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2015

January 2015

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January 2015

“Climate Change” issue

Friends Journal

Some of the articles in the issue include:

*Allen’s Neck Meeting Clambake Celebrates 125 Years*
By Joseph E. Ingoldsby

*Affirming the Heart of Climate Advocacy*
By Jose Aguto and Emily Wirzba

*Taking Heart*
By Marcia Cleveland

*The Lambs War and Climate Change*
By Will Taber
Allowing Ourselves to Be Bold
By George Lakey

Climate Change Is a Hot Mess
By Karie Firoozmand

For more, visit:

January 2015

Earth Keeper Newsletter
Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=cf5449b637&e=a758405790

January 1, 2015

Can a Christian Make Conservatives Care About Climate Change?

Meet the 29-year-old using her conservative pedigree to help save the planet

By Coco McPherson
Rolling Stone

Anna Jane Joyner is evangelical royalty: Her father, Rick Joyner, founded a South Carolina-based megachurch with 1,000 congregations in 59 countries. But Anna Jane had a political come-to-Jesus moment while at UNC, where she embraced progressive politics. Today, at 29, she's the millennial face of a growing national movement that seeks to convince America's 80 million evangelicals that biblical tenets are compatible with environmentalism. "There's a huge host of faith communities who get it theologically, who even get the science piece of it," Joyner says. "But they're not mobilized in taking action."

Last year, Joyner was featured in Showtime's documentary series Years of Living Dangerously, where she debated climate change with her father in a gripping segment. "What I found was that his resistance had very little to do with theology and much more to do with his entrenched political ideology," she says. "Conservative talking heads and think tanks don't have to prove the science, they just have to introduce an element of doubt."

Lately, Joyner is working with Here Now, a group testing new tactics for engaging hard-to-reach audiences – including evangelicals – around climate change. And she's excited about an even bigger name in the faith-based community than her dad: Pope Francis, who will release a papal
encyclical on the climate this year. "We're experiencing climate impacts, but we have the solutions ready to go," says Joyner. "Renewable energy is an economic driver and a climate solution, and getting [Obama's] Clean Power Plan enacted is critical."


January 2, 2015

2015 could be the year we save the earth

By NCR Editorial Staff
National Catholic Reporter

When it comes to our planet's health, "2015 could be a decisive year in history," Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, told a gathering in London in November. We agree with the bishop: 2015 could go down in history as the year we saved the earth. We hope Catholics around the world can muster the spiritual and political clout to help make it happen.

The developments in early December out of Peru signal that a concrete, global solution for addressing climate change might well be within reach. The Lima Accord was an important breakthrough, representing the first time that each of the 195 member-nations in the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed to make commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Deadlines for submitting carbon-cutting plans come in March and June, and U.N. meetings in Geneva (February) and in Bonn, Germany (June), will further shape the Lima document before possible finalization in Paris in December. The year holds great possibilities, but it will be a long, hard fight against vested interests in the fossil fuel industry and global economic status quo.

Those looking for a strong voice for sustainability and environmental stewardship could find an able ally in Pope Francis. Faith-based communities can expect an accurate road map to the issues early in 2015 when Francis is expected to release his long-awaited encyclical on the environment. Francis will use the document to teach Catholics — as well as other religious and secular communities — about creation, humans' relations to it, and the state of the climate. If usual patterns with this pope hold true, it should spark intense global interest and prompt much conversation, within parishes, among bishops and in society at large, thanks to media coverage.

That Francis has selected the environment for his first solo encyclical (Lumen Fidei was largely written by Pope Benedict XVI) is in itself significant. Judging from his comments so far, Francis won't likely wax poetically about the fate of frozen tundra or endangered species, as much as he will place special focus on the human elements involved — both in the mistreatment of the planet and the resulting mistreatment of its people, particularly the world's poor.
"Respect for nature also calls for recognizing that man himself is a fundamental part of it. Along with an environmental ecology, there is also need of that human ecology which consists in respect for the person," he told the European Parliament in November.

Additionally, the Vatican has floated the idea of hosting religious leaders at some point this year to further raise climate awareness ahead of the Paris summit. We hope Francis can duplicate in climate change negotiations the diplomatic acumen he demonstrated in cracking a 60-year stalemate in U.S.-Cuba relations.

As for the U.S., President Barack Obama clearly sees climate change as a legacy issue, and he will spend his remaining time in office addressing it. The mid-November deal he made with China, the world's leading greenhouse gas emitter (the U.S. is second), gave needed momentum to the Lima talks.

The groundwork for U.S. commitments, though, will become a battleground once the 114th Congress is sworn into office. Incoming majority leader Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has stated his first priority will be a bill approving construction of the highly contentious Keystone XL pipeline.

Politicians from coal country, McConnell included, are also dead set against the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed Clean Power Plan, which would greatly reduce emissions from coal- and gas-fired power plants.

On behalf of the U.S. bishops, Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami and Bishop Richard Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, wrote to the EPA in July supporting national carbon reduction standards and encouraging Catholics to weigh in during a public commenting period that ended Dec. 1.

We applaud these efforts and encourage the U.S. bishops to do more. They have pulpits, blogs and diocesan newspapers as platforms and will have Francis' encyclical to form their message. By further leveraging alliances with groups like Franciscan Action Network and Catholic Climate Covenant, Catholics could become opinion leaders for carbon reduction in 2015.


January 5, 2015

Pope Francis climate change call to action makes waves in faith communities

CBC/Radio–Canada

The Current
With Anna Maria Tremonti

The Catholic Church is about to bring the influence of the Holy See to the issue of climate change. Today, we look at the religious push to protect the environment.
A few months ago, Pope Francis urged humanity to have more respect for nature, saying that we are the custodians of a planet created by God.

It's not for nothing that the Pope chose to name himself after St. Francis of Assisi -- the Patron Saint of Ecology who, it is said, preached to birds and blessed wolves.

The environment may feature highly among the Pope's priorities in 2015. There are reports that Pope Francis will issue a powerful edict -- called an Encyclical -- telling the Catholic world to step up the fight against climate change. And news of the Pontiff's environmental intentions have made waves -- both within the Catholic world and outside it.

For more on this we were joined by:

- **Heather Eaton** is as an ecological Catholic Theologian at Saint Paul University in Ottawa.
- **Asma Mahdi** is an environmental scientist and a board member of a non-governmental organization called Green Muslims in Washington.
- **Jim Wallis** is a Christian Evangelical writer and political activist and the founder of Sojourners magazine. He was in Daytona Beach, Florida.

We want to hear from you. What's the role of religion in taking action against climate change? Let us know what you think.

Tweet us @thecurrentcbc. Or e-mail us through our website. Find us on Facebook. Call us toll-free at 1 877 287 7366. And as always if you missed anything on The Current, grab a podcast.

This segment was produced by The Current's Marc Apollonio and Ines Colabrese.

http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/episode/2015/01/05/pope-francis-climate-change-religion/

January 5, 2015

Why Pope Francis is going green in 2015

Pope Francis has made an ambitious New Year's resolution: help heal human relations with all of creation.

By Stephen Scharper
The Star
While many make New Year resolutions involving better exercise, improved diet, and enhanced time management, Pope Francis appears to have adopted a slightly broader New Year’s objective: to help heal human relations with all of creation.

This past December, having been cited by U.S. President Barack Obama as a key player in the thawing of U.S.-Cuba relations, and having vigorously challenged the Vatican bureaucracy to be more pastorally grounded, the pontiff in 2015 will be turning his impressive energies to climate change.

In March 2015, according to The Guardian, following a visit in Tacloban, the Philippine city ravaged by typhoon Haiyan in 2012, the pope will issue an encyclical on climate change and human ecology, the first environmentally themed encyclical in history.

He is also slated to address the UN General Assembly in September and convene a summit of world religious leaders to address climate change.

According to Bishop Marcelo Sorondo, chancellor of the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the pope hopes to influence next year’s crucial UN climate meeting in Paris, when countries will attempt to finalize two decades of troubled negotiations with a universal and binding commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

According to Yale religion and environment professor Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-founder of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, the forthcoming encyclical will be one of the “most important” documents dealing with the moral implications of climate change, and will explore environmental justice concerns, including how the poor and other vulnerable groups are deeply impacted by global “climate disruption.”

For Dennis Patrick O’Hara, professor of ecological theology at the Toronto School of Theology, Francis’s forthcoming encyclical is an “important new development.”

Whereas Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI expressed environmental concerns in selected messages and addresses, O’Hara notes that an encyclical “has a much greater level of authority” than a message or an address. In addition, Francis has tended to see humanity “as more intimately related to the rest of creation” than his predecessors, suggesting a novel papal approach to the issue.

Once published, the encyclical will be shared with the world’s 5,000 Catholic bishops and over 400,000 priests, who will then potentially incorporate it in their pastoral ministries and share it with their communities.

Why, one wonders, is the pope doing all of this?

The reasons might be threefold.

First, perhaps Pope Francis wishes to make clear that when it comes to matters of creation, the church should be a major player, not a marginal voice. The earth is not just a geopolitical arena,
but it is also, from an ecclesial perspective, God’s creation, and is thus of central concern to the church. Rather than waiting to simply be invited to the table of secular climate change colloquies, Pope Francis is helping set the table.

Second, perhaps Francis is underscoring that this is not just a question of policies and carbon emissions, critical as they are, but it is also one of persons, especially poor and vulnerable persons, who often contribute the least to carbon emissions but suffer the most from “climate chaos” in the form of floods, drought, typhoons, and wildly whipsawing weather patterns.

Building on the social teachings of the church, especially the “option for the poor,” Pope Francis may well be underscoring that climate change, for both ecological and social reasons, is the defining moral reality of our time. As such, it requires the social, political, and moral teachings and imagination of the world’s largest Christian community.

Third, might Pope Francis be suggesting that climate change is not only a moral crisis, but a deeply spiritual crisis as well, one that cuts to the core of who we are and how we relate to all that is? Might he be suggesting that a sustainable solution to this morass is not going to happen outside of a spiritual as well as political and economic framework? Through these myriad green initiatives, might he be picking up a spiritual piece that other world leaders cannot?

If he is picking up that piece, he will be handling it, if his early pontificate be any guide, with compassion, simplicity, gravitas and courage — enviable gifts to bring to any conversation concerning faith and the fate of the earth.

