

## A Climate Change Edict for 2024

The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP28, held at Expo City, Dubai, is over. Disappointing assessments are being made of this year's UN climate agreement held annually since 1992. COP conferences are meant to forge a common global agenda for dealing with the global crisis in climate change, and not give way to climate change deniers and delayers. Relatively little was said about what is the major threat to our environment, the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas and the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine.

COP conferences are unique in that they draw the science of climate change into dialogue with operative social values. They are meant to confront us with the challenge of taking care of the community and caring for the earth. With the military-industrial complex clearly in mind, Pope Francis made his strongest statement yet on how culpability lay with big industries, world leaders, and "irresponsible" Western lifestyles. The pontiff wrote in his 7,000-word encyclical called *Laudate Deum* ("Praise God") that, "Our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point."

*Laudate Deum* is a follow-up to his 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Si* ("Praised Be to You"), which was the first ever pontifical writing completely dedicated to ecological issues, a cornerstone of Francis' papacy. Fostering an ethical order in the years that lie before us of necessity draws upon environmental practice, something so foundational will shape our conceptions of consumption and population policy. Ethics in this domain is clearly being worked out in relation to scientific knowledge (facts) and religious reflection (values). These categories are two parts of a whole that frame the way we view and maintain sustainability on planet earth. The historical era into which we have moved challenges us to formulate a new ethic appropriate to the task before us. Earth's capacity to meet human demands for natural resources and, equally, its ability to absorb the waste produced by human activity, is reaching its limits. In addition to the kind of integration between science and religion that is required, the following three strategies (among others) are suggested.

***Inclusivity:*** *First, better long-range thinking is necessary to meet the environmental challenge. This requires a cross-cultural perspective because the nature of the problem is global.* The search for a global and inclusive ethic for environmental security and economic sustainability has implications for human rights. Any transnational thinking requires interreligious implications. This is particularly true for reflection on The Earth Charter which seeks to identify the core values and principles that should guide global conservation and sustainable development. The discussion entails derivative questions about human rights in the context of an emerging global politics, which demands that we move beyond the patterns of national interest that have dominated political thought at least since the Peace of Westphalia (1648). It draws in definitions of development that affect economic well-being and reflect indigenous and other religious worldviews. The discussion entails the value of all sentient life and picks up the issues raised by deep-ecology or eco-philosophy. These are issues that require good science, as well as good reflection on the nature and origin of our values, traditional matters of faith or religion.

***Technology:*** *Second, further thought needs to be given to the meaning and use of technology. "Ecology" has to do with all living species, habitats, and eco-systems; "environment" has to do with the human social, economic, and material context for life.* Yet the terms are used without discrimination or are collapsed into each other, interfering with our understanding of culture and nature. It is the premise of most theorists that the way we live in relation to these categories is both the locus of the problem, as well as the solution. Politics and disputes about the meaning of environmental degradation become directly

involved in the implications of economic action and technical deployment. Our sense of the meaning and use of technology is directly related to our understanding of the meaning of human activity in the world. How we think about ourselves is reflected in the development – creation – and use of technology.

The metaphor that seeks to tie together many of the religious traditions as they approach global sustainability is that of stewardship. Embedded in Semitic tradition and developed variously, this image emphasizes the relational context in which humanity stands with respect to the rest of nature. Stewardship neither gives way to depressive determinism nor becomes overly optimistic about the spheres of human freedom open to us in the future. It demands as full a knowledge of the natural world as can be discerned,

***Metaphor for Self-Identity:*** *Third, in the movement toward equity in consumption and population within the parameters of global sustainability, what encouragement is there for those who have more to give to those who have less, particularly in light of human competitiveness?* The answer requires a metaphor for human self-identity and behavior such as that implied by the idea of stewardship. Without such a metaphor to relate us to God’s creation, any idea of a Jubilee Year, Sabbath Restitution, or Islamic Order, as conceived in our different religious traditions, will never be realized.

