

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF H.E. CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
AT THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION CONFERENCE  
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY – PITTSBURG, PA  
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My dear friends,

It is a great pleasure to be with you this evening to launch this edition of the Integrity of Creation Conference, which takes its inspiration from the Holy Father’s encyclical letter *Laudato Si*.

I commend Duquesne University for this initiative, which responds in a practical way for the Pope’s invitation to seek solutions for the pressing challenges of our times, in a spirit of dialogue and fraternity. I am grateful to the conveners of the Conference for the invitation to speak to you and to share with you some thoughts on the important contribution of *Laudato Si*, and more recently, *Laudato Deum*, to this global discussion.



On the Feast of St Francis, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation devoted to the climate crisis. The document’s title comes from two words of the prayer of St Francis: “Laudate Deum for all his creatures”.

Some critics could not understand the insistence of the Pope on such a theme. His previous encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, on the care for our common home (2015), remains one of the better-known writings of the Holy Father. It provided the groundwork for the Synod, and the post synodal document, of the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region (October 2019).

*Laudato Deum* is a short document, offered as a contribution to the United Nations' Conference of the Parties on Climate (the so-called COP-28), scheduled to meet in Dubai in late 2023, at which the Pope had intended to participate personally. It is worth noticing that such high-level Papal interventions, which enrich the social doctrine of the Church, are being presented on the occasion of particular international events. The Pope makes an urgent call to responsibility: "Our care for one another", he writes, "and our care for the earth are intimately bound together. Climate change is one of the principal challenges facing society and the global community" (*Laudate Deum*, 3).

### **The Roots of *Laudato Sì***

Such a dramatic insistence on the global climate crisis and its serious consequences, in the context of a certain indifference, due to the weakness of international politics, shows a profound awareness of the real dangers for humanity of accelerated climate change. The analysis and studies presented at COP-28 in Dubai are a good illustration of the situation, in spite of relative optimism of the Secretary General of the last COP!

I consider it important for us to understand that the magisterium of the Church deepens gradually the deposit of the faith and answers, in a dynamic way, the socio-cultural challenges of each epoch.

*Laudato sì* has its roots in the reflections of Pope Saint John Paul II upon the "Gospel of Life" (*Evangelium vitae*). That encyclical defended the dignity of human life from conception to natural death against the new threats emerging with force at the end of the last century.

Now, with *Laudato sì*, Francesco expands the horizons of Christian social thinking and the personalist bioethics. He tries to enlarge Christian reflection, which integrates a new global bioethics where the human person is always at the center, while taking into consideration the natural environment and the concrete circumstances of history. This will require an analysis of many and varying factors, without losing sight of the value and centrality of human life.

I want also to draw our attention to the analysis of Pope Benedict XVI, particularly in the encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate*. In the context of a growing globalization, he points out the risk of reliance on a purely technical rationality, conditioned to resolve important human questions in a wholly immanent way. For Benedict, human life is at risk when its personal – and transcendent – dimension, and its inalienable dignity are not explicitly recognized in a global system marked by a merely instrumental vision.

Benedict wants to contrast an “open rationality” and an “immanentist rationality”. Our responsibility is precisely not to fall into the illusion of a technical omnipotence! What is at stake, in reality, is a question of meaning. What is at stake is human nature, the meaning of human life, the dimension of personal existence, which cannot be instrumentalized.

Human life, with its fragility, is often at risk, through the absence of an explicit acknowledgement of its singular value within global systems that tend to obscure what is truly human.

The “ecological conversion”, which Pope Francis invites the Church to embrace, is an answer to a simple question: can the human species survive, if the ecosystem in which it is integrated is unable to withstand the pressure exercised today through the economic exploitation of nature?

Obviously, such a question is asked today by many. But the approach of Pope Francis is quite particular. *Laudato si* is given to Christians, and to the world, as a contribution to the new cultural, juridical and political struggle regarding the environment.

The Pope considers a number of dimensions: there is a deep inter-relationship between the deterioration of the environment, social inequity, and respect for human life in all moments of its development. The degradation of the human and natural environment go hand in hand! As the Pope observes: “Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest” (LS 48).

Pope Francis has a systematic understanding of the problems, and of the solutions. To quote *Laudato Si* 117: “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for ‘instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature’” (LS 117).

The idea that “everything is connected” is used 8 times in the document.

