Voices of Sisters

Environment




Copies of Pope Francis' latest encyclical on the environment, Laudate Deum, are available for purchase at a bookstore in Rome on Oct. 4, the day of its release. Pope Francis has called on world leaders to commit to binding targets to address and mitigate climate change (AP/Andrew Medichini)



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## Join the Conversation

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Eight years after *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis released his exhortation *Laudate Deum,* also addressed to every person of goodwill and following the same method: describing the problems, analyzing their causes and, finally, calling for action.

Francis updates his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*, demanding urgent reactions to the climate crisis — a dramatic global and social problem caused by structural sin.

In the apostolic exhortation released on Oct. 4, *Laudate Deum*, the pope emphasizes that climate change is one of the primary challenges confronting society and the global community. It focuses on the suffering of the most impoverished communities, which are disproportionately affected by a phenomenon undoubtedly caused by the unsustainable development practices of the most powerful countries.

Pope Francis also references the conclusions of scientists who have studied the acceleration of warming. In this context, he strongly addresses people who deny climate change and encourages each person to become informed and involved in addressing this issue.

Regarding the causes of climate change, two main factors stand out. First, the power of technology — omnipresent and omnipotent — has made the earth highly perilous for human life and the existence of each ecosystem. This prompts reflection on the meaning and limits of human power.

Second, it mentions the lack of ethics, evident in an economy that favors a privileged few at the expense of many who are discarded, as well as the noncompliance with the agreements signed at U.N. climate conferences since 1992. The document makes a call to COP28, Nov. 30-Dec. 12 in Dubai, The United Arab Emirates, not only to support adoption of agreements, but also to promote urgent actions toward an energy transition and reparations through loss and damage funds to  vulnerable areas.

"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," Pope Francis writes. He stresses that we cannot be satisfied with deceptive answers, such as superficial technical solutions or patches in a world/global system with profound deficiencies.

The pope questions the powers that have brought us to this situation, who have benefited from it and have done little to resolve the problem. Why do they want to maintain power, knowing history will remember you for your failure to intervene at crucial and necessary moments?

> "Laudate Deum" reminds us that God has connected us to all creatures, but the technological/technocratic approach can alienate us from our environment and make us forget that everything is interconnected.
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The pope, describing weak international policies, emphasizes the need to promote multilateralism and establish bodies with genuine global authority. This would enable supervision of countries responsible for the planet's deterioration, ensuring compliance with the necessary resources and implementation of signed commitments related to mitigation, adaptation and remediation of loss and damage. He also emphasizes the importance of conducting an energy transition with efficient, mandatory measures subject to constant monitoring.

Francis adds that civil organizations are also necessary to undertake subsidiary actions. The struggle to defend human, social and environmental rights is carried out by the power of the people with support from advocacy groups. He also promotes democratizing spaces for dialogue.

Finally, the pope reminds us of the spiritual motivations that should inspire believers to reconcile humbly and lovingly with nature. This impels us toward personal conversion and participation in a cultural revolution committed to transforming the technocratic market system. It is a change of consciousness that leads us to recognize that everything is interconnected in a universal family and that we are not gods.

In this document we can observe Francis' courage in naming the United States as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases. He also questions the misuse of the power of technology and colonialist countries that have enriched themselves by plundering and impoverishing colonized territories, thereby damaging the planet. Furthermore, his criticism of the UN climate conferences is clear: "May they demonstrate the nobility of politics and not its shame," he writes.



A group protests mining and fracking in General Roca, Argentina, in 2021. (Ana María Siufi)

The exhortation is concise, which limits its content. However, some of us expected him to emphasize that extraction of natural resources is the root cause of the climate crisis, to acknowledge women and children as its primary victims, and to advocate for a drastic shift away from the market-centered production and consumption system.

I have lived in Argentine Patagonia for 24 years, and I can confirm in this extreme south the causes and effects of climate change: the proliferation of mining projects and the exploitation of hydrocarbons, either conventionally or through the use of hydrofracturing (fracking), also applied in areas of fruit production. These practices include the indiscriminate use of scarce regional aquifers and increasing contamination.

Environmental disasters that tend to occur are rarely remedied, since the state does not sufficiently control the actions of oil or mining companies, much less the emission of greenhouse gases.

Furthermore, deforestation and fires occur every summer, devastating precious native Andean forests, often replaced by pine monocultures or real estate developments. This results in the loss of biodiversity in ecosystems.

Droughts alternate with prolonged rains, and the reduction of glaciers and annual snowfall is evident. Extreme temperatures are more frequent and impact human health, livestock breeding or crops, in addition to causing power outages that harm businesses. Moreover, the rise in strong winds leads to fallen trees, destroying the homes of the poorest population.

Nevertheless, a segment of the population is gradually becoming aware of the dangers of this extractivist economy. Responding to Francis' call, citizens' assemblies are being organized to resist mining, oil and hydroelectric projects. We take to the streets to declare, "No is No" or "Water is worth more than gold." We utilize posters, roadblocks, artistic expressions such as murgas (musical theater), poems, music and theater, and conduct talks in educational institutions and in the media to inform society and encourage participation in protest events.

Despite repression, criminalization, disqualification, and the silencing of environmentalists and scientists, as well as the dissemination of deceptive propaganda by companies and governments, the struggle for life persists. This social mobilization remains steadfast, organized and predominantly involves women, with some cases enjoying the support of the church in this defense of Mother Earth.

*Laudate Deum* reminds us that God has connected us to all creatures, but the technological/technocratic approach can alienate us from our environment and make us forget that everything is interconnected.

Jesus, an example of wonder, love and care for nature and the excluded, invites us to listen to the groaning of Mother Earth and the climate refugees who warn us of a planetary collapse that is already underway.

Let's heed it!

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