amount of time.

14. I feel obliged to make these clarifications, which may appear obvious, because of certain dismissive and scarcely reasonable opinions that I encounter, even within the Catholic Church. Yet we can no longer doubt that the reason for the unusual rapidity of these dangerous changes is a fact that cannot be concealed: the enormous novelties that have to do with unchecked human intervention on nature in the past two centuries. Events of natural origin that usually cause warming, such as volcanic eruptions and others, are insufficient to explain the proportion and speed of the changes of recent decades.<sup>[11]</sup> The change in average surface temperatures cannot be explained except as the result of the increase of greenhouse gases.

### *Damages and risks*

15. Some effects of the climate crisis are already irreversible, at least for several hundred years, such as the increase in the global temperature of the oceans, their acidification and the decrease of oxygen. Ocean waters have a thermal inertia and centuries are needed to normalize their temperature and salinity, which affects the survival of many species. This is one of the many signs that the other creatures of this world have stopped being our companions along the way and have become instead our victims.

16. The same can be said about the decrease in the continental ice sheets. The melting of the poles will not be able to be reversed for hundreds of years. As for the climate, there are factors that have persisted for long periods of time, independent of the events that may have triggered them. For this reason, we are now unable to halt the enormous damage we have caused. We barely have time to prevent even more tragic damage.

17. Certain apocalyptic diagnoses may well appear scarcely reasonable or insufficiently grounded. This should not lead us to ignore the real possibility that we are approaching a critical point. Small changes can cause greater ones, unforeseen and perhaps already irreversible, due to factors of inertia. This would end up precipitating a cascade of events having a snowball effect. In such cases, it is always too late, since no intervention will be able to halt a process once begun. There is no turning back. We cannot state with certainty that all this is going to happen, based on present conditions. But it is certain that it continues to be a possibility, if we take into account phenomena already in motion that "sensitize" the climate, like the reduction of ice sheets, changes in ocean currents, deforestation in tropical rainforests and the melting of permafrost in Russia, etc.<sup>[12]</sup>

18. Consequently, a broader perspective is urgently needed, one that can enable us to esteem the marvels of progress, but also to pay serious attention to other effects that were probably unimaginable a century ago. What is being asked of us is nothing other than a certain responsibility for the legacy we will leave behind, once we pass from this world.

19. Finally, we can add that the Covid-19 pandemic brought out the close relation of human life with that of other living beings and with the natural environment. But in a special way, it confirmed that what happens in one part of the world has repercussions on the entire planet. This allows me to reiterate two convictions that I repeat over and over again: "Everything is connected" and "No one is saved alone".

## 2. A Growing Technocratic Paradigm

20. In *Laudato si'*, I offered a brief resumé of the technocratic paradigm underlying the current process of environmental decay. It is "a certain way of understanding human life and activity [that] has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us".<sup>[13]</sup> Deep down, it consists in thinking "as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such".<sup>[14]</sup> As a logical consequence, it then becomes easy "to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology".<sup>[15]</sup>

21. In recent years, we have been able to confirm this diagnosis, even as we have witnessed a new advance of the above paradigm. Artificial intelligence and the latest technological innovations start with the notion of a human being with no limits, whose abilities and

possibilities can be infinitely expanded thanks to technology. In this way, the technocratic paradigm monstrously feeds upon itself.

22. Without a doubt, the natural resources required by technology, such as lithium, silicon and so many others, are not unlimited, yet the greater problem is the ideology underlying an obsession: to increase human power beyond anything imaginable, before which nonhuman reality is a mere resource at its disposal. Everything that exists ceases to be a gift for which we should be thankful, esteem and cherish, and instead becomes a slave, prey to any whim of the human mind and its capacities.

23. It is chilling to realize that the capacities expanded by technology "have given those with the knowledge and especially the economic resources to use them, an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world. Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely, particularly when we consider how it is currently being used... In whose hands does all this power lie, or will it eventually end up? It is extremely risky for a small part of humanity to have it".<sup>[16]</sup>

### *Rethinking our use of power*

24. Not every increase in power represents progress for humanity. We need only think of the "admirable" technologies that were employed to decimate populations, drop atomic bombs and annihilate ethnic groups. There were historical moments where our admiration at progress blinded us to the horror of its consequences. But that risk is always present, because "our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience... We stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. We have certain superficial mechanisms, but we cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint".<sup>[17]</sup> It is not strange that so great a power in such hands is capable of destroying life, while the mentality proper to the technocratic paradigm blinds us and does not permit us to see this extremely grave problem of present-day humanity.

