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# ESTUDIOS TRINITARIOS



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## SUMARIO

EDITORIAL ..... 7-10

### ESTUDIOS

MONTES PERAL, L. Á., *La primacía del amor en una teología trinitaria inspirada en el Tratado sobre la Trinidad de Tomás de Aquino* ..... 13-48

VALLEJO GAVONEL, M<sup>a</sup>. E., *Francisco Pacheco e l'Arte de la Pintura: contributi all'iconografia trinitaria post-tridentina nell'area ispanica* ..... 49-91

SALAZAR GARCÍA, L. M., *Libertad y persona. Rahner y Zizioulas, dos acercamientos desde el concepto de libertad entendido como autodeterminación* ..... 93-119

JAKOALEM, J., *Climate Justice: The Moral Imperative in the Eco-theology of Pope Francis in Contemporary Climate Negotiations and Struggles* ..... 121-173

BIBLIOGRAFÍA ..... 175-184

**CLIMATE JUSTICE: THE MORAL IMPERATIVE IN THE ECO-  
THEOLOGY OF POPE FRANCIS IN CONTEMPORARY CLIMATE  
NEGOTIATIONS AND STRUGGLES**

JUSTICIA CLIMÁTICA: EL IMPERATIVO MORAL EN LA ECO-TEOLOGÍA  
DEL PAPA FRANCISCO EN LAS NEGOCIACIONES Y  
LUCHAS CLIMÁTICAS CONTEMPORÁNEAS

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*Resumen:* Este artículo analiza la evolución y consolidación de la eco-teología del papa Francisco a través de *Landato Si'* (2015), *Querida Amazonía* (2020) y *Laudate Deum* (2023), destacando su contribución decisiva al desarrollo del concepto de 'justicia climática'. El estudio examina cómo estos documentos articulan una visión teológica integral que vincula la crisis ecológica con la injusticia social, y cómo esta perspectiva fortalece la incidencia de las comunidades de fe en los movimientos ecológicos y en los procesos internacionales de gobernanza climática. Se argumenta que la ecología integral constituye una herramienta ética y espiritual indispensable para impulsar una acción climática justa y transformadora.

*Palabras clave:* Justicia climática, Ecología integral, Papa Francisco, Eco-teología, COP30

*Abstract:* This article examines the development of Pope Francis's eco-theology through *Laudato Si'* (2015), *Querida Amazonía* (2020), and *Laudate Deum* (2023), emphasizing its significant contribution to the global call for climate justice. The study explores how these documents articulate an integral theological vision that connects ecological degradation with social injustice, while enhancing the role of faith communities within ecological movements and international climate governance. It argues that integral ecology offers a crucial ethical and spiritual framework capable of confronting systemic environmental harm and advancing effective, accountable, and justice-oriented climate action.

*Keywords:* Climate justice, Integral ecology, Pope Francis, Eco-theology, COP30

## 1. Introduction

This year marks the 10th Anniversary of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*<sup>1</sup> (2015), a groundbreaking encyclical that galvanized the Roman Catholic Church and other faith communities to embrace the urgent socio-ethical advocacy known as Care for Our Common Home. The document successfully catalyzed numerous ecological movements, inspiring them to significantly advance the global call for climate justice and establish continuous methodologies for climate action. Francis subsequently amplified this message with the publication of *Querida Amazonía*<sup>2</sup> (2020),

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On the Care for our Common Home*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015. To be cited as LS.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, «Querida Amazonía», *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* [online document], (02 February 2020), <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/>

which was strategically issued to foment active engagement from faith communities in protecting the Amazon and its indigenous peoples, framing the challenge as a unified ecclesial and ecological dream. The Pope further intensified this direction with *Laudate Deum*<sup>3</sup> (2023), which pivots away from institutional political failures to highlight the hopes and transformative potential rooted in grassroots communities, demanding concrete actions and solutions that extend beyond often-delayed climate negotiations and commitments.

The three papal documents –*Laudato Si'* (2015), *Querida Amazonía* (2020), and *Laudate Deum* (2023)– form the essential core of Pope Francis's comprehensive eco-theology. This article attempts to trace how the urgent global demand for climate justice is not only reflected but is progressively and powerfully articulated within Pope Francis's ecological vision. Through these documents, the Pope has issued increasingly strong ecological demands necessary to confront the ecological destruction affecting both nature and people. Thus, this article aims to demonstrate the profound impact of his unified theological framework on contemporary ecological struggles and the ongoing, intensified call for climate justice.

This article specifically hopes to address the following arguments:

1. What are the contrasts and functional implications of integrating the ecological movement's definition of

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apost\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\_esortazione-ap\_20200202\_querida-amazonia.html. To be cited as *QA*.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, «Laudate Deum», *Apostolic Exhortation on the Climate Crisis* [online document], (04 October 2023), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html). To be cited as *LD*.

climate justice into official international diplomatic framework like the UNFCCC?

2. How does Pope Francis's eco-theology, articulated across *Laudato Si'*, *Querida Amazonía*, and *Laudate Deum*, establish a foundational theological basis for amplifying the call for climate justice?
3. To what extent does the theological praxis inspired by Pope Francis's eco-theology enhance the visibility and political efficacy of ecological faith communities within broader ecological movements and formal global climate negotiations?

## 2. Fundamental Concept of Climate Justice

This chapter aims to establish the precise parameters of climate justice, situating it firmly within the broader global discourse on ecological justice issues. It will review the concept's historical development by contrasting its official definition, as applied within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)<sup>4</sup> and subsequent international climate negotiations, with the more expansive and radical understanding championed by the mainstream environmental movements. This dual analysis will clarify the fundamental differences between

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Climate Change, «The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the parent treaty that guides the global effort against climate change, boasting near-universal membership of 198 countries (Parties). The UNFCCC secretariat is the UN body responsible for supporting this global response. Most notably, the UNFCCC is the governing framework for the 2015 Paris Agreement, the mission of which is to limit the rise in the global average temperature this century to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels», accessed 13 November 2024. <https://unfccc.int/about-us/about-the-secretariat>.

diplomatic restraint and grassroots demands, which is essential for understanding the political efficacy of the concept.

The core definition advanced here will specifically focus on how climate justice relates to restorative justice, emphasizing the moral and historical debt owed by high-polluting nations to marginalized communities and the Global South. This restorative framework is crucial for analyzing two critical areas of implementation in climate commitments: the Principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR)<sup>5</sup> and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)<sup>6</sup>. By examining climate justice through the lens of CBDR's historical accountability and NDC's national pledges, the chapter aims to demonstrate how the concept translates into tangible requirements for compliance and the clear implementation of global climate goals.

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<sup>5</sup> German Council on Foreign Relations, «The Principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) establishes that all nations have a shared, fundamental duty to address human-caused climate change (anthropogenic). However, this duty is unequally distributed among countries. This differentiation is based on two key historical and economic factors: some nations have contributed far more to causing the crisis through past emissions (historical responsibility), while others have a greater capacity and wealth to afford and implement the necessary, costly climate solutions (varying economic capacities)», accessed 11 October 2024. <https://dgap.org/en/research/glossary/climate-foreign-policy/common-differentiated-responsibilities-cbdr>.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Climate Change, The Paris Agreement, «Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are the climate action plans at the heart of the Paris Agreement. Essentially, an NDC is each country's pledge detailing how it plans to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The Paris Agreement legally requires every country to prepare and regularly update these NDCs, outlining their specific domestic measures and goals for tackling the climate crisis», accessed 9 November 2024. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>.

### 2.1. *Definitions and Contemporary Understanding of Climate Justice*

The definition of ‘climate justice’ advanced by environmental and civil society movements is explicitly grounded in the broader principles of social and environmental justice, positioning the climate crisis as a moral and historical wrong that requires accountability. The climate impacts have affected the poor and vulnerable countries –the very populations least responsible for the high levels of global emissions. By tackling the root causes of climate change, it is necessary address a wide range of interlocking approaches that integrates social, racial, and environmental injustices, seeking solutions that mend systemic inequities alongside ecological damage<sup>7</sup>.

Remarkably, the demands of these movements are rooted firmly in the concept of restorative justice. They view environmental destruction and the resulting extreme climate vulnerability as a direct consequence of colonial, extractive, and exploitative power relationships<sup>8</sup>. understanding frames environmental injustice not merely as bad policy, but as a violation of both international law and fundamental human rights. For them, justice cannot be achieved simply through future aid or mitigation efforts; it inherently requires full compensation and reparations for damages already incurred, alongside essential provisions such as quality healthcare for victims.

