



Keys for a solidarity-based reading of the Exhortation

LAUDATE DEUM

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The Apostolic Exhortation LAUDATE DEUM, published on 4 October 2023, the liturgical feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, is a political text of around twenty pages that the Pope wanted to make public just two months before COP28 in Dubai. Media commentators have described it as an "alarm bell", a "climate cry" and a "political appeal". In effect, the Pope is alerting the world to the "global climate crisis" that threatens it. In his view, there is no longer any question of "denying", "hiding", "concealing" or "relativising" the signs of climate change: "[they] are there, ever more evident". Criticising the "contemptuous and unreasonable opinions" (§58) that he says he encounters on the subject, "even within the Catholic Church", the Pope draws on a large body of scientific data to finally affirm: "We can no longer doubt the human origin [...] of climate change".

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I. Who is the Pope addressing this exhortation to? (Destinatari)

The Pope uses an unusual formula in addressing this text "to all people of good will". While he assures us at the end of his text that he does not want to "fail to remind the Catholic faithful of the motivations that arise from their faith", he immediately reminds us that his exhortation is also addressed to "brothers and sisters of other religions". So his target audience is not just Catholics, but all those affected by climate change.

It is the only exhortation after 2013 that is not the fruit of a synod, but of a personal intuition, linked to the approaching COP28. It takes up the Pope's teaching expressed in the encyclical *Tutti Fratelli* and draws heavily on the encyclical *Laudato Si*.

II. What does it focus on?

This is more of an international plea, addressed primarily to decision-makers, who are being asked to take concrete decisions as part of a multilateral negotiation that allows all states, but also non-state actors such as NGOs, to express their views. The heart of the text is number 59. The head of the Catholic Church advocates the establishment of a new "effective" world authority, regulated "by law" and not dependent on "changing political circumstances or the interests of a few". To achieve this, he relies on the action of civil society and citizens, and asserts: "If citizens do not control political power - national, regional and municipal - no control of damage to the environment is possible either".



The Pope is following the same tactic as when he published the encyclical *Laudato si'* (published before COP21 in Paris). This time, he is using the forthcoming COP in the United Arab Emirates as an opportunity to raise awareness. He devotes an entire chapter to the subject, with the title: "What can we expect from COP28 in Dubai? Noting from the outset that the Gulf country is a "major exporter of fossil fuels", François does not wish to give up: "To say that there is nothing to hope for would be a suicidal act that would expose all of humanity, particularly the poorest, to the worst impacts of climate change". After recalling the successes, but above all the failures, of previous summits, he hopes for "a turning point" in December, and sets high objectives: the introduction of "binding forms of energy transition". These must be "effective, binding and easy to monitor". "It is only in this concrete way that it will be possible to significantly reduce carbon dioxide and avoid the worst evils in time", he warns, arguing that such measures would restore "the credibility of international policy".

He does not expect purely technological solutions to be found to put an end to the crisis. On the contrary, he warns: "Assuming that any future problem can be solved by new technical interventions is a homicidal pragmatism".

Overview of the 6 chapters

The apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum* is divided into six chapters:

- ✚ In the first, "The global climate crisis", Pope Francis lists the signs of a "silent disease" affecting humanity and reiterates that "the evolution of average surface temperatures cannot be explained without the effect of the increase in greenhouse gases". He warns that climate change is undeniable and that its effects are increasingly evident "despite certain attempts to minimise or ridicule them" (LD 6). "The world we live in is crumbling and may be approaching a breaking point". The computer graphics of the disasters affecting our 'common home' are dramatic: ocean acidity, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, droughts...des océans, fonte des glaciers, augmentation du niveau des mers, sécheresses...
- ✚ In the second chapter, the Holy Father addresses the "technocratic paradigm" and stresses that nature is not a resource to be exploited endlessly. He invites us to admit that unbridled ambition is not ethically sustainable (§ 28).
- ✚ In the third chapter, Francis refers to "the weakness of international politics" and stresses the urgent need for global cooperation through new multilateral agreements between states, because current and past approaches are insufficient (§ 43).



- ✚ In the fourth chapter, the Pope reflects on the "climate conferences: progress and failures" and encourages us to go beyond the selfish positions of individual countries in favour of the global common good (§ 44, 52). In the fifth chapter, he reflects on "what we can expect from COP28 in Dubai" if we do not want to condemn humanity.
- ✚ In the final chapter, "Spiritual Motivations", the Holy Father calls on people of all faiths to respond. He also reminds Catholics that, in the light of their faith, they have a responsibility to care for God's creation, and that this involves respecting the laws of nature and recognising the beauty and richness of God's creation.

Finally, Pope Francis invites us to walk in communion, together, synodically, and to engage in "reconciliation with the world in which we live" (§ 69).

In short, as theologian Morandini put it, "The Pope invites us to take history in hand and steer it towards a sustainable future. The Pope shares his clear-sightedness, which makes him attentive to the future, to its splendid possibilities, but also to the threats hanging over it. It is a watchful eye that combines constant attention to peace and the quality of human life with an attentive perception of the environmental, planetary and global context in which it is embedded and unfolds". Everything is linked' and 'no one can save himself alone!' (§19)

For us, Sisters of Charity and lay people, what does the encyclical recommend?

The message of the encyclical confronts us with :

- **The urgency to act :** Safeguarding the common home is no longer a choice but an urgent duty, an obligatory mission to defend human life in all its forms. "Our reactions are inadequate as the world that shelters us collapses and approaches the breaking point" (§2). The urgent need to change our lifestyles, to become more aware and to bring about individual and collective conversion. The sense of urgency that runs through the document is therefore also an opportunity to express hope.
- **The indelible link between human service and ecological service.** It is the most vulnerable people who suffer first and hardest from the effects of climate change. "Damage to nature has consequences for people's lives" (§3), "The Pope emphasises this by quoting the bishops of Amazonia. "Everything is linked" and "no one can save himself alone" (§19). It is no longer enough to diagnose and observe, it is imperative that we take responsibility and place our capacities at the service of humanity.



- **Faith as a starting point:** Faith is a powerful driving force for personal change, without which the necessary cultural change is not possible. For us, motivation comes from our faith, which "not only gives strength to the human heart, but [...] transforms the whole of life, transfigures personal objectives, illuminates relationships with others and links with the whole of creation" (§61). In the light of faith, the imitation of Jesus, "who was himself in constant contact with nature and paid attention to it with affection and fear" (§64), opens the way to reconciliation with "the world that welcomes us". "Praise God!" invites the Pope, taking Saint Francis of Assisi as his model, because "the human being who claims to replace God becomes the greatest danger to himself" (§73).