*Stephen Bede Scharper is professor of religion and environment at the University of Toronto. His column appears monthly.* [Stephen.scharper@utoronto.ca](mailto:Stephen.scharper@utoronto.ca)

[http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/01/05/why_pope_francis_is_going_green_in_2015_scharper.html](http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/01/05/why_pope_francis_is_going_green_in_2015_scharper.html)

**January 6, 2015**

Pope Francis plants a flag in the ground on climate change

The Pope’s expected actions continue a tradition of leadership

By John Abraham

The Guardian

Make no mistake about it, there is no longer any rationale for division between science and faith. Over the past decades, scientists and persons of faith have learned to dance in a complementary manner, a “non-overlapping magisterium” as the saying sometimes goes. But as prior conflicts were found to be more molehill than mountain, leaders among the scientific and religious communities have explored collaborative ways to answer scientific questions and provide
solutions to real-world problems that reflect a universal motivation to care for our fellow humans and honor our religious traditions.

Such collaboration is necessary, particularly in areas where the impacts of science so deeply affect the lives of people around the world. A present example comes from our changing climate. As I’ve written in these pages before, my work in the developing world has provided me with first-hand experience of how somewhat abstract and theoretical “global warming” studied in my office in the United States is manifested as human impacts, particularly in subsistence agricultural nations. These subsistence countries are already feeling the impacts of climate change. Ironically, those with the least ability to adapt are being impacted beyond their contribution to the problem.

I am a scientist and my motivation for studying climate change is driven by both a desire to understand the Earth’s environment, but also to provide information for decision makers. What are the impacts of taking certain actions? How will they affect the future climate of our children? But that is as far as my science hat can take me. The actual decisions we make to deal with climate change must come from the values of our society and the cost-benefit analyses of taking action.

But there are some in our society who specialize in human values, they think about what actions reflect ethical and moral values we hold as a collective society; in some cases, these are religious leaders.

A recent news splash was made of predictions of an encyclical soon to be given by Pope Francis, the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church with its 1.2 billion members. This encyclical is expected to further solidify the Catholic Church’s strong stance on climate change and its focus on the impact to people around the globe. As examples of this tradition, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops made early and public statements about the challenge of climate change. Among other statements, in 2011, Pope Benedict XVI strongly supported international climate change action. And now, Pope Francis continues that tradition. But this soon-to-be released encyclical should properly be viewed as a continuation of strong statements he has made since ascending to the papacy.

I asked Dr. Michael Naughton, Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas about the significance of the expected encyclical. He told me,

*For Francis, our ecological crisis highlights how important the relationship between faith and science is. On one hand, science enriches faith by protecting it from superstition and ideologies. On the other hand, faith helps science to see the deeper human implications of the reality in front of it. One of the terms that will most likely to come from Francis’ encyclical is ‘human ecology,’ which sees our ecological crisis in terms of both our natural as well as cultural and social environments.*

While it is not clear what will be in the encyclical, it likely will urge Catholics around to world to take action in their own lives to preserve the environment for themselves, others, and for future generations. The urging will be based on both moral and scientific bases. It may surprise people,
but the Catholic Church has long had active and informed scientific bodies which have informed the papacy, in fact there is a Pontifical Academy of Sciences which serves such a purpose.

While it remains to be seen what long-term impact there is from this encyclical, it is clear that there is a continued emergence of a science-informed, religiously motivated cause for action. Actions that will help the most vulnerable of this world prepare for, and even avoid, the worst consequences of climate change. When people of faith and people of science work together for a common goal, a tremendous potential is realized.

Professor Naughton added his perspective on this forthcoming action, saying,

Francis will no doubt, in his punchy and prophetic tone, draw our attention to a market system that too often treats the environment like a commodity in what he describes as a “throw away” culture. As he is never tired of repeating, the poor suffer the most from our ecological crisis. He will confront this “logic of the market” with a “logic of gift” that views the earth to be shared with all of humanity—a gift in need of great care and attention.

I couldn’t have said it better.


January 7, 2015

'Rock-star pope' intends to amplify his climate message

By Scott Detrow, E&E reporter
ClimateWire

Pope Francis has led the Catholic Church for less than two years. But during that short window, he has breathed new life into a religion struggling with apathy and scandal; earned the praise of social justice activists around the world for an intense focus on poverty; and even played a role in ending a half-century-old stalemate between Cuba and the United States.

So environmental activists were excited to read in The Guardian last week that Francis will add to this busy agenda by making climate change a top priority in 2015.

Like many of Francis' high-profile statements and actions, the move is simultaneously rooted in the Catholic Church's teachings and somewhat unprecedented.

Francis is not the first pope to tackle climate change. Both of his immediate predecessors -- church leaders with well-established conservative roots -- spoke bluntly on the matter. But the formal document Francis plans to issue later this year will be the first time a pontiff has devoted the entire text of a papal encyclical to environmental issues.
Environmentalists hope the document could provide momentum to the push to curb greenhouse gas emissions ahead of December's United Nations climate conference in Paris.

'Speaking up' in a more formal way

Francis has generated global headlines for comments ranging from whether gay men can serve as priests to the validity of the Big Bang theory. All of these remarks came during speeches or off-the-cuff statements at press conferences and papal audiences. Preparing a formal statement of church policy, called an encyclical, is much different.

"While popular media is always enthusiastic about any new utterance by this beloved pope, not all utterances are created equal in the realm of the Catholic Church," explained Christiana Peppard, an assistant professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University.

"An encyclical is a document that has one of the highest forms of authority of any teaching in the church."

Recent popes have regularly called for more environmental stewardship, and they've spoken out on the specific topic of climate change, but no encyclical to date has solely focused on the environment.

"This is really exciting," said Jame Schaefer, an associate professor of systematic theology and ethics at Marquette University.

"For people who are already engaged [on climate change], it's very exciting to have that affirmation from the head of a church. It's important for them to ... feel, wow, we've got a leader from a world religion speaking up."

Many Vatican observers view a recent speech by Argentine Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo as a kind of preview of what Francis will call for in the document. In the November speech, Sorondo said, "If current trends continue, this century will witness unprecedented climate change and the destruction of the ecosystem, with tragic consequences for us all. Human action that doesn't respect nature has a boomerang effect on human beings, creating inequality."

A deeper commitment, not a departure

On a wide range of topics, Francis has departed from the conservative style and substance of his immediate predecessors, Benedict XVI and the recently canonized John Paul II. That's not the case with climate change.

John Paul delivered high-profile remarks on the topic as early as 1990. "The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and related 'greenhouse effect' has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs," he said during a World Day of Peace message.
Benedict earned praise as "the green pope" from some quarters for a series of symbolic actions on climate change. He installed solar panels near St. Peter's Basilica, used offset purchases to make Vatican City the world's first carbon-neutral state and even purchased an electric "Popemobile" (Greenwire, March 1, 2013).

In a wide-ranging 2009 encyclical, Benedict addressed energy consumption. "The technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption," he wrote, "either through an evolution in manufacturing methods or through greater ecological sensitivity among their citizens. It should be added that at present it is possible to achieve improved energy efficiency while at the same time encouraging research into alternative forms of energy."

**Upcoming speech for the U.N.**

But Benedict's 2009 document didn't exactly galvanize the world's 1 billion Catholics to reduce their carbon emissions. The fact is, Peppard said, "most lay people ... don't read encyclicals. They're a somewhat heavy and plodding genre."

Environmental advocates hope Francis' growing global appeal and clout could lead to a different outcome. "A lot of people in positions of power would love to have his approval ratings. He's enormously popular," said Dan Misleh, the executive director of the environmental group Catholic Climate Covenant.

"This is the rock-star pope," said 350.org spokesman Jamie Henn. "For him to take bold leadership on climate change and go beyond the usual rhetoric would send shockwaves through the global community." The climate activist group is urging Francis to take the message a step further and divest the church's massive financial portfolio from the oil and gas industry.

The encyclical's timing could help its message resonate beyond church theologians. The Vatican is expected to release the document in the coming months, ahead of a high-profile U.N. summit on climate change in Paris. And with Francis likely to visit and address the United Nations in New York City this fall, the encyclical could provide the pontiff with material to address the issue head-on to a room full of global leaders.

http://www.eenews.net/stories/1060011220

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**January 8, 2015**

Muslim Groups Give $100,000 To Help Detroiter Without Water, Say It's 'Part Of Our Faith To Help'

By Robbie Couch
Huffington Post
Two Islamic organizations are alleviating Detroit's water crisis with a generous donation that'll benefit some of the city's poorest residents.

Islamic Relief USA and the Michigan Muslim Community Council (MMCC) have donated $100,000 to the Detroit Water Fund and Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency to help the groups assist Detroiter with making their water bill payments, the Associated Press reported.

Beginning last spring, the city has been shutting off water for residents with overdue balances -- a move the United Nations deemed a human rights violation.

More than 31,300 residents have had their water turned off since January 2013, the AP reported.

At a press conference on Wednesday, officials noted that both Islamic Relief USA (the largest Muslim charity organization in the U.S.) and the MMCC agreed to give $50,000 each in funds earmarked for residents with past-due accounts with the water department, The Detroit News reported.

"We are hoping this is going to be contagious," Anwar Khan, CEO of Islamic Relief USA, said in a statement, according to the Detroit News. "The most important thing we have is not our money, it's our energy and our enthusiasm, and it's our people … Also, it is important to us in our faith to help our neighbors. It is a part of our faith to help our friends."

HuffPost blogger Engy Abdelkader spoke to Dr. Muzammil Ahmed, chair of the MMCC, about Detroit shutting off water to some of its most vulnerable residents -- an act the chair called "outrageous."

Ahmed said he'd brainstormed with Islamic Relief USA's leadership and local city officials on how to help a community in need. Ultimately, they decided on giving water -- "the best form of charity, according to Islamic tradition."

"There is a lot of frustration and pessimism among Muslims, and people of faith in general, due to the horrific things that have been done in the name of God and religion over the past year," Dr. Ahmed said, according to Abdelkader's blog. "But there are far more wonderful things that can be done and that are being done, inspired by our faith and our love for our fellow neighbors."

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/08/muslim-group-detroit-water_n_6437506.html

January 8, 2015

When the Anthropocene Came to Halji

By Chris Crews
State of Formation
This is the second in a multi-part series discussing sacred landscapes and religion in the Himalaya. Read the first post here.