Francis insists on the necessity of a political, economic and scientific dialogue within religions. As he says in *Laudato Si* 164: “Solutions are proposed from a global perspective, and not simply to defend the interests of a few countries. Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan” (LS 164). In paragraph 201, he adds: “The gravity of the ecological crisis demands that we all look to the common good, embarking on a path of dialogue which

demands patience, self-discipline and generosity, always keeping in mind that ‘realities are greater than ideas’” (LS 201).

As he enters with determination into the battle against the degradation of the environment, Pope Francis brings with him the rich wisdom of the social doctrine of the Church, offering a new global bioethics which the Church has elaborated through various important documents, from *Evangelium vitae* to *Laudato Si*.

To the participants of the COP-28 in Dubai, Pope Francis offered a kind of *vademecum*, proposing an ecology informed by the light of the Gospel.

I would like to put in relief three main points.

**First,**

respect for nature is based on the creative act of God. Genesis 1:31 tells us that when God created the world, he called it “very good”. We are tenants in a house which has been entrusted to us out of love. As many commentators have observed, the Pope follows Francis of Assisi: “Laudate Deum – praise God – for all his creatures”. He also follows the vision of Teilhard de Chardin: the universe is not reduced to a “natural” order. The material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God (LS 84). I like the observation of the Bishops of Japan, quoted by Francis in *Laudato Si* 85: “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope.” The Pope adds: “The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God” (LS 86).

Indeed, I find it striking, at such a dramatic moment, as the international community tries to take important decisions about the climate crisis, that the Pope offers his contribution with a document entitled “Praise God”, “Laudate Deum”!

He does it at a time when human beings claim to take God's place. This is precisely his conclusion, and I quote: "*Praise God* is the title of this letter. For when human beings claim to take God's place, they become their own worst enemies" (LD 73).

The document represents a radical critique of the technocratic approach, which is nourished by the illusion that we are called to dominate and curtail nature. Such an approach developed, in part, as a result of a flawed interpretation of Genesis. But in the authentic Biblical vision, God remains the foundation, and we are invited by Him to inhabit the earth, to respect it as a common home.

### **Second.**

In *Laudato Si* 92, the Pope says: "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth". It is interesting to note that the Pope appeals for sustainable resource management, reduction of pollution, protection of ecosystems, as a consequence of the Gospel's law of love.

In this, Francis is faithful to the Judeo-Christian tradition, where the human being is at the center. However, such anthropocentrism is different from the ideology promoted by the technocratic paradigm - already mentioned by Benedict XVI. Human beings are not the owners of the world, as today they have a tendency to consider themselves!

*Laudate Deum* uses the very interesting formula of "situated anthropocentrism" (67). It is necessary to place this anthropocentric perspective in a context that urges us to value and respect all the creatures in the universe that were created by God and therefore do not belong to us.

### **Third.**

Pope Francis places the emphasis upon spiritual motivation rather than political ideologies. In *Laudate Deum* 62, he says: “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”.

“The creatures of this world,” he goes on to say, “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” (LD 65).

Obviously, the Pope acknowledges the seriousness of the situation. He wants to distance himself from political ideologies which only consider one side of the question. With regard to the climate crisis today, the problem is not only ecological. Solutions must integrate human and social issues. Pope Francis is inviting all of us to promote a Christian civic activism, based on dialogue and cooperation, with all the actors.

I want to finish with a reference to a message delivered, a few days ago, by the Pope’s Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, on the occasion of the third edition of “*Cinema for Creation*” in Padua, Italy.

The Cardinal wishes to underline that Pope Francis does not reduce the ecological question merely to a “series of urgent and partial responses to problems that present themselves concerning environmental degradation, the depletion of national resources, pollution”, but that he wishes to advance “a mind-set, a politics, an educational program, a style of living and a spirituality that will give form to a resistance against the advance of a technocratic paradigm.”

In fact, Cardinal Parolin observes: “only through the recognition of the gift that has been given to us, will we be able to act spontaneously to care for that gift

and move from a throw-away culture, which is dominant in our society, to a culture of care”.

The Cardinal returns to the fundamental insight that “everything is interconnected”. From that realization, “great opportunities open up to us today through the simple act of collaborating together, of interacting with reciprocal respect”. With direct relevance to what we are doing here in these days, Cardinal Parolin reminds us that the instrument for finding solutions is “a dialogue at the local level, as well as the international level, that will promote a genuine integral and sustainable human development, that will favor an education in integral ecology, capable of creating a new vision, and of cherishing the driving force of beauty and of love”.



Thank you, my dear friends, for your attention to these few reflections, but more so for your attention to this important topic during the course of the Conference. I wish your work well in the coming days, as you take part in that dialogue so keenly desired by Pope Francis.