25. Contrary to this technocratic paradigm, we say that the world that surrounds us is not an object of exploitation, unbridled use and unlimited ambition. Nor can we claim that nature is a mere "setting" in which we develop our lives and our projects. For "we are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it",<sup>[18]</sup> and thus "we [do] not look at the world from without but from within".<sup>[19]</sup>

26. This itself excludes the idea that the human being is extraneous, a foreign element capable only of harming the environment. Human beings must be recognized as a part of nature. Human life, intelligence and freedom are elements of the nature that enriches our planet, part of its internal workings and its equilibrium.

27. For this reason, a healthy ecology is also the result of interaction between human beings and the environment, as occurs in the indigenous cultures and has occurred for centuries in different regions of the earth. Human groupings have often "created" an environment,<sup>[20]</sup> reshaping it in some way without destroying it or endangering it. The great present-day problem is that the technocratic paradigm has destroyed that healthy and

harmonious relationship. In any event, the indispensable need to move beyond that paradigm, so damaging and destructive, will not be found in a denial of the human being, but include the interaction of natural systems "with social systems".<sup>[21]</sup>

28. We need to rethink among other things the question of human power, its meaning and its limits. For our power has frenetically increased in a few decades. We have made impressive and awesome technological advances, and we have not realized that at the same time we have turned into highly dangerous beings, capable of threatening the lives of many beings and our own survival. Today it is worth repeating the ironic comment of Solovyov about an "age which was so advanced as to be actually the last one".<sup>[22]</sup> We need lucidity and honesty in order to recognize in time that our power and the progress we are producing are turning against us.<sup>[23]</sup>

### *The ethical goad*

29. The ethical decadence of real power is disguised thanks to marketing and false information, useful tools in the hands of those with greater resources to employ them to shape public opinion. With the help of these means, whenever plans are made to undertake a project involving significant changes in the environment or high levels of contamination, one raises the hopes of the people of that area by speaking of the local progress that it will be able to generate or of the potential for economic growth, employment and human promotion that it would mean for their children. Yet in reality there does not seem to be any true interest in the future of these people, since they are not clearly told that the project will result in the clearing of their lands, a decline in the quality of their lives, a desolate and less habitable landscape lacking in life, the joy of community and hope for the future; in addition to the global damage that eventually compromises many other people as well.

30. One need but think of the momentary excitement raised by the money received in exchange for the deposit of nuclear waste in a certain place. The house that one could have bought with that money has turned into a grave due to the diseases that were then unleashed. And I am not saying this, moved by a overflowing imagination, but on the basis of something we have seen. It could be said that this is an extreme example, but in these cases there is no room for speaking of "lesser" damages, for it is precisely the amassing of damages considered tolerable that has brought us to the situation in which we now find ourselves.

31. This situation has to do not only with physics or biology, but also with the economy and the way we conceive it. The mentality of maximum gain at minimal cost, disguised in terms of reasonableness, progress and illusory promises, makes impossible any sincere concern for our common home and any real preoccupation about assisting the poor and the needy discarded by our society. In recent years, we can note that, astounded and excited by the promises of any number of false prophets, the poor themselves at times fall prey to the illusion of a world that is not being built for them.

32. Mistaken notions also develop about the concept of "meritocracy", which becomes seen as a "merited" human power to which everything must be submitted, under the rule of those born with greater possibilities and advantages. A healthy approach to the value of hard work, the development of one's native abilities and a praiseworthy spirit of initiative is one thing, but if one does not seek a genuine equality of opportunity, "meritocracy" can easily become a screen that further consolidates the privileges of a few with great power. In this perverse logic, why

should they care about the damage done to our common home, if they feel securely shielded by the financial resources that they have earned by their abilities and effort?

33. In conscience, and with an eye to the children who will pay for the harm done by their actions, the question of meaning inevitably arises: "What is the meaning of my life? What is the meaning of my time on this earth? And what is the ultimate meaning of all my work and effort?"