The rocky trail we had been hiking all day along the Limi River was interspersed with a mix of subalpine trees and large boulder fields, followed by a low stone wall alongside empty fields. As we crossed an old wooden bridge constructed of hand hewn logs and stones, a wide field of barley in various stages of harvest slowly came into view. The field was interspersed with a winding network of small streams, all nestled inside a small river valley. We were about to enter the village of Halji, our first destination in the remote Limi Valley of far western Nepal. Although I did not realize it as we crossed the bridge, we were entering another community on the front lines of a new era of climate chaos, or what some have taken to calling the Anthropocene.

After traveling in this area for several weeks, it’s easy to appreciate how vulnerable many of these Himalayan communities are to the impacts of climate change, especially those located at higher altitudes where glacial melt poses a serious threat. Halji, the village we had just entered, is a poster child for what at-risk mountain communities facing an increasingly unstable and erratic climate future look like. Although we don’t tend to talk about the issue as much, climate change also poses serious threats to everyday religious practices, especially when sacred sites are located in vulnerable areas. As we spent time in Limi Valley, and talked with locals there, it became clear that what we were seeing in Halji was a portend of a much larger climate trend across the Himalaya.

Halji is located in a small river valley, surrounded by mountains on all sides, with less than one hundred families living there. At one end of the valley, located at the base of one of the mountain slopes, is the main Halji settlement, a cluster of several dozen stone houses and a large monastery complex. Directly behind this area the mountains rise hundreds of meters, and behind one side of this mountain range lies a series of glacial lakes that have formed and expanded thanks to the increasing ice melt from the top of the mountain.

In early 2006, these glacial lakes began to burst, leading to a phenomenon scientists call a glacial lake outburst flood, or GLOF, which can destroy entire towns in an instant. On the afternoon of June 30, 2011, one such flood occurred. It washed away part of Halji, and in the process destroyed several homes and threatened a historically important gompa, or monastery, located in the middle of the village and close to the outflow path from the flood. By chance, a Norwegian graduate student was conducting fieldwork in the village at the time of the flood, and recounted the incident firsthand for the Nepali Times.

At around 4:30 pm there was a loud roar from up the valley, and everyone ran out of their houses. At first, the raging brown water was retained by the gabion walls, the last stretch of which was built only a month earlier. Soon, the embankments gave way and the water and the boulders raced towards the village with great force.

The ground shook and the water was nearly black because of the landslides along the banks. People managed to evacuate in time and move most of their belongings, but had to watch as their homes and fields were carried away.
Amazingly, no humans were killed, but the damage was done. When we visited the village three and a half years later, the damage was still clearly evident, with exposed building sides and a large debris pile where several houses had been sucked into the raging flood waters. The village had rebuilt and the residents had extended a rock retaining wall as protection from future flood surges, but it was obvious to our group as we walked through the outflow area that the new stone walls wouldn’t stop another severe flood.

Villagers in Halji are aware of their precarious situation, and have continued to petition the Nepali government for additional support to address this ongoing climate risk. Some outside groups and individuals, including the graduate student Astrid Hovden who witnessed the 2011 flood, have attempted to raise funds and public attention to help address the issue. Although some aid was sent, the larger glacial flood issue remains.

Besides the human and nonhuman lives at risk, there is a worry that another significant GLOF could damage or destroy Halji’s Rinchenling Gompa, which would be an irreplaceable cultural and historic loss. The monastery is estimated to have been built in the 11th century, and has been connected to the legendary Buddhist figure Rinchen Zangpo, who helped spread Buddhism throughout Tibet and Nepal, making it a historically important site for those studying the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet and Nepal. Based on recent dating of the central, four-fold Vairocana statue inside the temple, the Halji monastery may also be one of the oldest such monasteries in Nepal, which could make it a potential candidate for a UN World Heritage Site designation and an important site for religious pilgrims and cultural tourism.

Discussing the damages she documented while working in the area with the online journal Asian Art, Hovden wrote:

Since the flooding started in 2006 more than 100 fields have been washed away and another 100 fields were completely covered by sand and rendered useless by the recent flood. Some of the livestock is reported missing after the flood and a few of the families have lost all their fields. Food aid will therefore be needed for the winter.

Water mills and important infrastructure like bridges and sections of the main road through the valley were also washed away, and virtually the whole path at the bank of the flooding river leading up to their pastures in a neighbouring valley was completely flooded.

As anyone familiar with climate change in Southeast Asia knows, increasingly frequent floods and more erratic and damaging monsoons are becoming the new norm across the Himalaya. The future for villages like Halji will only grow more dangerous, not less. As climate instability leads to more coastal flooding and melting mountain glaciers, both highland and lowland communities will increasingly have to address and make sense of climate-related disasters in their own backyards. When we spoke with the head monk of the Rinchenling Gompa, he told us that initially many villagers thought the floods were due to local spirits or deities being upset with the village, but after recent events they are convinced climate change is the real source of the problems, not angry mountain spirits.
In this respect, Halji is emblematic of wider changes across the Himalayan region. Just over a year earlier, in the summer of 2013, floods devastated Northern India and portions of the Himalaya, including the Kedarnath Temple and surrounding Kedarnath valley, killing dozens of religious pilgrims who were making their yatra, or pilgrimage, to Hindu holy sites in the region. Ominous scenes like those broadcast on Indian television from Uttarakhand, where a large statue of Lord Shiva in Rishikesh was first submerged, then washed away completely, by the raging water of the Ganges River, are becoming increasingly common. According to the Indian government, more than 5,500 people died in the aftermath of these floods, and millions of rupees of damage was done. Last year saw more erratic monsoons and drought conditions across India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, a trend climate scientists tell us is not likely to improve.

Scientists and writers claim we may now be living in the Anthropocene, a new epoch defined by human actions so immense they are forcing changes to the entire planet that are outside historical norms and without precedent. Despite what commentators like Andrew Revkin claim, there is no such thing as a “good Anthropocene.” For mountain communities like Halji, and coastal cities like New York or New Orleans, increasingly the only options left for us in the Anthropocene are adaptation or extinction. This point was driven home a few days before we departed for western Nepal, when more than 40 people were killed on the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal after Cyclone Hudhud caused a freak snowstorm and series of devastating avalanches, leading to one of the worst trekking disasters in Nepal’s history.

Welcome to a brave new world. Welcome to the Anthropocene.

(For those interested in the Rinchenling Gompa, I have included a series of photos I took, to give a sense of its importance.)

http://www.stateofformation.org/2015/01/when-the-anthropocene-came-to-halji/

January 8, 2015

Pope Francis, the climate activist

The world may hear more about the Pope's coming encyclical on climate change when he visits Tacloban City this January

By Pia Ranada
Passig City Rappler

MANILA, Philippines – Many are familiar with Pope Francis' love for the poor and his commitment to a simple lifestyle, but did you know that he is also a devoted activist for climate change awareness and a passionate environmentalist?

In fact, the leader of the Catholic Church has promised that his first encyclical will be about climate change. Vatican insiders say it could be released early this year, in time to influence an important international climate change conference to be held in Paris in December 2015.
It's no coincidence that one of the Pope's first travels for the year will be to the Philippines, recently ranked the country most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. He'll be making a visit to Tacloban City, ground zero of Super Typhoon Haiyan, said to be one of the strongest storms to make landfall.

In a "mini-encyclical" he delivered last October 28 at the World Meeting of Popular Movements, he blamed global warming and the "plunder of nature" to an excessive economic system centered on the "god of money."

The Pope highlighted that, ironically, those who bear the brunt of ecological devastation are those at the fringes of such an economy.

"Climate change, the loss of bio-diversity, deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in the great cataclysms we witness, and you are the ones who suffer most, the humble, those who live near coasts in precarious dwellings or who are so vulnerable economically that, in the face of a natural disaster, lose everything," he said.

The speech, one of the longest in Pope Francis' papacy (6 pages long, single-spaced), shows his deep concern for the topic.

But you need not look farther than his name to know where his soft spot lies. Among the Leos, John Pauls and Piuses, this Pope took on the name of nature-loving St Francis of Assisi.

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences said to be close to the Pope told Catholic news site The Tablet, "The Pope is very aware that the consequences of climate change affect all people, but especially the poor. This is the moral consequence, the moral imperative."

The Pope's visit to the Philippines this month is not the first time he's shown the spotlight on the country in the context of the environment. In the most important document of his papacy, he quoted Philippine bishops to illustrate how environmental degradation is a "painful disfigurement."

"Here I would make my own the touching and prophetic lament voiced some years ago by the bishops of the Philippines," he says in section 215 of Evangelii Gaudium.

He then quotes a Pastoral Letter written by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines: "God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland...How can fish swim in sewers like the Pasig and so many more rivers which we have polluted? Who has turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?"

Climate and social justice
A papal encyclical is a rare document that could wield great influence on the world. Technically defined as a the Pope's letter to bishops and Catholic churches all over the world, it not only defines papacies but can inspire revolutions.

'Climate change is about social justice. A Church committed to defend and serve the poor must work to find solutions that will have its greatest impact on the poorest countries, communities and families.'
- Tony La Viña, environmental lawyer

Some world-changing encyclicals from previous popes include Redemptor Hominis by Pope John Paul II, in which he confronted the ideology of communism, and Pope Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum in which he tackled the ills of industrialization and urbanization.

When Pope Francis publishes his encyclical on climate change, it will be sent to the 5,000 Catholic bishops and 400,000 priests with the goal of reaching all of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics.

Climate change experts and environmentalists in the Philippines are heartened by the Pope's eagerness to get involved with an issue often deemed too complicated or abstract by most people. (READ: What PH did about climate change in 2014)

Jesuit priest, scientist and Ateneo de Manila president Fr Jett Villarin, who has joined the Pope in calling climate change a moral issue, looks forward to the encyclical.

"Surely we welcome this as this would firm up the theological, ethical and spiritual foundation of our action to protect the planet," he told Rappler.

Environmental lawyer and spokesmen of the Philippine delegation to the UN climate change talks Tony La Viña called the Pope's concern for climate change "downright inspiring."

"Climate change is about social justice. A Church committed to defend and serve the poor must work to find solutions that will have its greatest impact on the poorest countries, communities and families," he told Rappler.

'The right speech, at the right time'

Will a papal encyclical have any chance of influencing the tension-fraught climate negotiations?

The upcoming Paris conference is meant to end more than 20 years of talks, hopefully with a legally-binding, global commitment to cut down on carbon emissions.

La Viña says it can.
"The value of the encyclical will probably be on the ethical aspects of climate change. Understanding personal and social responsibility for overcoming climate change is key to be able to address it effectively."