The global discussion surrounding climate justice reveals a fundamental tension in its interpretation, particularly concerning

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<sup>7</sup> Center for Climate Justice, «What is Climate Justice», accessed 21 October 2024. <https://centerclimatejustice.universityofcalifornia.edu/what-is-climate-justice/>.

<sup>8</sup> Center for Human Rights and Climate Justice, «Climate Justice and Reparations», accessed 21 October 2024. <https://chrgj.org/climate-justice-and-reparations/>.



the ethical weight of historical damage. While climate justice is often categorized generally into procedural and distributive justice –focusing on fair decision-making and equitable sharing of costs and outcomes, the concept is forcefully amplified by environmental movements to include a robust demand for reparative justice. This reparative perspective insists that climate vulnerability and environmental destruction are the result of historical colonial, extractive, and exploitative power relationships<sup>9</sup>, placing an inherent obligation on highly polluting countries and destructive industries<sup>10</sup>. Leonardo Boff explicitly says, «the devastation of nature and current global warming affect all countries, without regard for national boundaries or their levels of wealth or poverty»<sup>11</sup>.

The pervasive effects and impacts of climate change are now evident in catastrophic events on an almost global scale, profoundly damaging both the environment and the livelihood of local communities, particularly in vulnerable island nations. This widespread destruction necessitates a clear assignment of responsibility and a decisive framework for resolution. The necessity for a justice-centered approach was powerfully articulated at the 2010 World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia, which provided an appropriate and definitive meaning for climate justice<sup>12</sup>. This definition centers on the understanding that developed countries

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<sup>9</sup> Center for Human Rights and Climate Justice, *Climate Justice and Reparations*, <https://chrgj.org/climate-justice-and-reparations/>.

<sup>10</sup> Center for Climate Justice, «What is Climate Justice».

<sup>11</sup> Leonardo Boff, «Humanity's intertwined dilemma: Social and Ecological Justice», accessed 28 October 2024. <https://www.theragblog.com/leonardo-boff-social-justice-ecological-justice/>.

<sup>12</sup> Eco Jurisprudence Monitor, «Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth», 22 April 2010, accessed 21 October 2024. <https://ecojurisprudence.org/initiatives/universal-declaration-of-the-rights-of-mother-earth/>.

and/or highly polluting countries are the main drivers of climate change and carry a historical responsibility<sup>13</sup>. Thus, climate justice is fundamentally a claim that these historically responsible nations are accountable for the ecological damages and must be liable to pay the climate debt. This liability assumes the duty to provide integral solutions to climate change that are necessary to be able to restore the integrity of the environment.

Pope Francis defines climate justice in an effectual way, by presenting the reality of the climate crisis:

The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest<sup>14</sup>.

## 2.2. *Climate Justice from the definition of the UNFCCC*

The core issue in global climate talks, where the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the governing body for the annual Conference of Parties (COP), attempts to reconcile the need for climate justice with the sensitive issue of historical responsibility for emissions. The definition of climate justice within the context of reparation suggests a moral

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<sup>13</sup> Oxfam, «Who is responsible for climate change? », 3 December 2023, accessed 13 August 2024. <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/stories/who-is-responsible-for-climate-change/>.

<sup>14</sup> LS 48.

and legal obligation for those who have contributed most to climate change—historically developed nations—to compensate and assist those most affected. However, the official language used by the UNFCCC is deliberately vague a «strategic political ambiguity». This vagueness avoids explicitly naming blame or demanding compensation (reparations). This intentional ambiguity keeps all countries involved in the negotiations by not forcing them into politically or financially impossible commitments, thus protecting the diplomatic process. The downside is that this compromise fails to fully deliver the historical justice that vulnerable nations are demanding.

The safeguard developed by the UNFCCC in 1992 as the fundamental rule for international climate cooperation was the Principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). It means that all nations must help protect the climate, but the richest and most industrialized nations must take the biggest responsibility because they historically created the most pollution and have the best resources to fix it. Therefore, this principle places a heavier obligation on these nations, recognizing their superior capacity (financial and technological) to act and their ethical commitment to justice. This framework provides the legal and philosophical basis for mechanisms like climate finance and technology transfer, ensuring developed countries lead emission cuts and provide support, thus enabling developing nations to pursue growth without being weighed down by historical climate debt. It implements the idea of *climate justice* by making the nations that caused the most climate damage pay for their actions without delay, especially to help vulnerable

countries. Nonetheless, there are non-compliant countries who refuses responsibilities<sup>15</sup>.

In the road to COP21, that defined Paris Agreement (2015), the negotiation text at COP20 mentioned clearly the principle of historical responsibility in the textual agreement, and yet this explicit language was absent in the final text of the Paris Agreement. On the other hand, the preamble of the Paris Agreement clearly mentions climate justice:

Noting the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including oceans, and the protection of biodiversity, recognized by some cultures as Mother Earth, and noting the importance for some of the concept of *climate justice*, when taking action to address climate change...<sup>16</sup>.

The inclusion of ‘climate justice’ in the Agreement’s preamble, however, acts as a moral and ethical anchor, a crucial win for developing nations and civil society. While the preamble’s language is generally non-binding –it acknowledges the deeply held equitable concerns of vulnerable nations. Nonetheless, the preamble noted the importance of identifying key areas where climate justice can be deduced,

Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective

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<sup>15</sup> Bushra Zeb Khan, «Common but Differentiated Responsibilities: A Shield for Equity or Barrier to Global Climate Action?», *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, vol. 13, n.º 4 (2024), p. 1162.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Climate Change, «The Paris Agreement», accessed 2 September 2024. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf).

obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity...<sup>17</sup>.

While the preamble texts may provide a relative definition, the agreement focuses its binding obligations primarily on mitigation goals and voluntary National Determined Contributions (NDCs), which simply is an alternative to the historical responsibility. The Paris Agreement strategically centers its binding obligations on procedural requirements and mitigation goals, fundamentally relying on the self-determined NDCs as a practical substitute for legally enforceable historical responsibility. The omission of explicit historical responsibility in major texts signals a political compromise designed to minimize the liability of developed nations, a decision that directly counters the demands for restorative justice.

This deliberate omission of explicit historical responsibility from the core binding text represents a crucial political compromise, prioritizing universal political buy-in and global mitigation efforts over restorative justice. While the Agreement acknowledges ethical concerns by retaining the concept of 'climate justice' in its non-binding preamble, the resulting structure ensures the continued involvement of major developed nations by minimizing their legal and financial liability for past environmental damage. This outcome directly contrasts with the demands of vulnerable developing nations, who argue that true climate justice requires not only collective future action but also robust compensation and financial support from those

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations Climate Change, «The Paris Agreement».

historically most responsible for climate change, extending beyond the current voluntary climate finance commitments.

### 2.3. *Beyond Reparations: Climate Justice Against the Capitalist Paradigm of Destruction*

While climate justice may be technically defined as a reparative obligation, its meaning across environmental movements is fundamentally a challenge to the deeply entrenched, destructive-capitalist linings on development. This tension highlights the ethical conflict between current economic models and true ecological sustainability. This critique is powerfully articulated by theologians and activists alike. Leonardo Boff states that «the prevailing type of development is not really compatible with ecological ideals, because it is based on the exploitation of nature and of human beings»<sup>18</sup>. This critique targets the existing capitalist paradigm of destruction<sup>19</sup>, which has historically sought to destroy indigenous lands for extractive enterprises, as evidenced by devastating mining operations across the Global South. These enterprises are not just environmental harms; they are a devastating enterprise that drives communities into a dehumanizing situation of poverty in the face of capitalist greed.

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<sup>18</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Orbis Books, New York, 2019, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> For an approach to the so-called paradigm of domination, its critiques, and the proposal of the “community of creation” paradigm, see: Enrique Gómez García, «Comunidad de la creación’. Una interpretación teocéntrica de Gen 1-2 con sensibilidad ecológica», en *Biblia y ecología. Nuevas lecturas en un mundo herido*, ed. por Carmen Yeber Rovira y M.<sup>a</sup> Estela Aldave Medrano, Verbo Divino, Estella, 2024, pp. 113-130.