### 3. The Weakness of International Politics

34. Although "our own days seem to be showing signs of a certain regression... each new generation must take up the struggles and attainments of past generations, while setting its sights even higher. This is the path. Goodness, together with love, justice and solidarity, are not achieved once and for all; they have to be realized each day".<sup>[24]</sup> For there to be solid and lasting advances, I would insist that, "preference should be given to multilateral agreements between States".<sup>[25]</sup>

35. It is not helpful to confuse multilateralism with a world authority concentrated in one person or in an elite with excessive power: "When we talk about the possibility of some form of world authority regulated by law, we need not necessarily think of a personal authority".<sup>[26]</sup> We are speaking above all of "more effective world organizations, equipped with the power to provide for the global common good, the elimination of hunger and poverty and the sure defence of fundamental human rights".<sup>[27]</sup> The issue is that they must be endowed with real authority, in such a way as to "provide for" the attainment of certain essential goals. In this way, there could come about a multilateralism that is not dependent on changing political conditions or the interests of a certain few, and possesses a stable efficacy.

36. It continues to be regrettable that global crises are being squandered when they could be the occasions to bring about beneficial changes.<sup>[28]</sup> This is what happened in the 2007-2008 financial crisis and again in the Covid-19 crisis. For "the actual strategies developed worldwide in the wake of [those crises] fostered greater individualism, less integration and increased freedom for the truly powerful, who always find a way to escape unscathed".<sup>[29]</sup>

#### *Reconfiguring multilateralism*

37. More than saving the old multilateralism, it appears that the current challenge is to reconfigure and recreate it, taking into account the new world situation. I invite you to recognize that "many groups and organizations within civil society help to compensate for the shortcomings of the international community, its lack of coordination in complex situations, and its lack of attention to fundamental human rights".<sup>[30]</sup> For example, the Ottawa Process against the use, production and manufacture of antipersonnel mines is one example that shows how civil society with its organizations is capable of creating effective dynamics that the United Nations cannot. In this way, the principle of subsidiarity is applied also to the global-local relationship.

38. In the medium-term, globalization favours spontaneous cultural interchanges, greater mutual knowledge and processes of integration of peoples, which end up provoking a multilateralism "from below" and not simply one determined by the elites of power. The

demands that rise up from below throughout the world, where activists from very different countries help and support one another, can end up pressuring the sources of power. It is to be hoped that this will happen with respect to the climate crisis. For this reason, I reiterate that “unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment”.<sup>[31]</sup>

39. Postmodern culture has generated a *new sensitivity* towards the more vulnerable and less powerful. This is connected with my insistence in the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* on the primacy of the human person and the defence of his or her dignity beyond every circumstance. It is another way of encouraging multilateralism for the sake of resolving the real problems of humanity, securing before all else respect for the dignity of persons, in such a way that ethics will prevail over local or contingent interests.

40. It is not a matter of replacing politics, but of recognizing that the emerging forces are becoming increasingly relevant and are in fact capable of obtaining important results in the resolution of concrete problems, as some of them demonstrated during the pandemic. The very fact that answers to problems can come from any country, however little, ends up presenting multilateralism as an inevitable process.

41. The old diplomacy, also in crisis, continues to show its importance and necessity. Still, it has not succeeded in generating a model of multilateral diplomacy capable of responding to the new configuration of the world; yet should it be able to reconfigure itself, it must be part of the solution, because the experience of centuries cannot be cast aside either.

42. Our world has become so multipolar and at the same time so complex that a different framework for effective cooperation is required. It is not enough to think only of balances of power but also of the need to provide a response to new problems and to react with global mechanisms to the environmental, public health, cultural and social challenges, especially in order to consolidate respect for the most elementary human rights, social rights and the protection of our common home. It is a matter of establishing global and effective rules that can permit “providing for” this global safeguarding.

43. All this presupposes the development of a new procedure for decision-making and legitimizing those decisions, since the one put in place several decades ago is not sufficient nor does it appear effective. In this framework, there would necessarily be required spaces for conversation, consultation, arbitration, conflict resolution and supervision, and, in the end, a sort of increased “democratization” in the global context, so that the various situations can be expressed and included. It is no longer helpful for us to support institutions in order to preserve the rights of the more powerful without caring for those of all.

#### 4. Climate Conferences: Progress and Failures

44. For several decades now, representatives of more than 190 countries have met periodically to address the issue of climate change. The 1992 Rio de Janeiro Conference led to the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a treaty that took effect when the necessary ratification on the part of the signatories concluded in 1994. These States meet annually in the Conference of the Parties (COP), the highest decision-making body. Some of these Conferences were failures, like that of Copenhagen (2009), while others made it



possible to take important steps forward, like COP3 in Kyoto (1997). Its significant Protocol set the goal of reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions by 5% with respect to 1990. The deadline was the year 2012, but this, clearly, was not achieved.

