

The Climate Summit in Belém, Brazil: Just Another Summit?

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From November 6 to 21 this year, COP 30 will be held in Belém, in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon. Ten years after the Paris Agreement, this climate summit transcends the usual diplomatic calendar to become an event of profound symbolism. As stated by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the summit will be an opportunity for the world to discuss the importance of the Amazon within the Amazon itself, listening directly to its peoples.¹

The conference agenda is anchored in crucial mandates that will define the trajectory of global climate action for the next decade. It inherits from COP 28 the task of responding to the first Global Stocktake, which concluded that current efforts are insufficient to limit warming to 1.5°C and called for the submission of a new and more ambitious round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), or national climate action plans by February 2025. It will also need to build on the financial commitments established at the last COP 29, particularly with regard to the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), which will replace the target of \$100 billion per year in aid to countries affected by climate change.

Since the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, contemporary to the Paris Agreement, the most recent Social Doctrine of the Church offers an operational paradigm, integral ecology, capable of reconfiguring the foundations of climate action on the basis of principles of moral theology.

Integral ecology on the immanent level, as a paradigm of socio-environmental justice, challenges the “technocratic paradigm” that often dominates negotiations, which blindly relies on technological and market solutions without addressing the root causes of the crisis (cf. *Laudate Deum*, 57). Instead, the social teaching of the Church proposes a relational approach that inseparably links social justice with environmental sustainability, international solidarity with historical responsibility, and political urgency with the need for profound personal and communal conversion.

The Brazilian presidency has structured the COP 30 negotiation agenda around six strategic pillars, designed to address the climate crisis in a systemic manner: 1) Energy, industry, and transport transition; 2) Forest, ocean, and biodiversity management; 3) Agriculture and food systems transformation; 4) Building resilience for cities, infrastructure, and water; 5) Promoting human and social development, and 6) Unleashing cross-cutting enablers and accelerators, including finance, technology and capacity building.²

¹ COP 30 will be held from November 6 to 21, 2025, in Belém, Brazil - UN.org., <https://www.un.org/es/climatechange/cop30>

² COP30 announces the calendar of theme days and invites the world to Belém, <https://cop30.br/es/noticias-dela-cop30/la-cop30-anuncia-el-calendario-de-dias-tematicos-e-invita-al-mundo-a-belem>

This multisectoral approach finds a deep correlation and further elaboration in the Catholic concept of integral ecology. This concept is the cornerstone of the Church's view on environmental matters and posits that “there are not two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but a single, complex socio-environmental crisis” (*Laudato Si'*, 139). Therefore, solutions cannot be fragmented; they require “an integral approach to combat poverty, restore dignity to the excluded, and, at the same time, care for nature” (*Laudato Si'*, 139).

From this perspective, integral ecology can be the ethos that connects and gives coherence to all the pillars of the summit. It insists that energy transition policies (pillar 1) cannot be dissociated from their impacts on employment, health, and social justice (pillar 5); that funding for forest conservation (pillar 2) must be intrinsically linked to the recognition of the territorial rights and wisdom of indigenous peoples (pillar 5); and that the transformation of food systems (pillar 3) is a matter of justice and sovereignty, not just productivity or efficiency (*Laudato Si'*, 129).

The very structure of the COP 30 agenda, with its interconnected pillars and a calendar of theme days that deliberately cross disciplines—for example, dedicating days to “Health, Employment, Education, Culture, Justice, and Human Rights” alongside days on “Energy, Industry, Transportation,” and “Forests, Oceans, Biodiversity”—is a practical expression of the values of Catholic integral ecology. It is not that the organizers are using the terminology of social doctrine, but rather that the design of the summit reflects a practical recognition, based on scientific knowledge, that “everything is connected.” In this structural alignment, the social teaching of the Church can act not as an external critique or moralistic add-on, but as a hermeneutical tool that reveals and strengthens the internal logic and transformative potential of the COP 30 agenda itself. By providing explicit language and ethical grounding for what is already implicitly structured, Catholic social thought can help the conference fulfill its ambition of being a true “turning point.” But will it be able to achieve its ambition?

A central focus of this climate summit will be climate finance, following up on the outcomes of COP 29 and Brazil's reaffirmed urgency to mobilize significant resources for climate action in developing countries. Discussions will focus on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), the reform of multilateral banks, and the sustained capitalization of the Loss and Damage fund, established to compensate most vulnerable nations for the inevitable impacts of climate change.

Laudato Si' introduces a profound concept into this debate: “ecological debt,” and in this jubilee year, the Church has insisted on it greatly. This concept maintains that there is a historical and current debt of the Global North to the Global South, generated by “trade imbalances with ecological consequences, as well as by the disproportionate use of natural resources, historically carried out by some countries” (*Laudato Si'*, 51).

The enormous consumption of rich nations has had direct repercussions on the poorest places, where rising temperatures and drought are wreaking havoc. This concept enriches and radically reorients the debate on financing. It transforms the framework of the discussion: climate financing is no longer an act of “aid” or “charity” from rich countries, but rather an act of restorative justice. It is, in essence, the payment of a debt. This perspective not only morally and politically strengthens the demands of the Global South, but also challenges the narrative that all countries share a common but undifferentiated responsibility. It recognizes that responsibilities are, in fact, differentiated, based on historical contribution to the crisis. Paragraph 3 of the exhortation *Laudate Deum* reinforces this idea by describing the fact that the effects of climate change are borne by the most vulnerable as a “striking example of structural sin,” a systemic injustice that requires systemic redress.

The COP 30 agenda, reflecting global trends, includes a strong technological component, with theme days dedicated to science, technology, artificial intelligence, and carbon markets. While these tools are potentially important, the social teaching of the Church warns against the hegemony of the “technocratic paradigm”: the belief that every environmental problem can and should be solved with a technical or market solution, without the need to question or change the models of production, consumption, and power structures that govern society (*Laudato Si'*, 5).

Furthermore, *Laudato Si'* criticizes the logic that “assumes all technological development is beneficial, without paying attention to the possible negative consequences for human beings” (*Laudato Si'*, 109). Furthermore, *Laudato Si'* criticizes the logic that “assumes all technological development is beneficial, without paying attention to possible negative consequences for human beings” (*Laudato Si'*, 109). For its part, *Laudate Deum* issues a stern warning: “never before has humanity had such power over itself, and nothing guarantees that it will use it well” (*Laudate Deum*, 23). Enriching the COP 30 agenda from this perspective means subjecting climate geoengineering proposals, carbon offset mechanisms, and other technological “solutions” to ethical scrutiny. The fundamental question is not only whether they work technically, but whom they serve: Do they promote the common good or the interests of a minority?

Do they empower local communities or further marginalize them? Do they propel us toward an authentic “ecological conversion,” which involves profound changes in lifestyles and values, or do they simply provide an alibi for the current unsustainable development model to continue without significant change?

Ultimately, if the climate summit in Bethlehem fails once again to achieve that much-desired turning point, it will not be for lack of a good basic structure, but because of a moral and political failure to implement these values in the face of the vested interests of the technocratic paradigm.