Pope Francis' voice, which has strongly championed for the rights of the poor and marginalized, can "put into focus the necessary perspective to enable Parties to look past politics and put our survival and the integrity of creation at the center of the whole process," said Aksyon Klima national coordinator Voltaire Alferez.

Other than contributing to ideas to the negotiations, the encyclical could also give encouragement to negotiators and activists frustrated with the talks and to those who directly suffer from impacts of a changing climate: typhoon victims, drought victims, climate refugees.

"The right statement and speech at the right time can have a huge impact," said La Viña.

In fact, La Viña hopes the Pope himself will attend the Paris conference during its second week, when stalemates usually arise to threaten the progress of the talks.

"I don't think we need another statement that will embarrass or shame governments. But a word of encouragement – an appeal to our common humanity and climate justice, that would make a difference." – Rappler.com


January 9, 2015

Faith, reason, and the future Pope Francis: An interview with Dr. Pablo Canziani

By Bill Patenaude
Catholic Ecology

With so much being said about Pope Francis and ecology, it would be helpful to hear from someone who knows about both faith and science—and about Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Dr. Pablo Canziani of Buenos Aires is one such person.

Dr. Canziani is an atmospheric physicist who had been tapped by Cardinal Bergoglio to help the Argentinian Church better engage environmental issues. An active Catholic, he possess a masters and PhD from the University of Buenos Aires. He performed post-doctoral work at the University of Washington in Seattle, working under Dr. James Holton, a leading researcher in climate change. Dr. Canziani is a member of the Argentinian National Research Council and a university professor currently working in applied climate change studies, especially as they impact South America.
He is also a member of the Board of the Lay Department of the Argentinian Conference of Bishops and a member of a newly created network of Argentinian lay citizens. In this latter role he is working on the creation of a professional solidarity group for the environment and development.

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**Catholic Ecology: Thanks for taking the time to talk about your work in the Church and in science, which you blend quite naturally. So tell us, how does your faith impact the work that you do in the realm of science?**

**Dr. Canziani:** At first it wasn’t easy. When I was getting my basic degrees there was all this discussions about faith versus science. But then in studying advanced topics, like quantum mechanics, I came to realize that there are no contradictions between science and faith. They are a complimentary and integral view of the universe. So as in quantum mechanics you have a view of what is the behavior an object that, under given conditions, is that of a particle but under different conditions is that of a wave. It’s the same thing in creation. It is a single thing with a view from the material, scientific perspective but also you have a view from a spiritual world—and to understand the whole thing you have to put them both together. They’re complimentary, because it’s all God’s creation.

**CE:** The faith-reason link is something I’ve always appreciated about the Catholic faith. So why, do you think, is there such a rift today over scientific issues related to ecology? Why is there so much discord about topics like climate change?

**Dr. Canziani:** My feeling is that there is always this view that if you deal with environmental issues you’re going against the economy. And especially since the 1980s we see the economy as the big thing that drives everything. I’m not saying it’s wrong to think about the economy. I’m saying it’s misplaced in how we see it in the work of humanity. We have put the economy above everyone else. It even rules politics.

We have today economic interests that see the economy not as a management of scarcity but as a maximization of gains. And that’s a perversion of the economy.

And yet the economy is part of the biosphere. So as progress is made in science, there is a reaction against scientific results. And then you have that scientists are, in general, very poor at interacting with society. We were never trained for that. So a vast number of scientists cannot communicate their results—to explain them to the community at large.

**CE:** It seems that the Church now has an opportunity now to be the communicator for scientists.

**Dr. Canziani:** Yes. And I think that has been something that’s been brewing. We see this in preliminary ways in the writings of Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*, and that exploded with Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, who was called the Green Pope—but I think he’s going to be overcome by Pope Francis. In Benedict’s *Caritas in Veritate* he says some very
sound things about the environment. And in his last Easter homily he goes through the Creed through an environmental perspective.

And now we have Francis who studied before the priesthood as a technical chemist, and that influences his whole experience. And he managed to blend that with his views of humanity and with his faith.

CE: And he does it quite beautifully.

Dr. Canziani: Yes.

CE: What experience do you remember most that can help us understand Pope Francis’s engagement of the environment?

Dr. Canziani: I was involved with the lay ministries here because of him. He had heard about me and was surprised that I was a both a scientist and a practicing, active Catholic. So a few years after we met in 2002 he considered it could be useful if I joined the Catholic University (UCA) to create research opportunities around environmental and social issues. At the very beginning of my period at the UCA there was a huge problem here between Argentina and Uruguay because of a giant pulp mill that was being built on the border on the Uruguay River. I was asked by a local bishop for technical support. So I analyzed the situation with the environmental lawyers in my group and with some engineers and we produced a report. That report went to Cardinal Bergoglio shortly before Holy Week. And then he found out himself where I was so that he could call me with questions—and I wasn’t at home that day that he called. I was visiting my mother-in-law. So he called my home and then he got the number of where I was that day and he called there. He had a number of questions about the report and the science at hand, which I answered. And this was about half an hour before he was going to celebrate the Stations of the Cross. That shows you how interested he is in these affairs.

CE: That is wonderful. And you heard your science echoed later.

Dr. Canziani: Yes. Yes. And then in April, 2012, the last time I actually met him, I was asked to spend two-thirds of a day at the national meeting of the [Argentinian] Conference of Bishops, which meets twice a year. We held a tutorial with two priests and me as a scientist on environmental issues from the point of view of the bible, from the social doctrine of the Church, and from the point of view of science.

And Cardinal Bergoglio was very attentive and involved. We actually put the bishops to work asking them to report out on the important environmental issues in their diocese.

CE: That’s great! How did they take it?

Dr. Canziani: Well, many of them were really interested. Some thought it was irrelevant. But it was a very successful day.
CE: So you come from a long track record of working with local bishops—and none other than the future pope himself—to better understand science to explore what we’re doing with God’s creation. So how would you encourage Catholics who may not be in that situation, who may have a family or a pastor that doesn’t appreciate the environmental connection with our faith. What would you tell them?

Dr. Canziani: I would say that one of the first problems is that people have to realize the limits of the planet we live in. It’s a beautiful planet. It’s a beautiful creation. But we have forgotten that we are part of that creation. And that’s very clear in the Old Testament and in the New—that we’re part of that biosphere. And we have to learn—as St. Paul said in Romans—creation is waiting for the redemption of humanity so it can be redeemed as well. Creation is suffering from the consequences of human action, and that’s in the epistles of St. Paul.

I had run a radio show on Radio Maria. One Holy Thursday, I had a theologian on and we spent ninety minutes speaking about environmental issues and joining them with Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross—and how these issues affect the lives of people, especially poor people. From that experience we realized there is a huge need in the community to understand environmental issues and how they relate to development—we cannot separate them from development.

I’m not sure how we would handle that in wealthy communities, like in countries like the U.S., as compared to many in Latin America, where people are closer to the environmental issues and they suffer much more frequently from issues like mega-mining, water rights, and mono-agriculture. All this is having an impact on people in Latin America—in Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Brazil—a major social impact.

People are concerned because they’re seeing the environment disappearing before their eyes. So there is a growing base for change in the community that is getting to the priests—especially those from poor or mining areas. They’re very aware of these issues. So in that sense we have an easier task of talking about the environment in this part of the world because it’s a big issue.

An example: Archbishop Pedro Barreto of Huancayo, Peru—and he’s a good friend of the pope as well—he’s been menaced by the Shining Path (Sedero Luminoso) terrorists and owners of mines in Perú. He’s received death threats. He’s been threatened on both sides.

CE: A reminder of the stakes that some people hold in all this.

Dr. Canziani: Yes. And that’s the major issue—when you get all this materialistic views coming from both sides of the political spectrum. Both sides are materialistic. It’s a view of the world which we have to change. We’re being driven as it were to a materialistic view of things. And that has to change. Especially within the Catholic community. We have to understand that loving people means loving their environment as well.

CE: Which is really why all ideologies need to be welcome to the conversation because everyone has a part to play in this. Because it is about life.
Dr. Canziani: I often have to deal with politicians and other religious people and lay people who may not think the same as we do, and I have to explain to them that this is not about an agenda. This is something very basic. It comes before we can discuss an agenda. It’s basic survival of humanity and basic survival of creation—which in a sense has its own right to be because it was made by God.

So we’re not just fighting for humans we’re fighting for something that God created. And that becomes the starting point from which we can then discuss our political and religious perspectives. After all, we are bio dependent. We cannot live without life around us.

CE: Amen. So now we’re getting ready—the Church is getting ready—for the pope’s trip to the Philippines and later his encyclical on the environment. What are you expecting it to say, and having worked with the future pope on faith and science issues, how do you think he will handle those who say we should not be speaking about environmental issues because of the politics involved?

Dr. Canziani: He knows it’s not a political issue. He knows it’s a survival issue. And he is a very able politician himself. So he knows how to go around these issues—he can be either very diplomatic or very blunt. And he knows when to be both.

I think he’s been doing marvelous work of linking all the social issues with all the aspects of life, as he did here. We had a big smile when Evangelii Gaudium came out because so many of the things he said there he had said before here in Argentina. And because his philosophies are clearly going on with him, I know that he will have very strong positions on the environmental issues because he knows that you cannot change social issues—issues of poverty—and not also change the issues of the environment. As we say here in Argentina they are two sides of the same coin. You have to talk about them both to get a good solution for society.

You know, before he was elected he was very tired and thinking of retiring. And the way he is now—I think he’s being held by the Holy Spirit. Lots of us down here think that.

CE: Amen. So do lots of us up here.

Dr. Canziani: Okay!

CE: He’s a gift to the Church. No doubt about it. I had done my graduate work on Benedict XVI and I will always have a special place for him. So I felt badly that people didn’t understand or appreciate him better. And I was heartbroken when he stepped down. But I love Pope Francis. He’s the perfect, perfect person to be in the Chair of St. Peter right now.

Dr. Canziani: As we say down here, there are two things. The big problem with Benedict was that he wasn’t a good communicator of his thoughts outside of his writings. His writings are of course excellent—his thoughts are excellent. And they’re very modern.
And second, as we say down here, you can’t have Francis if you didn’t have Benedict. You needed someone like Benedict with a sound theological background to set the premises for what Francis is now executing.

CE: That’s absolutely right. So when people object to Francis’s comments on ecology, you can just refer them to Benedict, because he’s already laid the groundwork.

Dr. Canziani: Yes. And one thing that all Catholics should know is that all things being said about the environment are in the bible. I mean, the social doctrine of the Church is just taking the bible and adding today’s science and language—but it’s all there.