The necessity of confronting this systemic greed is echoed in the work of Amazonian bishops and reflected in Pope Francis's *Querida Amazonía*, where he observes:

The powerful are never satisfied with the profits they make, and the resources of economic power greatly increase as a result of scientific and technological advances. For this reason, all of us should insist on the urgent need to establish «a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems... otherwise, the new power structures based on the techno-economic paradigm may overwhelm not only our politics, but also freedom and justice». If God calls us to listen both to the cry of the poor and that of the earth, then for us, «the cry of the Amazon region to the Creator is similar to the cry of God's people in Egypt. It is a cry of slavery and abandonment pleading for freedom»<sup>20</sup>.

Nonetheless, the pursuit of climate justice must, therefore, be understood not only as a call for historical reparations but, more critically, as an urgent moral and political struggle to dismantle the prevailing economic systems that perpetuate the exploitation of both the Earth and the poor, demanding a new legal framework to restrain unchecked capitalist expansion.

### **3. The Theological Foundation of Climate Justice from the Work of Pope Francis**

The encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* accelerated the impetus of eco-theology across the theological discourse. This

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<sup>20</sup> QA §52.

encyclical provided a platform for bringing the theological dimension of addressing the global climate crisis, and of amplifying the involvement of church-people in their ecological advocacy. His work offered a compelling articulation of the moral dimension of solving the crisis. He introduced integral ecology<sup>21</sup> as a comprehensive response to address the issues affecting humanity –social, economic, political as interlinked with the ecological crisis. *Laudato Si'* legitimized the pastoral and theological dimensions of ecological concerns in the ambiance of the social teachings of the church, the creation care as a formative discourse was embraced and the climate justice is considered as an appropriate call.

For Daniel Patrick Castillo Pope Francis's praxis of integral ecology –specifically his response to the «cries of the earth and the poor»– is fundamentally interpretable, through the lens of eco-liberation theology, as a manifestation of faithfulness to God<sup>22</sup>. Drawing a vital cue from early Christian liberation discourse, this study will demonstrate how the 'eco-liberation' theology reconstructs Christian soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) to place the historical struggles for justice<sup>23</sup> –both social and ecological– squarely at the center of its framework, thereby reframing salvation as active participation in the liberation and restoration of creation.

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<sup>21</sup> University of Oxford, Campion Hall, «What is Integral Ecology?», “an integrated holistic approach that considers the interactions between both natural and social systems...”, accessed 04 November 2024, <https://www.campion.ox.ac.uk/integral-ecology>.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Patrick Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation (PDF): Salvation and Political Ecology*, Orbis Books, 2019, p. 36. <https://openresearchlibrary.org/content/9705ac4e-f6ff-4480-9e55-7cad5af0de7f>.

<sup>23</sup> Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology*, p. 19.



The challenge of climate justice is not merely an environmental or economic issue, but a critical test of global political and moral will, a sentiment powerfully articulated by Pope Francis in his video message to the 75th UN General Assembly. In his address, Pope Francis directly posits the core ethical dilemma facing the international community:

We must seriously ask ourselves if there is the political will to allocate with honesty, responsibility and courage, more human, financial and technological resources to mitigate the negative effects of climate change, as well as to help the poorest and most vulnerable populations who suffer from them the most<sup>24</sup>.

This statement has elevated the climate crisis beyond technical debate, framing it as an issue of courageous resource allocation and responsibility towards the most impacted. Pope Francis underscores the necessity of translating moral conviction into concrete policy action. By explicitly linking mitigation efforts to support for the «poorest and most vulnerable populations», he compels political leaders to recognize climate action as an urgent ethical mandate for global equity and justice.

### 3.1. *Laudato Si': The Foundational Moral Call*

Released months before COP21, *Laudato Si'* provided a foundational moral force for the Paris negotiations. It established climate change as a clear moral issue, linking environmental

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<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, «Message to the 75<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the United Nations (25 February 2020)», [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200925\\_videomessaggio-onu.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200925_videomessaggio-onu.html).

science and policy with a century of Catholic social justice teachings. The encyclical offered an ethical exploration of the human-nature relationship and supplied a theological basis for translating environmental concern into action.

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis articulated the meaning of climate justice in a precise manner, he says: «A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor» (LS 49), indicating the response to injustice as the utmost reference to respond to the destruction of nature and the impacts on people and communities.

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* serves as a foundational papal document for the Roman Catholic Church, offering a comprehensive ethical and pastoral response to pressing social and ecological issues. It is significant for unequivocally affirming the stark reality of the ecological crisis while simultaneously consolidating pastoral statements on the environment from Bishop Conferences across the globe. What truly distinguishes this document is its unique, collaborative methodology: it involved gathering essential insights from a diverse array of experts, including scientists, climate experts, eco-theologians, and religious leaders, ensuring the final pastoral response was fully attuned to the complexities and urgency of the climate emergency.

Through its six detailed chapters, *Laudato Si'* offers vital pastoral direction, successfully encouraging faith communities worldwide –including Catholic and Protestant groups, as well as local Philippine churches and various environmental institutions– to engage in concrete environmental programs that span from local initiatives, such as tree growing, to global protest actions. Most notably, the encyclical powerfully re-enforced the global call for

climate justice, with Pope Francis specifically targeting the core of the global ecological problem –the climate crisis– by citing the inhuman impacts suffered by vulnerable nations because of the historical emissions from highly polluting, industrialized countries.

Pope Francis systematically established a comprehensive theological foundation for climate justice, principally within his encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. This framework is anchored by three critical theological markers:

### 3.1.1. *Integral Ecology as authentic response*

Integral Ecology offers a holistic approach to understanding the climate crisis by asserting a fundamental link between social sin and ecological sin. This concept moves beyond segmented environmentalism, arguing that the degradation of humanity and the degradation of nature are interconnected and stem from the same root causes, necessitating a unified response.

Integral ecology is defined as a holistic vision capable of taking into account every interconnected aspect of the global crisis<sup>25</sup>. The framework for discerning the climate crisis rests upon the interconnectivity of the lived context, encompassing environmental, economic, social, and cultural ecology<sup>26</sup>.

This holistic view inherently reflects how the degradation of nature often mirrors the deterioration of human culture and communities. To present a practical approach to this concept, Pope Francis emphasizes two key areas: human ecology, which encompasses the importance of the ecology of daily life and its integral relationship with the environment and other living

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<sup>25</sup> LS §137.

<sup>26</sup> LS §146.

beings; and the common good, which necessitates the promotion of solidarity and the preferential option for the poorest<sup>27</sup>.

Moreover, the real-world applicability of integral ecology in the environmental discussion is found in Pope Francis' resolute emphasis on the need for effective international agreements and for nations and institutions to acknowledge the intimate and inseparable relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet<sup>28</sup>. The fundamental principle holds that the human environment and the natural environment will inevitably deteriorate together. Therefore, to effectively prevent environmental degradation, the intertwined issues of human and social degradation must be addressed simultaneously<sup>29</sup>.

### 3.1.2. *Theological Roots of Creation Care*<sup>30</sup>

The encyclical grounds this mandate in the Theological Roots of Creation Care, examining the Pope's strategic use of Scripture, the inspiring tradition of St. Francis of Assisi, and the established Social Doctrine of the Church to mandate a responsible care for both people and nature.

#### 3.1.2.1. *The Theological Understanding of the Natural World*<sup>31</sup>

Pope Francis offers the invitation «to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his

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<sup>27</sup> LS §§147-148.

<sup>28</sup> LS §16.

<sup>29</sup> LS §48.

<sup>30</sup> From the thesis of the author: Jaazeal Jakosalem, *The Concept of Anthropocene in Laudato Si' of Pope Francis: Implications for the Reception of Ecological Theology in Christian Communities*, University of Bonn, 2022, pp. 9-11.

<sup>31</sup> Jaazeal Jakosalem, *The Concept of Anthropocene in Laudato Si'*, p. 9.

infinite beauty and goodness»<sup>32</sup>. The recognition of nature as the revelation of God is rooted in Christian tradition. The description given by Pope Francis to describe nature as a magnificent book is a metaphor from the *Book of Works*, where St. John Chrysostom meant ‘the book of creatures’ or nature itself<sup>33</sup>. The whole story of creation is a narrative of God’s creative power, where the scene in Genesis unfolds the creation of life—of all the living beings.

Likewise, the ecological crisis presents the human incapacities to see nature as a revelation of God’s beauty and goodness. It is in this aspect where Pope Francis offers us a return to the theological understanding of nature, which is an essential aspect of Christian ecological practice<sup>34</sup>.