Through Spirituality & Sustainability: Global Network (SSGN) and its Season of Creation Team: “Bridging the Tectonic Plates,” an effort was made to envision the large-scale geological relationships and the unified CALL TO ACTION in Light of Discussions on *Laudato Si* and *Laudate Deum*, by partnering between North America and Iceland, or the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. This was an attempt to look beyond political boundaries and see the way in which issues of climate change are not limited by politics. An “edict” was drawn up by partners in the conversation. The term “edict” was consciously chosen to underscore the political nature of this Call to Action. Five clauses identify five calls to action:

1. We must uplift the next generation so that goodness and hope may reside with them.
2. Corporations, not just consumers, must be held accountable in abuses of power.
3. Transference across culture is paramount, so we must also build better relations with indigenous communities.
4. We call on the global citizenry to understand their place and effect on nature.
5. The Church must be intentional about fostering ministries that focus on Care for Creation, but also in reaching out to secular allies, for we are truly stronger together.

***(date of discussion)***

***(8/31) We are to be a people of hope.***

People of hope begin with prayer. Our world presents us with the calamities of climate change and political unrest. The earth as we know it is at risk from these two related challenges. The history of life on this planet has always been one of fluctuations. What is new is humans. Their appearance is described in the biblical narrative as being very good. **Action:** We must uplift the next generation so that goodness and hope may reside with them.

***(9/7) Our Common Home confronts a crisis.***

Now, the planet is less of a garden and more of a lifeboat. Those with resources can find a place in the boat; for others, each day is a challenge for survival. The climate crisis confronts us with the challenge of both taking care of the community and caring for the earth. Instead of transformation, we offer cynicism and resignation, bound by patterns of political despotism, corporate greed, and rapid commodification, leading to patterns of brutal consumption and grounded in nihilism. **Action:** Corporations, not just consumers, must be held accountable in abuses of power.

***(9/14) The Gospel of Creation finds its violent undoing in contemporary challenges.***

We view creation through the refracted light of science and religion. They provide the stained-glass windows as with Skálholt Cathedral to God's point of view. We learn to act, in the words of Augustine, as if everything depended on us, but to pray as if all depended on God, eliciting praise with Saint Francis in the Canticle of Creation. The first step in the weaving of this tapestry is naming what we encounter truly or falsely. We do this under the hovering spirit of Genesis and with the image of the river and tree of life (Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22). The next step concerns social justice and respect for all people made in the image of God (*imago dei*), and thereby welcoming all as we are each called to live in God's country. Land is given in light of maintaining righteousness and equality for all. The third step is to avoid the abuse of nature for the sake of present and future generations. The Gospel of Creation is embodied in the Sabbath and the Ten Commandments which provide the covenant of life for the stewards of God's lands. The undoing of this gospel will come about by our attitude to seven factors: climate change, provoking and waging of war, hijacking of democracy by corporate power, social inequality, restrictive immigration, fake news and narratives, and misuse of artificial intelligence. **Action:** We call on the global citizenry to understand their place and effect on nature.

***(9/21) The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis must be understood and exposed: Adopting Integral Ecology.***

A critique of human action in the world through a technocratic lens is seen to be limiting to social life. There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature unless humanity reassess its vocation and avoids efforts in this respect devolving into romantic individualism. Sociologist Jacques Ellul defines critical reaction to a technocratic paradigm as central to integral ecology and urges the building of social capital, as seen in Robert Putnam and Eboo Patel through ecumenical and interfaith agencies. The meaning of culture, language, and work come together in service of humanity. The tools we use affect our language; language frames understanding. The lens through which we view the world cannot be merely technocratic, as argued by Ellul (*The Technocratic Society*). **Action:** Transference across culture is paramount, so we must also build better relations with indigenous communities.

***(9/28) Lines of Approach are Discerned Through Ecological Education and Spirituality.***

Domestic and international ecological consciousness has grown (1972; 1992; 2012...) in the face of scandalous levels of consumption. Transparency in decision-making is all too often blurred and genuine political awareness and honest jurisprudence is essential. An ecological lifestyle framed by scientific and religious awareness reaches toward an Augustinian lifestyle, "You have made us for yourself, Oh Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you" (Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1). **Action:** The Church must be intentional about fostering ministries that focus on Care for Creation, but also in reaching out to secular allies, for we are truly stronger together.

**Partners in Conversation**

Organized by "Spirituality & Sustainability: Global Network (SSGN)" and its Season of Creation Team: "Bridging the Tectonic Plates."

**Spirituality & Sustainability: Global Network (SSGN)  
Season of Creation Team: Bridging the Tectonic Plates**

**Rev. Dr. Jim Antal**, Special Advisor on Climate Justice to United Church of Christ General Minister and President; Author: [\*Climate Church, Climate World - Revised & Updated 2023\*](#) [retired Mass. Conference UCC Minister & President].