CE: I always look at the popes as pastors who no longer have many opportunities to have the same pastoral experiences as they did when they were priests or bishops. And Francis is certainly a pastor. How would he be if he sat with someone who thought climate change was a hoax, or someone upset at the Church’s involvement in the environment? How would he handle that?

Dr. Canziani: You know, I met him in his office a number of times. First thing, he never sat at his desk—only when he had to work. When he received someone he would bring two chairs together and sit by you and look at you earnestly and hear what you had to say. And then he would speak—slowly, with this slow, low voice. And then he would try to say what he thought about the issue. And if you had a different perspective you could tell it to him, frankly—at least that’s my experience. And he would meditate on what you said. When the conversation was done, he would actually walk you to the elevator himself, open the elevator for you, and ask you to pray for him. And he would bless your family. And that’s him.

And later if he had some new idea or more thoughts, he would either call you or have his secretary email you. So that’s the kind of person we’re speaking of.

CE: So how can we as a Church help him? Because some of our brothers and sisters may be angry right now because they’re understanding this whole conversation in a political way or a worldly way. What would Pope Francis like us to do to help him?

Dr. Canziani: I think he’d like us to do two things. First, a strong dialogue, through reason—with a solid scientific background and a solid analysis of the limitations of the current development models, looking at flaws in economic models. And I’m speaking now as a physicist analyzing economic theory, because there are many economic issues that need to be reviewed from a physical-biological perspective—because the economy is in everything—

CE: Right. “Economy” and “ecology” have the same root word.

Dr. Canziani: Yes. Ecology, the understanding of the home. Economics, the management of the home. So we have to understand that.

And then second, once we have looked at the science of all this—once that is more or less clear and we understand our own limitations as well—we have to look at the things that top all this:
ethics and faith. And if you go through this process, even the most staunchly anti-environmentalist will realize how wrong he is.

CE: Yes. And it is a process. And it has to be done pastorally because people are hurting and afraid. And that’s really what we’re doing here—dialoguing to help Catholics and non-Catholics understand what the Church is doing when she engages ecology. So on that note, before closing is there anything else you’d like to say, anything you’d like to add?

Dr. Canziani: Yes. My wife and I are both members of the charismatic Church renewal and I think the crucial need that can help change people is prayer—especially prayers thanking God for everything—for creation and everyone. And praying for the sick and the poor. Over the years I’ve seen this in many of the writings of the saints, which are not frequently read. But prayer is very powerful.

And this is not just prayer in Church, but in the countryside—prayer watching the environment. There’s an old Spanish movie I think of. It’s called “It’s Sunrise, and it’s Not a Little Thing.” Even a sunrise should result in a prayer of gratitude.

I also want to say that in the books on ecology that I am writing with my sister, we choose not to use the term sustainability. We use the term “human integral development,” because nature evolves. Humanity develops.

CE: Yes, from Paul VI—

Dr. Canziani: —Yes—

CE: —and that reminds me of how Pope Francis has been using the term “human ecology,” coined by Saint John Paul II and continued by Benedict XVI—a term that connects ecology with the fundamental issues of life, like abortion. I think that when people finally read the encyclical they will be surprised—on both ends of the political spectrum—they’ll be surprised because they won’t be expecting the language that he will use.

Dr. Canziani: No. I am certain of that.

CE: Which makes it a lot of fun to read.

Dr. Canziani: Yes. When he releases a document we read the Spanish version and we find all the localisms that he would use here. And we wonder how the translators in the Vatican manage to handle that.

CE: [Laughs] From what I can see, Pope Francis is keeping everyone at the Vatican on their toes.

Dr. Canziani: [Laughs] Oh yes, yes. That’s good!

CE: Pablo, you’re a blessing. Many thanks, and I look forward to talking soon.
January 14, 2015

Pope to make moral case for action on climate change

By Andy Coghlan
New Scientist

COULD one man succeed in spurring decisive action on global warming? Pope Francis, leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, plans to release a ground-breaking appeal to combat climate change, in a major document called an encyclical.

Its message will be spread to congregations around the world by Catholic clergy, mobilising grassroots pressure for action ahead of the key UN climate summit in December in Paris. The encyclical may be published as early as March, and may be couched in terms of the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, which teaches that we have responsibilities to our fellow humans.

It will be the first encyclical to address concerns about a global environmental issue, and will provide "important orientation" to all Catholics to support action on climate change, says Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Social Sciences in Vatican City. Last May, he organised a workshop there discussing the science and impact of climate change. Participants issued a hard-hitting statement, which laid the groundwork and set the tone for the encyclical.

The most likely thrust of the pope's appeal will be that failure to combat climate change will condemn the world's poorest people to disproportionate harm. "The sad part is that the poorest three billion will be the worst affected by the impacts of climate change, such as sea level rise and drought, but have had least to do with causing it," says Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a climatologist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, California, and a scientific adviser to the Vatican on the encyclical.

"The world's richest billion people, by contrast, are responsible for 50 to 70 per cent of the greenhouse gases that are to blame." This, he hopes, will be the evidence on which the pope rests his moral case for action to remedy what, in the pope's view, is a global injustice.

Scientists and religious figures who champion urgent action hope that by focusing on moral rather than scientific or economic grounds, the pope can help persuade climate sceptics by appealing to their consciences.
"Science has taken this issue as far as it can, and now it's in the domain of policy-makers to bring about action which requires changes in behaviour," says Ramanathan. "As a scientist, I have no authority to demand changes in behaviour, but religious leaders do."

The pope's call may also help persuade some of the most trenchant opponents of action on climate change: evangelical Christians in the US. A survey of 3022 Americans, published in November by the Public Religion Research Institute in Washington DC, found that only 27 per cent of white evangelical protestants polled believe in human-generated climate change.

"A papal encyclical may shock millions of evangelicals into reality," says Richard Cizik, president of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good in Fredericksburg, Virginia. "It could be a real game-changer, because many evangelicals are still consumed by right-wing political ideology and apocalyptic theology."

It could also resonate in the US Congress, nearly a third of which is Catholic – split about equally between Democrats and Republicans.

But not everyone is convinced the move will have a major impact. "It's unlikely that any one action, even by someone as influential as the pope, will suddenly alter the global political landscape," says Naomi Oreskes, a historian of science at Harvard University. "But many of us are hopeful that papal authority will help some people revisit and reconsider the issue."

This article appeared in print under the headline "Can the pope win hearts and minds on climate?"

http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22530044.500-pope-to-make-moral-case-for-action-on-climate-change.html#.VLia8nvNdWx

January 15, 2015

Whether they want it or not, Republicans get religion on climate change

By Scott Detrow, E&E reporter

ClimateWire

On the rare chance any Republican congressmen or senators leave the premises of the Hershey Lodge during their joint caucus retreat today, they'll be greeted by an interfaith religious service aimed at motivating the GOP lawmakers to take action on climate change.

The group putting on the joint service and protest outside the Republican retreat, Interfaith Moral Action on Climate, is just one of an increasing number of religious coalitions organizing on both sides of the debate over how -- or whether -- to address climate change. That debate will likely intensify over the coming months, as Pope Francis stakes out climate change as a key policy issue.
"Our purpose will be to say very clearly to those inside that we believe any of those members who are motivated by religious beliefs need to look more closely at their own religions traditions and what they teach about stewardship of the Earth and care for the Earth," said Ted Glick, an environmental advocate who sits on Interfaith Moral Action on Climate’s steering committee.

"We can't be saying we are following those principles and those teachings if we are looking away from the impacts of economies dominated by fossil fuels. Fossil fuel economies are about polluting land, polluting water and heating up the Earth in dangerous ways," he added.

But while many of these religious groups are singing from the same hymnal -- or, more accurately, quoting from the same environmental-stewardship-themed Bible verses -- some are coming to very different conclusions about what climate change policies to pursue.

**Same Bible, different messages**

"Fossil fuels promote life -- human life and all the rest of life," said E. Calvin Beisner, the founder of an evangelical Christian group opposing policies lowering carbon dioxide emissions. Beisner’s group, the Cornwall Alliance, argues accessible, cheap, fossil-fuel-powered energy has played a key role in combating poverty throughout human history and that curbing society’s carbon footprint would do more harm than good.

"People can thrive in any climate if they have adequate wealth," he said. "But they will die like flies in any climate if they don't have adequate wealth."

Research has long shown that evangelicals view climate change more skeptically than other American religious groups. A 2008 Pew survey found that just 34 percent of white evangelicals think the Earth is warming due to human activity, compared with 47 percent of the total U.S. population.

Another increasingly active evangelical group is trying to change that mindset. "This year we did almost 100 different presentations to local church groups and Christian colleges around the country," said Mitch Hescox, the president of the Evangelical Environmental Network (E&ENews PM, Dec. 1, 2014). He attributes the skepticism to the fact the evangelicals are typically conservative and Republican, and that climate change has been long framed as a partisan issue.

"It's not about Al Gore, it's about Jesus," Hescox said he tells groups. "And it's not about polar bears. It's about our children." The group has taken an active role in promoting U.S. EPA’s Clean Power Plan, submitting thousands of supportive comments to the agency from people it labels "pro-life Christians."

"There is a biblical responsibility for caring for God's creation," Hescox said.
Catholic groups begin to mobilize

The world's most influential religious leader, Pope Francis, is signaling an aggressive push for climate change action, too. The Catholic leader is meeting with survivors of Typhoon Haiyan during this week's visit to the Philippines.

The Vatican has hinted that meeting could serve as a launching pad for more high-profile calls to action on curbing carbon emissions ahead of December's U.N. summit in Paris. That push will culminate with the release of a papal encyclical, one of the most authoritative documents a pontiff can issue (ClimateWire, Jan. 7).

Francis' impending climate change push has already led to the formation of a new international alliance called the Global Catholic Climate Movement. Announced yesterday, the coalition includes groups -- primarily Catholic lay organizations -- from around the world.

"We're viewing [the impending papal encyclical] as a call to action for Catholics. Not a document to sit around and have a theology debate on," said Patrick Carolan, the executive director of one of the coalition's American organizations, the Franciscan Action Network. "We have to do something for what's happening to the environment, and we have to do it now."

What exactly will they do? Carolan said one of the effort's first attempts at raising awareness will be a call for a coordinated fast during Lent. "A different country each day in Lent can have a hunger fast," he said. "Each day, a different country can be highlighted, and we can talk about how Bangladesh is doing their fasting and how climate change is affecting them."