Nonetheless, in the book *The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si’*, Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam notes:

The pope affirms that the ecological crisis is not only about the collapse of the planet’s ecosystems and biochemical cycles with a profound impact on human populations, especially on the poor, but is also ultimately a theological issue. The ecological crisis is not only a physical problem and a moral predicament<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> LS §12.

<sup>33</sup> Peter M. J. Hess, «Nature and the Word of God in Inter-religious Dialogue», accessed 29 April 2022, <https://metanexus.net/archive/conference/2004/pdf/hess.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Denis Edwards, «Everything Is Interconnected: The Trinity and the Natural World in Laudato Si’», *The Australasian Catholic Record*, n.º 94 (2017), pp. 81-92 and p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Joshtrom Kureethadam, *The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si’*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 2019, p. 56.

### 3.1.2.2. *The Destiny of All Creation in Christ*<sup>36</sup>

Christ's presence is a revelation of God, one and triune. *Laudato Si'* clearly underlines this Christological element:

All things have been created through him and for him (Col 1,16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ's creative work as the Divine Word (*Logos*). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word 'became flesh' (Jn 1,14)... From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy<sup>37</sup>.

This implies that through the incarnation God entered into nature and redirect the natural world into his original plan, thereby, connecting creation to redemption. Accordingly, Christ mediates in creation as the word of God, and saves the world as the incarnate Son of God.

### 3.1.2.3. *Ecological Conversion*<sup>38</sup>

The ecological crisis calls for ecological conversion –a return to the Creator. This offers a distinctive challenge to humanity's damaging of the planet. Pope Francis echoes the challenge of the Australian Bishops' Conference on achieving reconciliation with creation: «To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's

<sup>36</sup> Jaazeal Jakosalem, *The Concept of Anthropocene in Laudato Si'*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> LS §99.

<sup>38</sup> Jaazeal Jakosalem, *The Concept of Anthropocene in Laudato Si'*, p. 10.

creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion or change of heart»<sup>39</sup>.

The immensity of the ecological crisis is acknowledged also as a crisis of values. The Greek Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas argues that «the Church will have to revise radically her concept of sin, which traditionally has been limited to the social and anthropological level and start speaking of sin against nature as a matter of primary religious significance»<sup>40</sup>. Accordingly, Pope Francis quotes Patriarch Bartholomew on the sins against creation:

For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life –these are sins<sup>41</sup>.

#### 3.1.2.4. *Trinitarian Communion*<sup>42</sup>

The foundation of the interconnectedness of all beings is the triune God, who is the Creator of all things. Pope Francis describes this in the encyclical, «everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity

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<sup>39</sup> LS §218. Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, «A New Earth –The Environmental Challenge», <https://socialjustice.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Social-Justice-Statement-2002.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> John Zizioulas, «Foreword», in John Chrysavgis (ed.), *Cosmic Grace Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2009, pp. VIII and p. VIII.

<sup>41</sup> LS §8.

<sup>42</sup> Jaazael Jakosalem, *The Concept of Anthropocene in Laudato Si'*, p. 11.

which flows from the mystery of the Trinity»<sup>43</sup>. This aspect of trinitarian communion in the theological vision of Pope Francis is anchored on the doctrine that God is the creator of all things, as John Carmody reiterates, «nature, as well as humanity, reflects its trinitarian source»<sup>44</sup>. Denis Edwards offers a deep reflection,

this theology of God's creative presence to each creature through the Word and in the Spirit, enabling each creature to participate in its own way in the Trinity, already offers a foundation for developing a contemporary ecological theology<sup>45</sup>.

This trinitarian element in creation is an important theological basis for Christians, as a counter-thesis to Lynn White's generalization. The Anthropocene scholar Bruno Latour, insists not to entirely blame Christian theology, but rather on Christianity's gradual abandonment of the concerns of the cosmos and on focusing on the salvation of humans alone<sup>46</sup>.

### 3.1.3. *Interconnected cries: The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor*

The 'cry of the earth' is interwoven with the 'cry of the poor', serving as a clear indicator of the severe impacts of social injustice and the devastating consequences of environmental degradation. By highlighting this unequal impact, Pope Francis ensures that

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<sup>43</sup> LS §240.

<sup>44</sup> John Carmody, *Ecology and Religion: Toward a New Christian Theology of Nature*, Paulist Press, New York, 1983, p. 121.

<sup>45</sup> Denis Edwards, «Where on Earth is God? Exploring an Ecotheological Theology of the Trinity in the Tradition of Ahtanasius», in Ernst M. Conradie et al. (eds.), *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, Bloomsbury Publishing, United Kingdom, 2014, pp.11-29.

<sup>46</sup> Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, Polity, Cambridge, 2017, p. 210.



genuine climate action becomes a definitive and non-negotiable expression of justice and caring for creation. Leonardo Boff underlined this early on his work as interrelationship between liberation theology and ecology that will ultimately guarantee a good quality of life for future generations<sup>47</sup>.

Francis provides a broader social approach to ecology, he precisely defined this interconnection by stating that «a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor»<sup>48</sup>. The human face of the ecological crisis is undeniably that of the poor, who are facing the most severe and immediate consequences of environmental degradation. «The relationship to ecology is direct, for the poor and the oppressed belong to nature and their situation is objectively an ecological aggression»<sup>49</sup>.

The biblical message of the Psalms constantly speaks of God acting on behalf of the poor, establishing a non-negotiable imperative for justice within the faith tradition. This pervasive theme in the Old Testament serves as the ethical and spiritual bedrock for examining the contemporary call to address the

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<sup>47</sup> «Both lines of reflection and action stem from a cry: the cry of the poor for life, liberty and beauty (see Ex 3,7) in the case of liberation theology; the cry of the earth growing under oppression (see Rom 8,22-23) in that of ecology. Both seek liberation: one of the poor by themselves, as organized historical agents, conscientized and linked to other allies who take up their cause and their struggle; the other of the earth through a new alliance between it and human beings, in a brotherly/sisterly relationship and with a type of sustainable development that will respect the different ecosystems and guarantee future generations a good quality of life» (Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1995, p. 67.

<sup>48</sup> LS 49.

<sup>49</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecología: grito de la Tierra, grito de los pobres*, Trotta, Madrid, 1996, p. 139.

intersecting crises of poverty and environmental destruction. He is the one who 'hears' their 'cry' and 'comes to their aid'; he 'protects' and 'defends' them; he 'rescues' and 'saves' them... Indeed, the poor will never find God indifferent or silent in the face of their plea. God is the one who renders justice and does not forget (cf. Ps 40,18; 70,6); he is their refuge and he never fails to come to their assistance (cf. Ps 10,14)<sup>50</sup>.

The identity of the poor is reflected in the theological life of the Church as presented by liberation theology and other theopastoral directions,

never in the history of Christian theologies have the poor become so central. To seek to build an entire theology starting from the perspective of the victims and so to denounce the mechanisms that have made them victims and to help overcome those mechanisms by drawing on the spiritual storehouse of Christianity, thereby collectively forging a society that offers greater opportunity for life, justice, and participation: this is the unique intuition of liberation theology<sup>51</sup>.

A transformative approach to social change requires recognizing the poor as active agents of social transformation, fundamentally shifting their status from being passive objects of development to empowered protagonists. This involves creating genuine opportunities to allow the poor to participate fully in political life, ensuring their voices and concerns shape policies, not just respond to them. Ultimately, this process aims for a radical change where members of these marginalized communities are transformed to become leaders of the society, bringing their

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<sup>50</sup> Pope Francis, *Third World Day of the Poor*, 17 November 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecología: grito de la Tierra, grito de los pobres*, p. 139.

unique experiences and insights to drive equitable governance and sustainable change.

The systemic failures like inequality and exploitation lead to ecological harm that disproportionately victimizes the marginalized. As has been observed, «as is always the case, the poor and vulnerable are the first to suffer and the worst hit»<sup>52</sup> this is the description of ecological injustice –the poor suffers the most, making their suffering the critical ethical lens through which both social and ecological impacts must be judged. Pope Leo XIV adds:

When justice and peace are trampled underfoot, those who are most hurt are the poor, the marginalized and the excluded. The suffering of indigenous communities is emblematic in this regard<sup>53</sup>.