45. All parties also committed themselves to implementing programmes of adaptation in order to reduce the effects of climate change now taking place. Provisions were also made for aid to cover the costs of the measures in developing countries. The Protocol actually took effect in 2005.

46. Afterwards, it was proposed to create a mechanism regarding the loss and damage caused by climate change, which recognizes as those chiefly responsible the richer countries and seeks to compensate for the loss and damage that climate change produces in the more vulnerable countries. It was not yet a matter of financing the "adaptation" of those countries, but of compensating them for damage already incurred. This question was the subject of important discussions at various Conferences.

47. COP21 in Paris (2015) represented another significant moment, since it generated an agreement that involved everyone. It can be considered as a new beginning, given the failure to meet the goals previously set. The agreement took effect on 4 November 2016. Albeit a binding agreement, not all its dispositions are obligations in the strict sense, and some of them leave ample room for discretion. In any case, properly speaking, there are no provisions for sanctions in the case of unfulfilled commitments, nor effective instruments to ensure their fulfilment. It also provides for a certain flexibility in the case of developing countries.

48. The Paris Agreement presents a broad and ambitious objective: to keep the increase of average global temperatures to under 2° C with respect to preindustrial levels, and with the aim of decreasing them to 1.5° C. Work is still under way to consolidate concrete procedures for monitoring and to facilitate general criteria for comparing the objectives of the different countries. This makes it difficult to achieve a more objective (quantitative) evaluation of the real results.

49. Following several Conferences with scarce results, and the disappointment of COP25 in Madrid (2019), it was hoped that this inertia would be reversed at COP26 in Glasgow (2021). In effect, its result was to relaunch the Paris Agreement, put on hold by the overall effects of the pandemic. Furthermore, there was an abundance of "recommendations" whose actual effect was hardly foreseeable. Proposals tending to ensure a rapid and effective transition to alternative and less polluting forms of energy made no progress.

50. COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh (2022) was from the outset threatened by the situation created by the invasion of Ukraine, which caused a significant economic and energy crisis. Carbon use increased and everyone sought to have sufficient supplies. Developing countries regarded access to energy and prospects for development as an urgent priority. There was an evident openness to recognizing the fact that combustible fuels still provide 80% of the world's energy, and that their use continues to increase.

51. This Conference in Egypt was one more example of the difficulty of negotiations. It could be said that at least it marked a step forward in consolidating a system for financing "loss and damage" in countries most affected by climate disasters. This would seem to give a new voice

and a greater role to developing countries. Yet here too, many points remained imprecise, above all the concrete responsibility of the countries that have to contribute.

52. Today we can continue to state that, "the accords have been poorly implemented, due to lack of suitable mechanisms for oversight, periodic review and penalties in cases of noncompliance. The principles which they proclaimed still await an efficient and flexible means of practical implementation".<sup>[32]</sup> Also, that "international negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility".<sup>[33]</sup>

## 5. What to Expect from COP28 in Dubai?

53. The United Arab Emirates will host the next Conference of the Parties (COP28). It is a country of the Persian Gulf known as a great exporter of fossil fuels, although it has made significant investments in renewable energy sources. Meanwhile, gas and oil companies are planning new projects there, with the aim of further increasing their production. To say that there is nothing to hope for would be suicidal, for it would mean exposing all humanity, especially the poorest, to the worst impacts of climate change.

54. If we are confident in the capacity of human beings to transcend their petty interests and to think in bigger terms, we can keep hoping that COP28 will allow for a decisive acceleration of energy transition, with effective commitments subject to ongoing monitoring. This Conference can represent a change of direction, showing that everything done since 1992 was in fact serious and worth the effort, or else it will be a great disappointment and jeopardize whatever good has been achieved thus far.

55. Despite the many negotiations and agreements, global emissions continue to increase. Certainly, it could be said that, without those agreements, they would have increased even more. Still, in other themes related to the environment, when there was a will, very significant results were obtained, as was the case with the protection of the ozone layer. Yet, the necessary transition towards clean energy sources such as wind and solar energy, and the abandonment of fossil fuels, is not progressing at the necessary speed. Consequently, whatever is being done risks being seen only as a ploy to distract attention.

56. We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned but not having the courage needed to produce substantial changes. We know that at this pace in just a few years we will surpass the maximum recommended limit of 1.5° C and shortly thereafter even reach 3° C, with a high risk of arriving at a critical point. Even if we do not reach this point of no return, it is certain that the consequences would be disastrous and precipitous measures would have to be taken, at enormous cost and with grave and intolerable economic and social effects. Although the measures that we can take now are costly, the cost will be all the more burdensome the longer we wait.