Carolan said that while Francis' statements on climate change have, for the most part, mirrored prior popes like Benedict XVI, his words have carried farther. "People are feeling engaged to be able to speak out on these issues. In the past, I don't think people felt comfortable to speak out as Catholics," he said.

http://www.eenews.net/stories/1060011713

January 15, 2015

Rate of environmental degradation puts life on Earth at risk, say scientists

By Oliver Milman
The Guardian

Humans are “eating away at our own life support systems” at a rate unseen in the past 10,000 years by degrading land and freshwater systems, emitting greenhouse gases and releasing vast amounts of agricultural chemicals into the environment, new research has found.

Two major new studies by an international team of researchers have pinpointed the key factors that ensure a livable planet for humans, with stark results.
Of nine worldwide processes that underpin life on Earth, four have exceeded “safe” levels – human-driven climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land system change and the high level of phosphorus and nitrogen flowing into the oceans due to fertiliser use.

Researchers spent five years identifying these core components of a planet suitable for human life, using the long-term average state of each measure to provide a baseline for the analysis.

They found that the changes of the last 60 years are unprecedented in the previous 10,000 years, a period in which the world has had a relatively stable climate and human civilisation has advanced significantly.

Carbon dioxide levels, at 395.5 parts per million, are at historic highs, while loss of biosphere integrity is resulting in species becoming extinct at a rate more than 100 times faster than the previous norm.

Since 1950 urban populations have increased seven-fold, primary energy use has soared by a factor of five, while the amount of fertiliser used is now eight times higher. The amount of nitrogen entering the oceans has quadrupled.

All of these changes are shifting Earth into a “new state” that is becoming less hospitable to human life, researchers said.

“These indicators have shot up since 1950 and there are no signs they are slowing down,” said Prof Will Steffen of the Australian National University and the Stockholm Resilience Centre. Steffen is the lead author on both of the studies.

“When economic systems went into overdrive, there was a massive increase in resource use and pollution. It used to be confined to local and regional areas but we’re now seeing this occurring on a global scale. These changes are down to human activity, not natural variability.”

Steffen said direct human influence upon the land was contributing to a loss in pollination and a disruption in the provision of nutrients and fresh water.

“We are clearing land, we are degrading land, we introduce feral animals and take the top predators out, we change the marine ecosystem by overfishing – it’s a death by a thousand cuts,” he said. “That direct impact upon the land is the most important factor right now, even more than climate change.”

There are large variations in conditions around the world, according to the research. For example, land clearing is now concentrated in tropical areas, such as Indonesia and the Amazon, with the practice reversed in parts of Europe. But the overall picture is one of deterioration at a rapid rate.

“It’s fairly safe to say that we haven’t seen conditions in the past similar to ones we see today and there is strong evidence that there [are] tipping points we don’t want to cross,” Steffen said.
“If the Earth is going to move to a warmer state, 5-6°C warmer, with no ice caps, it will do so and that won’t be good for large mammals like us. People say the world is robust and that’s true, there will be life on Earth, but the Earth won’t be robust for us.

“Some people say we can adapt due to technology, but that’s a belief system, it’s not based on fact. There is no convincing evidence that a large mammal, with a core body temperature of 37°C, will be able to evolve that quickly. Insects can, but humans can’t and that’s a problem.”

Steffen said the research showed the economic system was “fundamentally flawed” as it ignored critically important life support systems.

“It’s clear the economic system is driving us towards an unsustainable future and people of my daughter’s generation will find it increasingly hard to survive,” he said. “History has shown that civilisations have risen, stuck to their core values and then collapsed because they didn’t change. That’s where we are today.”

The two studies, published in Science and Anthropocene Review, featured the work of scientists from countries including the US, Sweden, Germany and India. The findings will be presented in seven seminars at the World Economic Forum in Davos, which takes place between 21 and 25 January.


January 16, 2015

Church Authority and Assent: Clarifications Ahead of Pope Francis’s Encyclical

By Daniel DiLeo
Political Theology Today

The church has known for the last year that Pope Francis is working on an encyclical about ecology. Until recently, this awareness has generally only been discussed by those who regularly work on environmental justice in the Catholic tradition. On December 27, however, the Guardian published an article about the forthcoming document that has sparked passionate—and sometimes uncharitably acerbic—interest from people who are opposed to climate change mitigation and/or fear that Francis will inappropriately address the topic in his encyclical. In many such instances, those who express anxiety about Francis’ encyclical raise questions about church authority and either deny that Francis can speak authoritatively on climate change or suggest that Catholics are free to quickly (even preemptively) dismiss such teaching.

In light of these recent debates, it is important to correctly understand the various levels of church teaching authority, identify the level of potential encyclical teachings and appreciate the corresponding response to which Catholics are called by the church. This is especially true for political theologians, since Francis is likely in his encyclical to build on the support for an
international climate treaty offered by Pope Benedict XVI, the Holy See’s Permanent Observer to the United Nations, and Francis himself. As such, I here review levels of church authority and locate likely encyclical teachings in the hopes of providing prescient clarifications to political questions regarding Francis’ encyclical.

Levels of Church Authority and Catholic Social Teaching

In his chapter “The Ecclesiological Foundations of Modern Catholic Social Teaching” (Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations, ed. Kenneth R. Himes), Richard Gaillardetz describes Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as “the normative articulation of official church positions regarding social questions” (87). In addition, Gaillardetz points out that the church recognizes three levels of authority in CST. The highest level is “universal moral teaching.” These are dogmatic teachings that are divinely revealed, infallibly taught, and “call forth from the believer an assent of faith” (88-89). Examples include “the law of love, the dignity of the human person, respect for human life, and obligation to care for the environment” (89).

The next level of moral teaching include those “specific moral principles” that have the status of authoritative doctrine, i.e., are principles “that have been taught authoritatively but not infallibly by the magisterium” through reflection on Scripture, tradition and experience (89). Examples include the church’s teaching about the necessary conditions to support capital punishment or the prohibitions against the direct taking of innocent human life. The church calls Catholics to “treat these teachings as more than mere opinions or pious exhortations but as normative church teaching that they must strive to integrate into their religious outlook” (90; Cf. Lumen Gentium, no. 25).

Finally, the lowest level of authoritative church teaching is the prudential “application of specific moral principles” to concrete situations in light of “changing contexts and contingent empirical data” (89-90). The virtue of prudence is classically understood as “right reason applied to action” (St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, II-II, 47.8), and in the case of climate change prudential judgment entails right reason about the assessment of empirical data and application of Catholic moral principles. Gaillardetz points out that an example of such an authoritative teaching is the U.S. bishops’ “no first nuclear use” exhortation in The Challenge of Peace. Additionally, Gaillardetz notes that while Catholics can differ with these judgments for well-founded reasons after deep reflection, such teachings are, according to the bishops, “to be given serious attention and consideration by Catholics as they determine whether their moral judgments are consistent with the Gospel” (The Challenge of Peace, no. 10). In other words, the church calls Catholics to deeply and prayerfully consider any/all magisterial prudential judgments in a way that precludes their dismissal in good conscience without due consideration (and, by definition, before they have been promulgated).

Authority and Pope Francis’ Encyclical

In light of this developed taxonomy of church teaching authority, I believe it possible to anticipate teachings that Francis is likely to make in his encyclical and situate them within the abovementioned framework. These projections are firmly rooted in CST and church precedent regarding climate change, and this exercise can, I think, provide a template to better structure
discussions about the encyclical. First, Francis will presumably affirm the prudential judgment about the reality of anthropogenic climate change that he has already made and which was repeatedly asserted by Pope John Paul II (1990 World Day of Peace Message, no. 6; 1999 World Day of Peace Message, no. 10), Pope Benedict XVI (2009 encyclical Caritas in Veritate, no. 50; 2010 World Day of Peace Message, nos. 4, 7, 10; etc.), the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and international bishops and episcopal conferences.

In addition to this assessment of anthropogenic climate change, Francis will likely apply the CST principles of Life and Dignity of the Human Person, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable and Solidarity to his understanding of the issue and, like the church has repeatedly done, prudentially judge climate change to be a moral issue. Finally, Francis will likely apply the CST principle of subsidiarity to his understanding of climate change and call for an international climate change accord in keeping with the precedent established by Pope Benedict XVI (2009 encyclical Caritas in Veritate, no. 50; message to the 2009 U.N. Climate Change Summit; 2010 Address to the Diplomatic Corps; 2012 Address to the Diplomatic Corps), the Holy See’s Permanent Observer to the United Nations (September 2014; October 2014), and his own previous remarks (December 2014 message to the U.N.; January 12 message to the Diplomatic Corps; January 15 remarks en route to the Philippines).

Francis’ probable encyclical teachings about climate change and an international climate treaty are what seem likely (and have already proven) to be areas of the document most ripe for contentious debate. In particular, some appear to believe that prudential teachings made through the ordinary papal magisterium about climate change possess no authority whatsoever, are in no way normative for the church, and, as such, can be quickly discarded by Catholics without due consideration. As has been shown, however, none of these positions is correct within the framework of church teaching on authority and assent. Catholics are free to ultimately disagree (in charity) with prudential magisterial judgments, but can only do so in good conscience after thoughtful consideration marked by sincere openness and deep prayer.

Presuming that Francis thus accepts the reality of human-forced climate change in his encyclical and calls for an international climate agreement, Catholics will only be able to disagree with him in good conscience after serious reflection and the determination that the pope has reasoned incorrectly, i.e., imprudently, about the findings/appropriation of mainstream climate science and/or application of Catholic moral principles. This strikes me as an exceedingly high burden of proof to satisfy given the widespread international agreement about the reality of human-forced climate change and precedent Catholic teaching on the issue. Thus while Catholics may disagree with Francis’ prudential judgments on climate change in his encyclical after due consideration, my own feeling is that such disagreement is likely to itself be imprudent. Nevertheless I, like everyone, will need to wait for the encyclical’s publication in order to properly consider Francis’ encyclical judgments on climate change and/or assess those subsequently made by other Catholics about the teaching.

Conclusion

The Vatican recently indicated that Francis’ encyclical on ecology will likely be published before the summer. Crux observes that already “Pope Francis’ stance on climate change is the
latest battleground for US Catholics” and, unfortunately, this battle seems likely to intensify rather than abate between now and the encyclical’s release. Nevertheless, political theologians can make substantive contributions to present and future encyclical conversations by reminding Catholics about the correct assent owed to various levels of church teaching. This would ensure that Francis’ encyclical is received with the utmost amount of genuine openness and humility, and as such would be a great service to the church and to the world.