Today there is a growing awareness and assertive calls from Indigenous communities for stronger protection of their ancestral lands and rights. This movement has profound ecological consequences because, in asserting their sovereignty and traditional ecological knowledge, these communities are often the most effective guardians of intact ecosystems. Their successful advocacy and legal battles directly contribute to protecting vast forests and other vital habitats from destructive industrial activities such as mining, illegal logging, massive agricultural expansion, and other development-related aggression. Thus, securing Indigenous land rights is not merely a social justice

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<sup>52</sup> António Guterres, *Remarks at High-Level Meeting on Climate and Sustainable Development*, 28 March 2019, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-03-28/remarks-high-level-meeting-climate-and-sustainable-development>.

<sup>53</sup> Pope Leo XIV, «Message for the 10th World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation», <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/creation/documents/20250630-messaggio-giornata-curacreato.html>.

issue, but a powerful, necessary a step of genuine recognition of territorial rights and achievement of climate action.

Poverty is connected to environmental degradation. The correlation has been presented by many of the organizations involved in the protection of the environment. The existing connection between poverty rate and the extent of the destruction of the forests for commercial ends are clearly matched. Structural corruption does not respect existing environmental regulations. Globally, we have created laws, protecting biodiversity and even clearly stipulations regulations; yet all these are shelved by corrupt government systems; deliberately favoring big polluters and capitalist driven business. The Church, and communities of faith need to respond with deliberate call; Pope Leo XIV spoke of the need of a poor Church, sharing not only in solidarity, but the poor evangelizing the Church<sup>54</sup>. In his message during the celebration of the Third World Day of the Poor, he said:

Environmental justice –implicitly proclaimed by the prophets– can no longer be regarded as an abstract concept or a distant goal. It is an urgent need that involves much more than simply protecting the environment. For it is a matter of justice–social, economic and human. For believers it is also a duty born of faith, since the universe reflects the face of Jesus Christ, in whom all things were created and redeemed. In a world where the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters are the first to suffer the devastating effects of climate change, deforestation

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<sup>54</sup> «This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them» (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.º 198).

and pollution, care for creation becomes an expression of our faith and humanity<sup>55</sup>.

### 3.2. *Querida Amazonía: Localizing the Call for Climate Justice from the Amazonian struggle*

*Querida Amazonía* responds to the call for climate justice by citing the Amazon region as a localized case study of ecological injustice. The document meticulously exposes how the destruction of nature—driven by extractive interests, rapid deforestation, and climate change that pushes the forest toward a savanna tipping point—is inextricably linked to severe human exploitation, abuse, and violence against indigenous peoples.

The document meticulously expounds upon the interconnected nature of injustice by demonstrating that the destruction of nature is invariably accompanied by forms of human exploitation and abuse. The text draws a direct link between environmental degradation and human suffering, using the Amazon region as a poignant reference point. It asserts that the severe «incidents of injustice and cruelty» that occurred historically and continue today in the Amazon must «provoke profound abhorrence», compelling contemporary society to acknowledge and confront the «current forms of human exploitation, abuse and killings»<sup>56</sup>. This framing makes it clear that the physical violation of the natural environment is inseparable from, and indeed a catalyst for, the violation of human dignity and rights.

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<sup>55</sup> Pope Leo XIV, Message for the 10th World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/creation/documents/20250630-messaggio-giornata-curacreato.html>.

<sup>56</sup> QA 15.

Furthermore, the document strongly positions the defense of indigenous communities as a non-negotiable component of climate justice. It highlights the profound ecological wisdom inherent in the original peoples of the Amazon, noting that their consciousness «inspires care and respect for creation, with a clear consciousness of its limits, and prohibits its abuse»<sup>57</sup>. The text elevates this respect to a spiritual and communal duty, stressing that «to abuse nature is to abuse our ancestors, our brothers and sisters, creation and the Creator, and to mortgage the future». This articulation underscores that the harm inflicted upon the natural world affects these peoples in an immediate and verifiable way, making the protection of their rights and lands synonymous with the fight against environmental injustice.

Finally, the document anchors the entire pursuit of justice in creation with a clear reference to the power of faith and the mission of the Church. It emphasizes that Christ's redemption seeks to «restore in each of us the capacity to enter into relationship with others», and that the 'divine charity' proposed by the Gospel is the wellspring for a pursuit of justice that is simultaneously a «hymn of fraternity and of solidarity» and an «impetus to the culture of encounter»<sup>58</sup>. This spiritual foundation empowers the Church, utilizing its «broad spiritual experience, her renewed appreciation of the value of creation, her concern for justice, her option for the poor», and its rich educational and cultural tradition, to contribute decisively to the «protection and growth of the Amazon region» and similar threatened areas globally<sup>59</sup>.

The Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* also serves as a prophetic platform for advancing the cause of

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<sup>57</sup> QA 42.

<sup>58</sup> QA 22.

<sup>59</sup> QA 60.

forwarding the demands of ecological justice, particularly for the Peoples' Summit 2025 in Belém, Brazil (November 2025). By placing the Amazon region and its indigenous communities at the center of the global ecological discussion, the document ensures that core environmental issues and the crucial voices of the most impacted peoples are gathered and elevated in the global call for climate justice. This foresight establishes the papal text as an enduring moral and strategic reference point for indigenous leaders, environmental activists, and faith communities seeking to forward the people's agenda during the climate agreement.

The Peoples' Summit Towards COP30 is a coalition of diverse social and environmental movements that began in March 2023. Its main goal is to create a unified voice reflecting the global social and ecological struggles. At the Peoples' Summit event in Belém, Brazil coinciding with COP30, the organization provided a participatory platform for groups like indigenous communities, NGOs, and activists to push for more effective, people-driven solutions and actions to address the ecological crisis. Among the fifteen proposals of the Peoples' Summit<sup>60</sup>, we highlight the following:

We demand the demarcation and protection of the lands and territories of indigenous peoples and other local peoples and communities, as they are the ones who guarantee the survival of the forest. We demand that governments implement zero deforestation, end criminal burning, and adopt state policies for ecological restoration and recovery of areas degraded and affected by the climate crisis.

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<sup>60</sup> «Declaration of the Peoples' Summit Towards COP30», Belém do Pará, Brazil, 12-16 November 2025, <https://cupuladospovoscop30.org/es/declaracion-final/>.

We demand the implementation of popular agrarian reform and the promotion of agroecology to guarantee food sovereignty and combat land concentration. Peoples produce healthy food to feed the people, in order to eliminate hunger in the world, based on cooperation and access to techniques and technologies under popular control. This is an example of a real solution to confront the climate crisis. There is no climate justice without land back in the hands of peoples.

We call for the strengthening of international instruments that defend the rights of peoples, their customary rights and the integrity of ecosystems. We need a legally binding international instrument on human rights and transnational corporations, which is built on the concrete reality of the struggles of communities affected by violations, demanding rights for peoples and rules for corporations.

### 3.3. *Laudate Deum: Demanding Binding Accountability*

Pope Francis's 2023 apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, serves as an urgent pastoral message to Catholics and the world, systematically accelerating the call initiated by *Laudato Si'* by defining the contemporary climate crisis as a rapidly 'collapsing' reality nearing a 'breaking point', while simultaneously providing a six-part framework to guide and pressure concrete international climate action –specifically targeting the COP28<sup>61</sup> in Dubai– by confronting the technocratic paradigm, analyzing the failures of international politics, and demanding a clear timeline for

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<sup>61</sup> Despite the critical achievement of establishing a Loss and Damage Fund to aid fragile nations, COP28 was met with disappointment over its failure to mandate a stronger 'phase-out' of fossil fuels and significant funding gaps that leave overall climate finance commitments insufficient.



commitment to protect the lives and families of the most vulnerable.

### 3.3.1. *The global climate crisis*

The clear and present danger is undeniable, Pope Francis says «the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident»; this time confronting the climate deniers and even green-washing climate apologists. The exhortation maximizes the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>62</sup> findings and reports, re-enforcing the message of *Laudato Si'* with scientific data on the climate crisis.

He refers to climate change as a global reality that must be addressed seriously by politicians, business leaders, and institutions. His concerns for the climate crisis always have implications for social injustice, that this has affected the poor and will have severe impacts on jobs and livelihood. He clearly repudiates the usual blame game on the poor, richer countries, or high-polluting countries not assuming full responsibility for the crisis, he says «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>63</sup>.

