



The 28th UN Conference on Climate Change

1. Introduction

The 28th Conference of Parties (COP 28), also called the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC) begins on 30th November 2023 this year in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Global recognition of the present climate change problems was acknowledged back at COP 1, the *Earth Summit* in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where 154 states signed the *International Environment Treaty*. Each subsequent conference has resulted in decisions being taken by global leaders based on this original treaty.

The treaty calls for ongoing research and regular meetings, negotiations and future policy agreements designed to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, rather than as a result of interventions that are human centred or caused.

2. The Current Climate Change Problem

Scientific research and studies have discovered that there is an imbalance in the natural environment that is causing the atmosphere to be polluted, the earth to be eroded and altered, and water either to be scarce, causing drought, or over-abundant, leading to flooding. All these conditions are causing species extinction and are linked to the phenomenon of global warming that has been increasing, year on year, to the present situation.

This manifests itself in water and food insecurity, inferior crops, plants and trees, in increased desertification, and in the heightened instance of extreme weather events.

R W Millar, editor of *God, Creation and Climate Change, a Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis*,¹ describes the current problem as a “dangerous gap between scientific knowledge and

public awareness”. He also states that 97 percent of scientists believe that human activity is a significant contributing factor in changing the global temperature. As is well-known, the continued burning of fossil fuels is regarded as a significant contributor to the problem.

3. The UN Conference on Climate Change Solutions

Each year at the UNFCCC COP events some decisions to achieve solutions have been put into effect, but too many have not. A major treaty to reduce global warming emerged out of COP 21 (called the *Paris Agreement*) where 196 UNFCCC countries endorsed, and committed to achieve, the goal of ensuring that the earth’s temperature will never exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times, with the intention of net zero by 2050. This commitment has been ignored by many countries, including some of our largest nations. Presently, the earth is already 1.1 degrees warmer and, at the rate of present greenhouse gas emissions, we are on track for a 2 degree global warming, as disclosed in the most recent report by the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change.²

A most important decision was the developed countries’ agreement to invest in developing and underdeveloped countries in order to help the latter to achieve all the goals set by the UNFCCC, most especially a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions through transitioning from fossil fuels to the use of renewables in energy production.

4. Pope Francis’ Appeals to Care for Our Common Home

Pope Francis, first in *Laudato Si’* and now in *Laudate Deum*, shares his awareness of our suf-

fering planet and his heartfelt concerns about our inadequacy in caring for our common home.³ In both documents – the Encyclical and the Exhortation – Pope Francis calls us to acknowledge our contribution to the collapsing of our world which will seriously “prejudice the lives and families of many persons”.⁴

In all Pope Francis’ teachings he highlights that humanity, who are God’s uniquely created beings, are of utmost importance and the reason for us to join hands in caring for our common home with urgent immediacy. *Laudate Deum* asks us hard questions that need to be in our thoughts as we discover the holistic message Pope Francis is sharing. What is the meaning of my life? What is the meaning of my time on this earth?

The Pope’s message is that every person on earth needs to be aware that their voice must be heard. We need to stand together to make our leaders, whether within the Catholic Church, other churches and religions, or states and governments, turn their previously-made decisions into real action:

- changing energy production to become sustainable and renewable;
- addressing biodiversity loss by restructuring agriculture, lessening desertification, and increasing reforestation;
- investing in underdeveloped and developing countries to enable them to do the same; and
- promoting just transitions so as to ensure that communities are empowered and that no one is left behind.

In article 58 of *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis categorically states the urgency and the need for action:

“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.

In *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis is again drawing everyone’s attention, as he did in *Laudato Si’* eight years ago, to the fact that our current behaviour is detrimental to the future of our children, as the world will no longer be healthy to live in by 2050. As one example, already in Delhi, India, canned air is being sold.

5. What is Expected from COP 28?

COP 28 needs to become an historic event honouring and ennobling humanity with hope for binding forms of energy transitions – a paradigm shift causing a tipping point of no return to old ways. There are three requirements for the implementation of these transitions: they need to be drastic, intense and fully collaborative, so that they will emerge with three conditions – to be obligatory, planned efficiently, and readily monitored. To avoid greater evils to come, these strategic implementation processes must be in place, ensuring that it is possible to reduce carbon dioxide levels significantly.

6. The Limits and Risks of Technology

Pope Francis continues to link his urgent calls for action to an awareness of our Creator God, and to the role of all humanity; that while we are living on earth, we realise that we are endowed with intelligence and must respect nature’s laws and balance – the delicate equilibrium existing between the creatures of this world. Our faith strengthens our human hearts and avoids the feeling of desolation that is experienced by those whose prime objective is self-gratification, and whose central belief is that technology and economic power can bring us goodness and truth.

It is sometimes argued that artificial intelligence and the latest technological innovations are creating limitless possibilities for humans. In article 22 of *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis contrasts this false reality with the fact that technology is using natural resources such as lithium, silicon and more, that these are finite, and that we need to be sensitive to the ideology that underlies the obsession to infinitely increase human power and consumption. If not, it risks leading us to becoming slaves, prey to any whim of the human mind and its capacities. We lose the sense of receiving gifts of our Creator God.

Technology has often created destruction – for instance, in the invention and use of nuclear weapons – and this should make us aware of the

fact that we, humanity, are incredibly vulnerable even in the midst of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. Fortunately, ethics, culture, and spirituality can assist us in developing the clear-minded self-restraint that is necessary to avoid the lust for power and domination that is destroying life and blinding us to the extremely grave problem of present-day humanity.⁵

7. Awareness of Our Responsibility

How to maintain a healthy ecology is something that can be, and is being, learnt from indigenous cultures. We need to be more aware of the need to include interaction with all people, and all natural and social systems. We also need to recognise the levels of power and questionable progress that are emerging from the technocratic paradigm. The marketing and false information that we receive often hides the lack of ethics of the powerful which, in turn, manipulates public opinion with no consideration for the real effect on people and their quality of life, or for habitats and landscapes.⁶

8. Conclusion

Pope Francis will be attending COP 28, where he will take part in a series of private and bilateral meetings. He will also inaugurate the 'Faith Pavilion', offering words of greeting on this occasion. The Faith Pavilion is hosted by the Muslim Council of Elders in collaboration with the COP28 Presidency, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the Holy See, and a coalition of faith partners. It aims to convey a message of peace to the world. The Pope's participation in COP 28 is seen as 'unprecedented' and a 'historic event', and is bound to have a major impact on the proceedings.⁷

Each day we need to acknowledge the trials and crosses which manifest in what is going on around us, and we need to set our sights higher on a path of goodness, with love, justice and solidarity. These have to be realised everywhere and all the time, which can be achieved only through multi-lateral agreements between States. To do so, we will need to build more effective world organisations, so that global and local crises can be transformed into opportunities for the betterment and healing of society, rather than for the advancement of the powerful and the wealthy.

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¹ See <https://www.catholicbookshop.co.za/products/god-creation-climate-change-a-catholic-response-to-the-environmental-crisis>

² See <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

³ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html ; https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html

⁴ *Laudate Deum*, article 2.

⁵ *Laudate Deum*, article 24.

⁶ *Laudate Deum*, articles 26-31.

⁷ <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2023/11/06/pope-francis-cop28-dubai-climate-246439>