**Dr. Nina Balmaceda** is the associate director of the Center for Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School, where she teaches theology, theory and practice of conflict transformation and reconciliation. At Duke, Nina also serves on the Duke Human Rights Center Faculty Board, and co-leads the Americas Initiative for Transformation and Reconciliation, the Certificate on Faith-based advocacy, organizing, and social transformation, and the Certificate in Conflict Transformation and Reconciliation. Nina is also the president/CEO of Peace and Hope International (PHI), a faith-based peacebuilding nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing violence and confronting environmental abuse and other forms of injustice among marginalized communities through its sister organizations in Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador.

**Rev. Dr. Kristján Björnsson** has served as a bishop in Skalholt, Iceland, for last 5 Years and senior pastor since 1989, vice Chair to the Icelandic Institution on Religion and Reconciliation ([www.stofnunsigurbjorns.is](http://www.stofnunsigurbjorns.is)), He was editor of Church Journal and a former member of the board of The Lutheran Church of Iceland. He has been participant in managing breakout sessions at Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik 2015 - 23 focusing on international interfaith collaboration with spiritual leaders and scholars.

**Dr. Sólveig Anna Bóasdóttir**, Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of Iceland at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Iceland. Her areas of expertise are Christian ethics, feminist ethics and sexual ethics.

**Dan Carman** graduated from the Boston University School of Theology (STH), with a Master of Divinity in Theology and the Arts, and a certificate in Religion and Conflict Transformation. He serves in Metropolitan Ministries (CMM), Boston's oldest interfaith social action network.

**Rev. Dr. Donald B. Conroy** is a theologian, ecumenical leader, family life minister, environmental activist and board chairman of the National Institute for the Family NIF (Washington, DC). He has been active in theological and ecumenical development and has taught at Duquesne University and the Washington Theological Union.

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**Rev. Gunnlaugur Garðarsson** is pastor in the Church of Iceland, Iceland.

**Rev Gunnþór Ingason** graduated from the University of Iceland, Reykjavik, with a Cand.Theol./M.A. degree in theology and at the same time studied psychology and social sciences. He studied Christian Mysticism and Third World Theology at the Clerical Seminary in Lögumkloster, Denmark, and Celtic Christianity and Medieval Latin at the University of Wales, Lampeter, where he received an MA degree in the former subject.

**Dr. Ögmundur Jónasson**, born in Reykjavík, Iceland, 1948, is a historian from Edinburgh University. He was foreign news correspondent at Icelandic State TV for a decade, leader of the public service unions in Iceland and active in international trade union work for over twenty years, Member of Parliament from 1995 to 2016, held several ministerial posts, headed the Constitutional and Supervisory Committee of the Icelandic Parliament after leaving government and until his retirement in 2016.

**Rev. Dr. Rodney Petersen** served as Executive Director of the Boston Theological Institute (BTI), the consortium of theological schools, seminaries, and university divinity schools in the Greater Boston area (1990-2014). He taught in BTI member schools and overseas; facilitated workshops on religion and conflict, and with Boston's Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries.

**Rebecca Sommer-Petersen** holds a Master of Divinity and a Master of Theology degree from Boston University School of Theology. Her major focus was on Community Ministry and Ecumenism. She currently serves as Director of The Salvation Army of Chatham County. Rebecca is an Ordained Pastor with the International Council of Community Churches. She also holds certification as a Dementia Practitioner and healthcare "Coleman Coach", using Motivational Interviewing.

**Rev. Andrew Taylor-Troutman** is the pastor and head of staff of Chapel in the Pines, a Presbyterian (U.S.A.) congregation in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The church's ministry includes an earth care focus. Taylor-Troutman is the author of seven books, including a 2023 collection of poems with environmental themes, *Tigers, Mice & Strawberries*.

**Fr. Fidelis N. Uko**, Catholic priest from Nigeria; ordained a Catholic priest 24yrs ago. I did pastoral work for 15 years in Nigeria before coming to the United States; currently doctoral candidate in practical theology at Palm Beach Atlantic University, Florida.

**Rev. Vernon Walker** works with Mass. Clean Water, Boston; formerly with Communities Responding to Extreme Weather (CREW).