He highlights the human origin of climate change by introducing the word ‘anthropic’, he illustrates clearly the human impacts as analyzed and presented by scientific reports. In *Laudato Si'*, he mentions the «tragic consequence of unchecked

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<sup>62</sup> 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).

<sup>63</sup> LD 9.

human activity...»<sup>64</sup> and in the document *Querida Amazonía* he states «the great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity»<sup>65</sup>. Still, in the *Laudato Si'* encyclical, he identifies the following Anthropocene-related references, namely: tyrannical anthropocentrism, distorted anthropocentrism, modern anthropocentrism, excessive anthropocentrism, and misguided anthropocentrism; providing an understanding of the human origin of the climate crisis. Thus, he says «it is verifiable that specific climate changes provoked by humanity are notably heightening the probability of extreme phenomena that are increasingly frequent and intense»<sup>66</sup>.

### 3.3.2. *Advancing to Protect Nature*

Pope Francis presents a clear manifestation of his ecological message that as faith communities we need to commit «the world that surrounds us is not an object of exploitation, unbridled use and unlimited ambition»<sup>67</sup>. Thus, nature must be protected from technological advancement and human greed, he says clearly that «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». The technocratic paradigm is an archetype found in business, economics, and technological advancement, cultivating a limitless attitude in the hope of unlimited progress. This paradigm, however, is a purely utilitarian attitude that will entirely exhaust the planet and hasten ecological destruction.

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<sup>64</sup> LS 4.

<sup>65</sup> QA 54.

<sup>66</sup> LD 5.

<sup>67</sup> LD 25.

### 3.3.3. *The relevance of the document*

In this exhortation Pope Francis is highly critical of the weakness of international politics and climate conferences, clearly indicating much of the failures than the outcomes. Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, transcends a mere warning about the rapidly 'collapsing' climate crisis by serving as a comprehensive blueprint for integral global transformation, urging humanity to move beyond inadequate responses and institutional failures. The document specifically impacts international bodies by calling for a decentralized, renewed multilateralism that rejects excessive power concentrated in an elite few, instead advocating for the involvement of all<sup>68</sup> impacted civil societies and a «new sensitivity towards the more vulnerable»<sup>69</sup>, thereby ensuring that ethics prevail over contingent interests. Simultaneously, the exhortation provides a profound mandate for faith communities, inspiring them to leverage their spiritual conviction –through the biblical model of Jesus and the richness of Christian tradition—<sup>70</sup> to effect personal, communal, and institutional cultural changes<sup>71</sup>, ultimately demonstrating that these humbler, determined efforts are more transformative than the inertia shown by powerful political and business actors.

### 3.4. *Theological-Pastoral pathways*

The three papal texts, *Laudato Si'*, *Querida Amazonía*, and *Laudate Deum*, construct a comprehensive and urgent theological mandate

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<sup>68</sup> LD 58.

<sup>69</sup> LD 39.

<sup>70</sup> LD 66.

<sup>71</sup> LD 70.

for climate justice. *Laudato Si'* establishes the foundational moral link between the «cry of the earth and the cry of the poor», integrating environmental stewardship into the core of Catholic social teaching<sup>72</sup>. This is the theological basis: an integral ecology must project the inseparability of the degradation of nature from the suffering of marginalized humanity. The documents move beyond merely affirming a 'reality' to proclaiming a moral crisis of injustice, rooted in an excessive and 'misguided anthropocentrism' that licenses the exploitation of both the natural world and vulnerable communities. The Church's mission is thus re-affirmed not only as a spiritual one but as a prophetic call to redress this core injustice by pursuing justice as a «hymn of fraternity and of solidarity»<sup>73</sup>. Leonardo Boff says «the prevailing type of development is not really compatible with ecological ideals, because it is based on the exploitation of nature and of human beings»<sup>74</sup>.

The trajectory from *Laudato Si'* to *Querida Amazonía* demonstrates the vital theological step of localizing injustice and elevating indigenous wisdom. *Querida Amazonía* cites the situation in the Amazon region as the ground zero for ecological destruction –driven by extractive, 'anthropic' interests– is invariably accompanied by «severe human exploitation, abuse, and violence against Indigenous peoples». This local focus transforms a global problem into an immediate moral imperative by highlighting the struggles of the indigenous peoples directly affected. *Querida Amazonía* frames the physical defense of the land and its peoples as an act of profound theological and spiritual duty.

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<sup>72</sup> LS 49.

<sup>73</sup> LS 22.

<sup>74</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Orbis Books, New York, 2019, p. 129.

On the other hand, *Laudate Deum* provides a theological-political critique by addressing the stagnation of global accountability with a theme of ‘extreme urgency’. Published after the initial ambition of Paris, the document moves the conversation from principle to binding commitment. The document shifts the Church’s role from a catalyst setting the agenda to a steadfast ethical critic demanding «binding forms of energy transition that meet three conditions: that they be efficient, obligatory and readily monitored». This demand for rigorous, verifiable accountability, coupled with the call for personal and community cultural change to spur political will, ensures that the pursuit of integral ecology is translated into concrete, systemic shifts, making the commitment to climate action an indispensable measure of modern moral and political integrity.

Enhancing this pathway is the integration of the *Global Mutirão* approach, *Mutirão*<sup>75</sup> is a Tupi-Guarani language concept that describes a collective, cooperative work effort where a community voluntarily comes together to achieve a shared goal, such as harvesting crops or building a house, emphasizing solidarity and reciprocity without direct payment. Rooted in the culture of the Amazonian region, this concept has been embraced by ecological and Catholic social movements as a directional theme, especially in connection with the work of Pope Francis’s integral ecology. During events like COP30 and the Peoples’ Summit, the idea of *Mutirão* acts as a critical bridge, injecting the spirit of community

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<sup>75</sup> The Brazilian presidency of COP30 is issuing a strong invitation for the world to join a coordinated, transformative global effort for climate action, involving governments, the private sector, and all parts of civil society. This initiative, called Mutirão, is intended as a continuous method of mobilization that extends beyond the conference itself, creating a civilizational milestone by actively listening to diverse voices and strengthening the connection between local actions and global goals. Mutirão COP30, <https://cop30.br/en/brazilian-presidency/mutirao-cop30>.

ownership and collaboration into the global climate justice dynamics between formal negotiations and grassroots people's movements.

#### **4. Voices of the Ecological Faith Communities Responding to the Call of Climate Justice**

##### *4.1. Advancing Climate Justice thru Climate Action: From Global Advocacy to Pope Francis*

The global environmental movement has historically been characterized by its varied methodologies and its capacity to integrate diverse ideologies and beliefs in the defense of nature and people. From different corners of the globe, the challenges of ecological preservation have spurred profound discoveries in how to effect meaningful involvement, transforming the very definition of environmental engagement.

This evolution moved beyond purely technical approaches to ecological protection, propelled by concrete experiences and actions. Organizations such as Greenpeace and Earth First<sup>76</sup> pioneered direct action method, demanding immediate attention to ecological crisis. Simultaneously, influential thinkers and activists articulated deeper connections between social and ecological issues. Leonardo Boff, for instance, championed the crucial integration of social justice with ecological justice. Moreover, the powerful legacy of figures like the martyr Chico Mendes, who inspired 'ecological witness' with his conviction

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<sup>76</sup> «Earth First! gained notoriety during the 1980s for employing unorthodox and controversial means to protest the abuse of wilderness areas», <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/science/earth-first#full-article>.

that «environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening», fundamentally shifted the movement's focus toward systemic change.

Pope Francis in his works, became highly critical of the development and capitalist agenda that impacted the destruction of nature, he warns of «unprecedented destruction of ecosystems»<sup>77</sup> and of articulating that «imbalance is the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation»<sup>78</sup>. He himself categorically said:

A new tyranny is thus born, invisible and often virtual, which unilaterally and relentlessly imposes its own laws and rules. [...] The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule<sup>79</sup>.

Pope Francis significantly amplified the global conversation on environmentalism and climate justice with his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which provided an authoritative institutional voice and steered ecological commitment toward an integral and expansive framework. This influential document was driven by a two-fold concern: (1) it offered an undeniable affirmation of the ecological crisis, insisting that it be addressed through the lens of ecological justice –a perspective that inseparable links environmental degradation to social inequality and the plight of the poor; (2) the encyclical issued a universal call for an active

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<sup>77</sup> EG 24.

<sup>78</sup> EG 56.