N.B. This piece builds on my December essay at Millennial Journal. I am grateful to Richard Gaillardetz, Ph.D., the Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology at Boston College, for feedback on previous iterations of this piece.


January 16, 2015

Storm Warnings for Pope’s Climate Stop in the Philippines

By Andrew C. Revkin
Dot Earth
New York Times

[Updated, 11:40 p.m. | Pope Francis made it to Tacloban and, wearing a yellow plastic rain coat like those on the tens of thousands of people before him, delivered a simple and moving homily focused on assuaging people’s sense of loss. The transcript is here.]

Here’s the post as written Friday afternoon:

On Saturday, nearing the end of his visit to the Philippines, Pope Francis is scheduled to hold mass for residents of Tacloban City, which was devastated in late 2013 by Typhoon Haiyan (known as Yolanda in the Philippines). The Vatican has signaled that he will also talk about global warming.

If the stop comes off as planned, he’ll have a suitable backdrop in the form of high winds and downpours from Tropical Storm Mekkhala [now upgraded to a typhoon, as Jason Samenow reports], which is swirling in the Pacific nearby. The website Western Pacific Weather has the meteorological details.

The pope has been speaking out more about climate change of late, most recently in an exchange with reporters during his flight from Sri Lanka to the Philippines. Here’s the relevant moment, thanks to a transcript from the Catholic News Agency:

Gerard O’Connell, America Magazine: …We have seen in Sri Lanka the beauty of nature, but even in the end the vulnerability of that island to climate change, etc. We are going to the Philippines, you are going to visit the stricken area. It is more than one year
that you are studying the issue of ecology, of the cure of creation, etcetera. My question has three aspects. First, is climate change an outcome of the work of man, of man’s lack of care of nature? Second, when will your encyclical be released? Third, you insist – as we have seen in Sri Lanka – very much on cooperation among religions. Are you going to invite other religions to gather together to discuss this issue? Thank you.

Pope Francis: The first question, you had said a word that requires a clarification. Mostly. I don’t know if it’s all, but mostly, for a large part, man ‘slaps’ nature, continually, but we have taken hold of nature, of mother Earth. I remember – you already heard this – what an old peasant once told me: God always forgives, we men sometimes forgive, nature never forgives. If you slap it, it will always slap you back. Then, we exploited nature too much, with deforestations, for example. I remember [the 2007 meeting of Latin American bishops at] Aparecida; at that time, I did not understand this issue so much; when I listened to Brazilian bishops speaking about the deforestation of the Amazon, I never understood it in depth. The Amazon is the lung of the world. Five years ago, with a human rights commission, I appealed to the Supreme Court of Argentina to stop, at least temporarily, a terrible deforestation in Northern Argentina, in the Norte de Salta area. This is one issue.

Then – I will say another one – the one-crop system – I will give two or three [examples]: Farmers know that if you make a cultivation of corn for three years, you have to stop, and then cultivate a different crop for one or two years, in order – I don’t know how to say it, nitrogenizar is the Spanish word for it – to regenerate the soil. Nowadays, for instance, there is the exclusive cultivation of soy; you take everything, you make soy until the soil is exhausted; not everyone does it, it is an example; many others don’t.

I think that man has gone overboard. Thank God, today there are voices and many people speaking out about this. But I would like in this moment to remember my beloved brother [Patriarch] Bartholomew, who has been speaking out about this for years. I read many things of his to prepare this encyclical…. The first draft was sketched by Cardinal Turkson with his staff.

[ACR: Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana has dealt with other contentious scientific issues – including weighing the role of genetic engineering in agriculture. In 2013, he threaded a path between industry and critics of genetically modified organisms, or G.M.O.s., saying they need to be used, but only with “the guidance of a deeply responsible ethic.”]

Then I took over the draft with the help of some people and worked on it, then I made a third draft with some theologians and I sent this draft to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to the Second Section of the State Secretariat, and to the Theologian of the Pontifical Household, so that they could study it, and find if I had said some foolishness. Three weeks ago I received the responses, some of them this big, but all of them constructive. Now I will take a whole week in March to complete it, so at the end of March it should be completed, and will then be translated. I think that, if the work of translation goes well…, in June or July it will be released.
It is just important that there is some time between the release of the encyclical and the [climate treaty] meeting in Paris so that it may be brought there. Because the [treaty] meeting in Peru was not that much; it disappointed me, the lack of courage. They stopped at one point. Let’s hope that in Paris representatives will be more courageous.

The third [question]. I believe that dialogue among religions is important; this issue is felt by other religions as well, on this issue there is a common feeling. I have spoken with some representatives of other religions on the issue, and I know that Cardinal Turkson has, as well, and two theologians also; this was the path: it will not be a common declaration, meetings will come after.

If he gets to speak in Tacloban, I hope Francis recognizes how the scope of the social calamity in that coastal city was far more the result of deep poverty and poorly governed urban growth than any shift in typhoon patterns — which really haven’t changed at all in that region in recent decades. This graph shows the frequency of tropical cyclone landfalls:

There, as in so many places around the world, the prime driver of losses in severe weather calamities is poverty or settlement in danger zones.

Global warming, through sea-level rise, will raise odds of bad outcomes in such storms down the line even if warming has little impact on the storms themselves.

But for the time being, better governance and paths out of poverty are the prime priority in such places.

Family planning would help, too, and it was encouraging to see the Philippine Supreme Court approve a pioneering Reproductive Health Law last year.

As The Wall Street Journal reported just before the pope’s arrival, that decision has made it possible for the government to start providing thousands of families with access to contraception.

The Journal noted:

The Roman Catholic Church fought the measure, but many rank-and-file Catholics supported it as a way to reduce the country’s high birthrate and reduce poverty.

On his stop in Manila on Friday, while meeting with a thousand Catholic families, Francis made it clear that he was not shifting from longstanding Vatican policies against contraception.

The Catholic publication Crux reported:

The pope also issued a strong defense of Pope Paul VI’s controversial 1968 encyclical Humanae Vitae, which upheld the Church’s traditional ban on birth control.

“He had the strength to defend openness to life at a time when many people were worried about population growth,” Francis said.
Take a strong stance on climate change is one thing. Changing a stance on population is another.


January 16, 2015

Pope Francis Hopes World Leaders Will Make the Environment a Priority

By Ashley Curtin
Nation of Change – Bullhorn

In a recent interview, Pope Francis is making the environment a priority this year in hopes that his encyclical on ecology will encourage world leaders to reach an agreement during the next round of climate change talks in Paris in November.

Citing deforestation and monoculture as just two ways that man has exploited nature, he said "[man has] taken over nature" in what he referred to as a "culture of waste." Pope Francis' encyclical is set to be released by June or July, according to the Associated Press, so that world leader taking part in the world climate change negotiations will have ample time to read it in its entirety and absorb it.

"The meetings in Peru were nothing much, I was disappointed," he said in an Associated Press story. "There was a lack of courage. They stopped at a certain point. We hope that in Paris the representatives will be more courageous going forward."

Pope Francis was en route to the Philippines where he will visit with survivors of the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan, which is said to be just one example of the severe and disastrous weather pattern caused in part by climate change. During the interview, he said that while many other things might have caused global warming, it was "man who has slapped nature in the face."

The pope said it was about time that world leaders make "'courageous' decision" to protect "God's creation."

Pope Francis will offer up some of his opinions about climate change and the role man plays in September at the United Nations in New York. And when he takes the stage, he hopes his points will encourage world leader to act fast.

http://bullhorn.nationofchange.org/pope-francis-environment-a-priority

January 16, 2015

Take 5: Forum on Religion and Ecology co-director Mary Evelyn Tucker
Mary Evelyn Tucker, senior lecturer and research scholar, holds appointments in the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and the Divinity School, as well as the Department of Religious Studies. Her special area of study is Asian religions. Her concern about the growing environmental challenges led her to help shape a new interdisciplinary field linking religion and ecology. Tucker teaches in the joint M.A. program in religion and ecology and directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim. She is the author of “Moral and Spiritual Cultivation in Japanese Neo-Confucianism,” “The Philosophy of Qi,” and “Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter Their Ecological Phase,” and is co-author (with Grim) of the recently published “Ecology and Religion.” She has also co-edited a number of books, including “Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?” and “Worldviews and Ecology,” among others. She is a co-creator (with Brian Thomas Swimme) of the multi-media project “Journey of the Universe,” which includes the Emmy Award-winning film of the same name that was broadcast on PBS and is now available on Netflix. She and Swimme co-authored a companion book for the film that was published by Yale Press in 2011.

What scholarly/research project are you working on now?

Along with my husband, John Grim, I am writing a biography of Thomas Berry for Columbia University Press. Berry was a remarkable historian of world religions who studied the traditions of Asia and of indigenous peoples, along with the western religions. He was our teacher and inspired us to help create the Forum on World Religions and Ecology. He had an abiding concern for what the religions might contribute positively to solving our environmental crisis. One example is that the Pope is soon to release an Encyclical on the environment, which will have a major influence on 1.2 billion Catholics and another 1 billion Christians. We hope to do something at Yale in March to mark this occasion and explore the ethical implications of this new teaching document.

What important lesson(s) have you learned from your students?

How much resilience they have. With all of the dispiriting news in the world today — from politics to the environment — our students have not given up the hope of making a real difference in our world. I find this so invigorating, indeed inspiring. In starting new online classes in world religions and ecology I also realize that there are fresh ways that students learn and reflect on video lectures and reading. The responses and interactions of students online have been some of the most creative discussions I have seen in 40 years of teaching.

What world problem would you fix, if you could?
The health of the environment has been a concern of mine for many decades, as this is what we all depend on. If we can continue to devise viable programs for protecting the biosphere, maintaining biodiversity, and supporting human communities, I would feel immense relief, indeed happiness. This means that we have to try to reframe human-Earth relations in a mutually enhancing manner. That is what our PBS film “Journey of the Universe” is trying to do by showing that we are part of a vast process of cosmic, Earth, and human transformation. As 65,000 people have rated it on Netflix in one year, we are feeling quite hopeful!

**Is there something you’ve always wanted to do — either professionally or personally — that you haven’t yet?**

I have published academic volumes, but I would love to write one or two small books in a more personal vein. We live in such challenging times and how we may navigate through these challenges is something I often reflect on in my diaries. So I would like to share these reflections, perhaps in a collection of letters addressed to family and friends.