57. I consider it essential to insist that "to seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system".<sup>[34]</sup> It is true that efforts at adaptation are needed in the face of evils that are irreversible in the short term. Also some interventions and

technological advances that make it possible to absorb or capture gas emissions have proved promising. Nonetheless, we risk remaining trapped in the mindset of pasting and papering over cracks, while beneath the surface there is a continuing deterioration to which we continue to contribute. To suppose that all problems in the future will be able to be solved by new technical interventions is a form of homicidal pragmatism, like pushing a snowball down a hill.

58. Once and for all, let us put an end to the irresponsible derision that would present this issue as something purely ecological, “green”, romantic, frequently subject to ridicule by economic interests. Let us finally admit that it is a human and social problem on any number of levels. For this reason, it calls for involvement on the part of all. In Conferences on the climate, the actions of groups negatively portrayed as “radicalized” tend to attract attention. But in reality they are filling a space left empty by society as a whole, which ought to exercise a healthy “pressure”, since every family ought to realize that the future of their children is at stake.

59. If there is sincere interest in making COP28 a historic event that honours and ennobles us as human beings, then one can only hope for binding forms of energy transition that meet three conditions: that they be efficient, obligatory and readily monitored. This, in order to achieve the beginning of a new process marked by three requirements: that it be drastic, intense and count on the commitment of all. That is not what has happened so far, and only a process of this sort can enable international politics to recover its credibility, since only in this concrete manner will it be possible to reduce significantly carbon dioxide levels and to prevent even greater evils over time.

60. May those taking part in the Conference be strategists capable of considering the common good and the future of their children, more than the short-term interests of certain countries or businesses. In this way, may they demonstrate the nobility of politics and not its shame. To the powerful, I can only repeat this question: “What would induce anyone, at this stage, to hold on to power, only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was urgent and necessary to do so?”<sup>[35]</sup>

## 6. Spiritual Motivations

61. I cannot fail in this regard to remind the Catholic faithful of the motivations born of their faith. I encourage my brothers and sisters of other religions to do the same, since we know that authentic faith not only gives strength to the human heart, but also transforms life, transfigures our goals and sheds light on our relationship to others and with creation as a whole.

### *In the light of faith*

62. The Bible tells us: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (*Gen* 1:31). His is “the earth with all that is in it” (*Deut* 10:14). For this reason, he tells us that, “the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” (*Lev* 25:23). Hence, “responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world”.<sup>[36]</sup>

63. At the same time, “the universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible richness of God”. Hence, to be wise, “we need to grasp the variety of things in

their multiple relationships".<sup>[37]</sup> Along this path of wisdom, it is not a matter of indifference to us that so many species are disappearing and that the climate crisis endangers the life of many other beings.

64. Jesus "was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attraction full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things".<sup>[38]</sup>

65. Hence, "the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise, because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence".<sup>[39]</sup> If "the universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely... there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face".<sup>[40]</sup> The world sings of an infinite Love: how can we fail to care for it?

#### *Journeying in communion and commitment*

66. God has united us to all his creatures. Nonetheless, the technocratic paradigm can isolate us from the world that surrounds us and deceive us by making us forget that the entire world is a "contact zone".<sup>[41]</sup>

67. The Judaeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvellous concert of all God's creatures, but today we see ourselves forced to realize that it is only possible to sustain a "situated anthropocentrism". To recognize, in other words, that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. For "as part of the universe... all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect".<sup>[42]</sup>

68. This is not a product of our own will; its origin lies elsewhere, in the depths of our being, since "God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement".<sup>[43]</sup> Let us stop thinking, then, of human beings as autonomous, omnipotent and limitless, and begin to think of ourselves differently, in a humbler but more fruitful way.

69. I ask everyone to accompany this pilgrimage of reconciliation with the world that is our home and to help make it more beautiful, because that commitment has to do with our personal dignity and highest values. At the same time, I cannot deny that it is necessary to be honest and recognize that the most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level.

70. Nonetheless, every little bit helps, and avoiding an increase of a tenth of a degree in the global temperature would already suffice to alleviate some suffering for many people. Yet what is important is something less quantitative: the need to realize that there are no lasting changes without cultural changes, without a maturing of lifestyles and convictions within societies, and there are no cultural changes without personal changes.