<sup>79</sup> EG 56.

commitment to the care for nature and people, demanding concrete action and a profound spiritual conversion to a lifestyle of ecological responsibility, thereby moving into ecological mandate.

*Laudato Si'* serves as a pivotal text that bridged spiritual authority with scientific urgency, effectively repositioning the ecological movement as an issue of global moral imperative. By embedding environmentalism within a comprehensive framework of justice and human solidarity, Pope Francis provided a compelling theological and ethical foundation for a truly integral ecology, challenging institutions and individuals alike to commit to an active defense of our common home. The growing urgency of the ecological crisis inspired by *Laudato Si'*, significantly amplified by key institutional voices, has resulted in a global transformative impact across diverse communities of belief and activism. This transformation moved ecological commitment from a niche concern to a mainstream ethical imperative, mobilizing a broad coalition of actors committed to active ecological engagement.

The influence of this integral ecological advocacy extended far beyond its initial denominational bounds. It created waves among faith communities globally, including institutions and personalities outside of the Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations, and invigorated organizations and activists in the ecological movement. The central premise—that care for creation is intrinsically linked to justice—provided a powerful, unifying moral foundation for action. Within the Roman Catholic church, this advocacy served as a catalyst, effectively mobilizing church-people to embrace institutional witnessing and commitment in the work of active ecological action. This mobilization frames ecological action not merely as a political or social undertaking, but as a direct faith response and an ethical approach to climate justice.



#### 4.2. *The 'continuum' of climate justice advocacy among faith communities*

The global environmental crisis is increasingly recognized not merely as a technical or scientific problem, but as a profound moral challenge, particularly within faith communities. These communities have long approached ecological issues with a distinctive, holistic lens, consistently identifying the interconnectedness between poverty and ecology. This enduring perspective asserts that the degradation of the environment and the perpetuation of poverty are two sides of the same coin, with marginalized populations often bearing the disproportionate burden of ecological harm. Thus, the call for climate justice emanating from religious and spiritual traditions is fundamentally rooted in a commitment to both the promotion of human dignity and the care for creation. Leonardo Boff in his book *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, posits:

What is the fate and the future of planet Earth if we prolong the logic of plunder to which our development and consumer model has accustomed us? What can the poor two-thirds of humankind hope for from the world?<sup>80</sup>

The historical and theological commitment of faith communities to the poor provides a compelling and enduring ethical foundation for active engagement in climate justice. By highlighting this integral connection, faith-based advocacy moves beyond single-issue activism, demanding a comprehensive and equitable response that prioritizes the most vulnerable while working toward a sustainable and just future for all.

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<sup>80</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1995, p. 75.

### 4.3. *Faith voices of climate justice from Paris Agreement to COP30*

The path to the historic 2015 Paris Agreement (COP21) was significantly influenced by the confluence of scientific urgency and a powerful moral mandate championed by faith communities. This movement gained unprecedented momentum with the publication of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* just five months before the climate negotiations. The encyclical served as a critical source of inspiration, mobilizing world leaders, climate negotiation observers, and activists and lending substantial ethical weight to the proceedings that ultimately resulted in the Paris Agreement. From this pivotal period, the participation of faith organizations solidified, and the influence of Pope Francis on climate action continues to inspire faith movements globally. This sentiment was powerfully articulated by Faith and Spiritual Leaders Statement during COP21, which affirmed that the climate negotiation is the 'right moment for showing inter-generational responsibility' and the 'right time for ensuring climate justice'. As the WCC stated:

Our religious convictions, social codes and customs tell us about concern for the vulnerable: climate change is leading to unprecedented ecological degradation, affecting in particular the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations. It is an irrefutable moral duty for all governments to agree on concrete and measurable steps towards global climate justice and partnerships for climate resilience<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>81</sup> Statement of Faith and Spiritual Leaders Statement from the World Council of Churches –WCC On behalf of different world's Faith and Religious Traditions to the High-Level Ministerial Segment of the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties– COP21 to the UNFCCC 11th Session of the Meeting of the Parties –CMP11 to the Kyoto Protocol Paris, France, 8 December 2015.

The integral ecology framework provided by *Laudato Si'* and the collective voice of faith communities transformed the climate debate, cementing the understanding that global climate action is an irrefutable moral duty necessitating tangible steps toward global climate justice.

#### 4.4. *Faith Communities and the Policy Engagement of Climate Justice*

Driven by a profound ethical and theological mandate, faith communities are increasingly solidifying their role as significant actors in the global environmental arena. This engagement is characterized by a strong ecological commitment that strategically embraces the methodology of climate justice as its core operational framework.

This framework allows faith communities to address a wide spectrum of environmental problems and issues not just through local action, but also by successfully engaging in complex policy mechanism engagements. By viewing climate change through the lens of justice, they connect environmental degradation directly to issues of poverty, human rights, and social equity.

The methodological adoption of climate justice allows faith communities to effectively translate their deep spiritual values into concrete political and social action. By employing this justice-centered approach, these communities are able to exert a unique influence on policy formation, advocating for comprehensive, equitable, and ethically-grounded solutions to the climate crisis.

Pope Leo XIV communicated to the COP30 Official Session, this message:

May this ecological conversion inspire the development of a new human-centred international financial architecture that en-

tures all countries, especially the poorest and those most vulnerable to climate disasters, can reach their full potential and see the dignity of their citizens respected. This architecture should take into account also the link between ecological debt and foreign debt<sup>82</sup>.

#### 4.5. *Consistent voices beyond any COP:*

##### *The continuing challenge of Pope Francis eco-theology*

##### 4.5.1. *National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB)*

The global climate conversation reached a critical inflection point at COP30 in Belém, where the commitment of faith communities was clearly and powerfully manifested in the ambiance of the global environmental summit. This engagement signaled a deepening organizational resolve to place spiritual and social concerns at the forefront of climate policy. The most tangible evidence of this commitment was the strategic involvement of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB). The CNBB, in active cooperation with various church NGOs and religious congregations, organized and hosted activities directly relevant to the essential work of the church in the Amazon region, particularly their long-standing advocacy alongside indigenous communities.

The presence of the CNBB –visibly active in both the official events at COP and the alternative Peoples’ Summit– demonstrates the faith community’s dual strategy of institutional dialogue and

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<sup>82</sup> «Message from His Holiness Pope Leo XIV Delivered by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin at the Thirtieth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention On Climate Change (COP30)», in Belém, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/messages/pont-messages/2025/documents/20251107-messaggio-cop30.html>.

grassroots solidarity. By bridging these two spheres of influence, these communities underscore the inseparable link between ecological protection and social justice, establishing themselves as indispensable partners in securing the future of the Amazon and advancing the global agenda for climate justice.

#### 4.5.2. *Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Councils of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean*

The bishop conferences of the Global South issued a pastoral statement on the ecological situations and the need for action, this is in view of the coming COP30 in Belem, Brazil. The Bishops of the Global South not only affirm the ecological crisis they are facing but likewise pointed out the systemic failure in addressing the crisis. Evidence points to a direct link between government and business corruption, militarization, and the escalating climate crisis in impoverished areas. Meanwhile, large-scale projects, such as land reclamation, are aggressively destroying vital coastal areas, devastating the marine ecosystem and shattering the livelihoods of traditional fishing communities. Even more heartbreaking is the displacement of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands, sacrificed for the sake of mining and forest destruction. This is the harsh backdrop against which calls for justice are rising. In the face of this immense challenge, the Ecclesial Response is becoming a beacon of hope and action. It's a movement built on integrating interreligious and ecumenical initiatives into the heart of climate issues. The power of community organization and church participation is recognized as an essential component for effective action on the ground. The collective stance of the Bishops' Conferences offers hope, primarily because it's grounded in a profound act of listening to the issues that genuinely affect the people and their communities, the statement says

As a Church on pilgrimage in the Global South, we will not cease to raise our voice against social and ecological injustices. We will do so inspired by the certainty that the cry of the Earth is inseparable from the cry of the poor<sup>83</sup>.

The Bishops of the Global South have issued three clear and urgent demands for climate action. First, they insist on the recognition of ecological debt, meaning that industrialized nations must acknowledge and compensate the South for the historical environmental damage caused by their pollution. Second, they demand an end to fossil fuel expansion globally, arguing that no new coal, oil, or gas projects should be developed. Finally, they call for a just transition –a comprehensive shift away from fossil fuels that is deliberately designed to uplift the poor and ensure that the solutions simultaneously restore creation and address systemic inequalities, «we urgently demand collective action for the climate, biodiversity and the rights of all living beings, as well as a change in the economic model in favour of the common good and future generations»<sup>84</sup>.