71. Efforts by households to reduce pollution and waste, and to consume with prudence, are creating a new culture. The mere fact that personal, family and community habits are changing is contributing to greater concern about the unfulfilled responsibilities of the political sectors and indignation at the lack of interest shown by the powerful. Let us realize, then, that even though this does not immediately produce a notable effect from the quantitative standpoint, we are helping to bring about large processes of transformation rising from deep within society.

72. If we consider that emissions per individual in the United States are about two times greater than those of individuals living in China, and about seven times greater than the average of the poorest countries,<sup>[44]</sup> we can state that a broad change in the irresponsible lifestyle connected with the Western model would have a significant long-term impact. As a result, along with indispensable political decisions, we would be making progress along the way to genuine care for one another.

73. "Praise God" is the title of this letter. For when human beings claim to take God's place, they become their own worst enemies.

*Given in Rome, at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, on 4 October, the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, in the year 2023, the eleventh of my Pontificate.*

FRANCIS

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[1] UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Global Climate Change Background*, 2019.

[2] SPECIAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PAN-AMAZONIAN REGION, *Final Document*, October 2019, 10: AAS 111 (2019), 1744.

[3] SYMPOSIUM OF EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR (SECAM), *African Climate Dialogues Communiqué*, Nairobi, 17 October 2022.

[4] Cf. INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC), *Climate Change 2021, The Physical Science Basis*, Cambridge and New York, 2021, B.2.2.

[5] Cf. ID., *Climate Change 2023, Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers*, B.3.2. For the 2023 Report, see [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf).

[6] Cf. UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM, *The Emissions Gap Report 2022*: <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022>.

[7] Cf. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Earth System Research Laboratories, Global Monitoring Laboratory, *Trends in Atmospheric Carbon Dioxide*: <https://www.gml.noaa.gov/ccgg/trends/>.

[8] Cf. IPCC, *Climate Change 2023, Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers*, A.1.3.

[9] Cf. *ibid.*, B.5.3.

[10] These are data of the IPCC, based on 34,000 studies: INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC); cf. *Synthesis Report of the Sixth Assessment Report (20/03/2023): AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023 (ipcc.ch)*.

[11] Cf. IPCC, *Climate Change 2023, Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers*, A.1.2.

[12] Cf. *ibid.*

[13] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), 101: AAS 107 (2015), 887.

[14] *Ibid.*, 105: AAS 107 (2015), 889.

[15] *Ibid.* 106: AAS 107 (2015), 890.

[16] *Ibid.*, 104: AAS 107 (2015), 888-889.

[17] *Ibid.*, 105: AAS 107 (2015), 889.

[18] *Ibid.*, 139: AAS 107 (2015), 903.

[19] *Ibid.*, 220: AAS 107 (2015), 934.

[20] Cf. S. SÖRLIN-P. WARDE, "Making the Environment Historical. An Introduction", in S. SÖRLIN-P. WARDE, eds., *Nature's End: History and the Environment*, Basingstroke-New York, 2009, 1-23.

[21] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), 139: AAS 107 (2015), 903.

[22] Cf. *War, Progress and the End of History, Including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ. Three Discussions by Vladimir Soloviev*, London, 1915, p. 197.

[23] Cf. SAINT PAUL VI, *Address to FAO on its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* (16 November 1970), 4: AAS 62 (1970), 833.

[24] Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), 11: AAS 112 (2020), 972.

[25] *Ibid.*, 174: AAS 112 (2020), 1030.

[26] *Ibid.*, 172: AAS 112 (2020), 1029.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Cf. *ibid.*, 170: AAS 112 (2020), 1029.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Ibid., 175: AAS 112 (2020), 1031.

[31] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), 179: AAS 107 (2015), 918.

[32] Ibid., 167: AAS 107 (2015), 914.

[33] Ibid., 169: AAS 107 (2015), 915.

[34] Ibid., 111: AAS 107 (2015), 982.

[35] Ibid., 57: AAS 107 (2015), 870.

[36] Ibid., 68: AAS 107 (2015), 874.

[37] Ibid., 86: AAS 107 (2015), 881.

[38] Ibid., 97: AAS 107 (2015), 886.

[39] Ibid., 100: AAS 197 (2015), 887.

[40] Ibid., 233: AAS 107 (2015), 938.

[41] Cf. D. J. HARAWAY, *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis, 2008, pp. 205-249.

[42] Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), 89: AAS 107 (2015), 883.

[43] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 215: AAS 105 (2013), 1109.

[44] Cf. UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM, *The Emissions Gap Report 2022*:  
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