#### 4.5.3. *Catholic actors at COP30*

The participation of Catholic actors at COP30 in Belém marked a powerful demonstration of faith-based commitment to translating ethical principles into concrete political demands. Moving beyond general calls for action, this coalition strategically

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<sup>83</sup> A Message from the Catholic Episcopal Conferences and Vouncils of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean on the occasion of COP30, «A Call for Climate Justice and the Common Home: Ecological Conversion, Transformation and Resistance to False Solutions», 12 June 2025, [https://iglesiasymineria.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ENG\\_The-Churches-Global-South-on-ocassion-of-COP30-1.pdf](https://iglesiasymineria.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ENG_The-Churches-Global-South-on-ocassion-of-COP30-1.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> «A Message from the Catholic Episcopal Conferences», p.11.

endorsed a comprehensive agenda, aligning its voice with the most vulnerable populations and grassroots movements. The Catholic actors at COP30 endorsed the demands climate-vulnerable nations: Stronger emissions targets for 2030 from wealthy, high-polluting countries, A concrete roadmap to end deforestation by 2030, Real implementation support –not just promises on paper, Recognition of the emergency –that climate impacts are happening now, not in a distant future, Financial fairness– acknowledging that those who contributed least to the problem need the most support.

The Catholic actors at COP30 endorsed the demands of the Peoples' summit, namely, (1) Genuine territorial protection –Indigenous land rights are climate action; (2) Climate justice, not climate capitalism –no false solutions or greenwashing; (3) End fossil fuel expansion –no new coal, oil, or gas projects; (4) Accountability from leaders –match words with action; and (5) Intersectional justice –climate, racial, economic, and territorial justice are inseparable.

Catholic Statement at COP30: «As we continue this journey of ecological conversion, we ask for the grace to care more tenderly for creation, to walk in deeper solidarity with one another, and to grow in the courage needed to respond faithfully to the urgent challenges of our time, which affect us all, but especially women, youth, migrants, Indigenous peoples, and the most marginalized»<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> CIDSE, «COP30 Catholic Statement», <https://www.cidse.org/2025/11/19/sign-on-for-the-cop30-catholic-statement/>.

#### 4.5.4. *The Holy See's Diplomatic and Moral Role in Climate Negotiations*

The Holy See has consistently provided a crucial diplomatic and moral voice during global climate negotiations, actively championing Pope Francis's call for integral ecological commitment since the publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015. This engagement was formally solidified when the Holy See, acting on behalf of the Vatican City State (VCS), was officially admitted as a Party<sup>86</sup> to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on September 4, 2022. This move transformed the Holy See's status from a mere observer to a formal party, significantly enhancing its ability to participate in and influence the international diplomatic framework for climate action.

One of the regular dialogues between the Vatican delegation and the participating members of the Catholics@COP30 appeared to be cordial, with Dr. Paolo Conversi, a member of the Vatican Delegation at COP30, emphasized that the Holy See is committed to climate action and emphasized the need for ecological education as the pillar of the just transition work programme.

«We cannot achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement unless political and technical solutions are accompanied by an educational process that proposes new, sustainable ways of living and caring for creation»<sup>87</sup>, said Archbishop Giambattista

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<sup>86</sup> Vatican City State, «First National Communication United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 2025», On 4 July 2022, the Holy See acceded, in the name and on behalf of the VCS, to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as a non-Annex I Party, and, on 4 September 2022, it acceded to the Paris Agreement, p. 2. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/HolySeeNationalCommunication01.pdf>.

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-11/holy-see-giambattista-diquattro-cop30-climate-human-face.html>.



Diquattro, Apostolic Nuncio to Brazil and head of the Holy See delegation.

Despite its formal admission to the UNFCCC, the Vatican delegation still faces significant criticism regarding its diplomatic positions in climate negotiations, often prioritizing official diplomatic dialogue over bolder ecological commitments. This tension was starkly highlighted at the latest COP30, where the Holy See delegation notably did not sign the non-fossil-fuel roadmap, a decision viewed by many as inconsistent with the call of climate justice and outside the progressive ecological direction set by Pope Francis. This ‘diplomatic resistance’ regarding climate justice commitments was publicly noted by Catholic leaders, including Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of the FABC delegation, who specifically critiqued the Holy See delegation’s position in a manner that aligned against the clear demands made by the Global South bishops<sup>88</sup>. Even then, Pope Leo XIV during the ‘Raising Hope Conference’ in Castel Gandolfo had hope for a better outcome, he says:

It is my hope that the upcoming international summits of the United Nations –the 2025 Climate Change Conference (COP 30), the 53<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Session of the Committee on World Food Security, and the 2026 Water Conference– will listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, families, indigenous peoples, involuntary migrants and believers throughout the world<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>88</sup> «Informal dialogue with Catholic actors at COP30», 16 November 2025, Conference Room, Parish of San Jose de Queluz, Belem, Brazil.

<sup>89</sup> Pope Leo XIV, «Raising Hope Conference», Mariapolis Center (Castel Gandolfo), 1 October 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/october/documents/20251001-conferenza-mariapoli.html>.

#### 4.5.5. *The World Council of Churches (WCC)*

The WCC continues to have a decisive presence at every COP Summit, serving not merely as an organized body of Protestant churches but as a powerful, unified ecumenical voice in the global call for climate justice. Through its continuous engagement, the WCC effectively employs the prophetic voice of Pope Francis and the Catholic Church's integral ecology framework, amplifying a shared Christian mandate to address the social and ecological crisis. This strategic collaboration compels world leaders to recognize the issue as a moral and spiritual imperative, ensuring that the principles of equity, accountability, and the defence of the most vulnerable remain central to all climate action and policy.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), in a recently released statement after COP30, says:

[...] more than a political or technological problem, humanity's collective inability or unwillingness to commit to taking the needed action to avert climate catastrophe represents a profound spiritual and ethical crisis, a failure of moral responsibility, a lack of justice and compassion. As Christians, our faith in God the Creator is inseparably linked with our public advocacy for all Creation. Our prayer to the triune God and the compassion of Jesus Christ move us to action for climate justice<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> World Council of Churches (WCC), «Statement on Proclaiming Jubilee for People and Planet: Reflections on The Outcomes of the COP30 Climate Change Conference and the G20 Leaders' Summit», WCC Executive Committee meeting in Hangzhou, China, 20-25 November 2025.

## 5. Conclusion

The panorama of climate justice has evolved from an initial demand for global climate action into an established concept now integrated into the official texts of international climate negotiations and debates. However, the concept's true definition retains a profound human and ecological character, embodying the human face of the victims of climate disruption and the scarred face of nature. This foundational ethical clarity must not be lost amidst the continuing restraint of countries and institutions that remain unwilling to be accountable for the pervasive ecological injustice they have caused. The integrity of climate justice, therefore, lies in compelling historical emitters to accept responsibility, pay the climate debt, and ensure that reparative action addresses the intertwined cries of the earth and the earth. Thus, the continuing climate action in many forms must be pursued to demand climate justice.

The necessity of this moral transformation is powerfully underscored by Pope Francis's eco-theology. His concept of integral ecology, which defines a methodology for achieving ecological justice, is specifically designed to break «the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness»<sup>91</sup>. By mandating that the defence of nature is inseparable from the plight of the poor, Francis provides the essential ethical and spiritual conversion required to dismantle the systemic roots of environmental degradation and social inequality. The commitment of faith communities then, is important in bringing the voices of those facing the climate impacts and challenged by on-going destruction across the platforms of negotiations, dialogue and direct action.

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<sup>91</sup> LS 230.

Ultimately, Pope Francis's intervention is an urgent, systemic call for immediate action –not just a warning– that challenges our moral obligation to care for people and nature. His appeal demands a rigorous examination of our faith values and an active response to the destruction of our common home. While faith communities face the continuing challenge of maintaining an ethically consistent voice and overcoming reluctance in the face of ground-zero climate disasters, the framework of integral ecology provides the necessary theological foundation. Therefore, the central conclusion of this study is that integral ecology stands as the indispensable ethical and spiritual tool for humanity and global institutions to move past inaction, embrace ethical responsibility, and decisively ensure the realization of global climate justice.

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