**What is your favorite spot on campus?**

I love being in Kroon Hall on Prospect Street where the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies is located. My office is there on the first floor. The building has a great feeling about it, not just because it is a beautiful green building, but because of the buzz of students and faculty who inhabit the building. Every week we have the opportunity to hear first-class lectures on a wide range of environmental topics. The students run a coffee shop on the top floor and several active centers are housed here, like the Center for Environmental Law and Policy, the Center for Business and the Environment, and our Forum on Religion and Ecology.


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**January 18, 2015**

Details of the proposal for Pope Francis’ US visit revealed

By Alan Holdren and Elise Harris  
Catholic News Agency

Manila, Philippines - Archbishop Bernardito Auza – a member of the organizing committee for Pope Francis’ upcoming visit to the U.S. – has revealed details of the proposed schedule, which includes visits to three cities.

“He would arrive on the 22nd and he would leave the evening of the 27th. It’s really a full six days, plus the travel, so it’s really one week,” Archbishop Auza told CNA in Manila on Jan. 18.

A Philippines native, Archbishop Auza is the Holy See’s permanent observer to the U.N. in New York and to the Organization of American States in Washington. He is back in his homeland this
week participating in the events of Pope Francis’ Jan. 15-19 apostolic journey.

The archbishop spoke of a meeting held last Monday by the U.S. trip’s organizing committee appointed by Pope Francis, during which the details of the visit were discussed.

After a projected arrival to Washington, D.C. on the evening of Sept. 22, they’re proposing that Pope Francis visit the White House the following morning, where the official welcoming ceremony would take place.

Following his stop at the White House, the pontiff would go on to celebrate Mass at Washington’s Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

The Mass, the archbishop observed, would be primarily for bishops, consecrated and religious men and women, seminarians and representatives from humanitarian and Catholic charitable organizations.

“And we might say really the highlight of the Washington visit might be his speech to the joint-meeting of Congress, so the Senate and the House of Representatives,” Archbishop Auza said. According to the proposal, Pope Francis would leave for New York City on the afternoon of the 24th.

The U.N. general-assembly would be his destination on the morning of the 25th, which is also the opening of the 3-day Post-2015 Sustainable Development Summit.

“Practically all of the heads of states and governments will be around and they will all be there on that day, so if the Pope were to finalize this visit to the U.S. that means that he would address all the heads of states and of governments, who will be sitting with their official delegations,” the archbishop explained.

“We certainly are looking forward to that,” he said, noting how everyone involved is anticipating what the Pope might say, particularly U.N. secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, who is “extremely thrilled.”

The papal address at the U.N. would take up the entire morning of Sept. 25, Archbishop Auza said. He added that proposals for what the pontiff may do afterward include an interreligious meeting, and “of course the Pope will visit St. Patrick’s (Cathedral). That’s for sure.”

The visit to the historic church wouldn’t likely mean the celebration of Mass there, the archbishop said. Mass has been proposed instead for another area of New York. He named the Madison Square Garden as a possibility.

“Our plan is not to have a huge Mass outside of Philadelphia, because the focus will really be Philadelphia, because the Pope is going to the United States for the World Meeting of Families,” he explained.

Perhaps the most “unique ingredient” of Pope Francis’ proposed schedule for New York would
be an interethnic meeting with the pontiff, which is significant given the diverse ethnic background of the city.

“Ground Zero,” the site of the terrorist attack on Sept. 11, 2001, which brought down New York City’s twin World Trade Center towers, is another foreseeable stop on the Pope’s itinerary, Archbishop Auza noted.

Benedict XVI visited the site during his 2008 visit, but the Archbishop mentioned that since then the official memorial has been inaugurated, the museum has been finished, and the metal cross found in the wreckage of the towers is there.

“But these are just proposals. At the end of February there will be the first organizational visit (from a Vatican delegation), and then we will see what we could really fill in,” the archbishop said.

Pope Francis could spend a couple of nights in New York, but “it depends” on what else comes up.

From New York the Roman Pontiff would head to Philadelphia in the early morning of the 26th as his last stop, where he is set to participate in the World Meeting of Families from Sept. 26-27.

“Philadelphia is confirmed. That’s for sure,” the archbishop observed, explaining that the two big events set to take place with the Pope are a prayer vigil on the 26th and Mass Sunday, the 27th.

There is also an encounter planned with grandparents and children, however the archbishop said he does not know whether or not the Pope will participate.

Pope Francis himself confirmed his presence at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia during the Nov. 17-19 Humanum Conference in Rome, saying that he will attend “if God wills it.”

Besides the encounter with families, Archbishop Auza said that the Philadelphia visit will likely include “a visit either to a children’s hospital or a juvenile prison.”

Members of the organizational committee for the visit, he said, include himself; papal nuncio to the United States Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano; Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington; Cardinal Sean Patrick O’Malley, archbishop of Boston; Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, also president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Cardinal Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York; Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia; Msgr. Ronny Jenkins, secretary-general at the bishops’ conference, as well as a team of various secretaries and assistants.

On his Jan. 15 flight from Sri Lanka to the Philippines, Pope Francis also made the surprise announcement that he would canonize the founder of California’s first missions, Blessed Junipero Serra.
When asked whether or not the Pope’s itinerary for his U.S. trip would include a visit to California for the canonization, Archbishop Auza said that although it would be the ideal place, the state will most likely not be on the agenda.

“I think he may do that in Washington,” he said, noting how there is a statue of Bl. Serra in the National Statuary Hall of the Capitol building, honoring him as one of the founders of California.

The pontiff would most likely preside over “what they call a brief canonization, not the formal solemn canonization,” he said.

On a final note, Archbishop Auza spoke of the possibility that the Pope would go to Mexico as part of his trip to the U.S., saying that “they might skip Mexico this time because it becomes a very, very long (trip).”

The pontiff might make another visit to Latin America, the archbishop noted, although he did not know when that would be.

“So that’s more or less the plan. It’s a plan, we’ll see how it will pan out.”

In addition to being Catholic News Agency's Rome bureau chief, Alan Holdren is also the Rome correspondent for EWTN News Nightly.

UPDATED on Jan. 19, 2015 at 11:29 a.m. MST:

Archdiocese of Philadelphia director of communications Kenneth Gavin clarified that Pope Francis' official schedule during his trip to the U.S. in September has yet to be finalized.

"We are overjoyed that Pope Francis will be with us in September, and planning for his visit is intensely underway," he told CNA. "However, no final decisions regarding the Papal itinerary for Philadelphia have yet been made."

"Certainly, we are exploring a wide variety of potential scenarios and there are numerous factors and contingencies to consider,” Gavin noted, adding that final confirmation of the Pope's Philadelphia schedule "can come only after consultation with the Papal household."


January 19, 2015

Film journeys into the cosmos’ history

By Chase Brunton
The Maine Campus - The University of Maine student newspaper
Fourteen billion years ago, all of the energy in the universe was contained in a single point. Then the big bang happened, sending all of the energy in the universe scattering off in all directions.

Today, the force generated by the big bang is still causing the universe to expand outward. Eventually, stars were created, and when those stars died millions of years later — or billions, depending on the size of the star, as smaller stars live longer — they exploded, releasing all of the elements in the universe and creating everything as we know it, from planets, to new stars, and eventually life.

And now here we are, just beginning to understand our place in the vast scheme of things, using language to share ideas and change the world around us.

If this kind of thought fills you with excitement, you might enjoy the cosmic documentary “Journey of the Universe” now streaming on Netflix. Hosted and co-written by teacher and scientist Brian Swimme, author of the companion book of the same name, “Journey of the Universe” takes the viewer on a brief but intellectually stimulating tour of the “journey” the universe took to get where it is today. The film includes a revealing discussion of the nature of how life arose, and what it means to be alive in a universe where life is so exceedingly rare. Through explanations of cosmic phenomena and historical accounts of famous people, Swimme eloquently shares the story of how everything we know came to be.

Exploring the entire history of the universe and life in 50 minutes is no easy task, but Swimme handles it with grace and a surprising amount of nuance given the film’s short length. A scientist and teacher at Yale, he uses clever analogies and an amiable voice to show how humans have gone from being shaped by life to taking control of it. All of the concepts explored in this film are incredible, not just on a scientific level, but a philosophical and humanistic one as well. One of the most enjoyable aspects about the film is the taming of the wild science concepts with a humanistic touch. The fact that life has gotten to the point where it is self-aware and can speak and share ideas is one of the most, if not the most, beautiful outcomes of the big bang and evolution, a prospect outlined wonderfully by the film.

And yet, this evolution is not without its darker sides — another thing “Journey of the Universe” explores. For better or worse, humans now have such a command over nature that they are profoundly altering the composition of the planet that birthed them. As mentioned in the film, humans, originating from nature, have come to see themselves as separate. This makes some small sense because surviving and thriving as a species required conquering nature. However, we now know more than we ever did then; we now have begun to grasp just how closely related we are to everything around us. It’s true that survival may require controlling nature, but if we are to continue living as we are, it’s important that we understand just how delicate the balance of life is.

As I mentioned, the movie’s short, and as a result may leave less of an impression than it would have were it longer. Since “Journey” is a companion to the book of the same name, also written by Swimme, one can imagine that the book has a broader exploration of the concepts brought forth in the film. Nonetheless, the film is a thought-provoking, entertaining philosophical and humanistic ride through space and time. From the big bang and solar explosions, to the
development of the first primitive life forms, and onward to the emergence of consciousness and language, this universe of ours has been on quite the journey. How fortunate we are to be here, to serve as active witnesses to the universe.

http://mainecampus.com/2015/01/19/column-documentary-theater-film-journeys-into-the-cosmos-history/?ref=opinion

January 19, 2015

Pope Francis will visit New York City, Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia during September visit to U.S.

The papal visit to the Big Apple would likely include an address at the United Nations and possibly a Mass at Madison Square Garden. The first U.S. visit by a Pope since 2008 will include a White House visit and an address at Philadelphia’s World Meeting of Families. A trip to Boston may be included as well, a Vatican official told the Daily News.

By Sasha Goldstein
New York Daily News

Pope Francis may be the hottest ticket at Madison Square Garden this year.

The spiritual leader of the country’s 78 million Catholics confirmed to reporters Monday he will visit New York City during a U.S. visit in September.

"We are overjoyed" at the impending visit, New York Archdiocese spokesman Joe Zwilling told the Daily News.


"Both were huge and full of excitement," Zwilling said. "I imagine that this visit will be as huge, if not bigger, than those two!"

The news has thrilled "New Yorkers of all faiths," City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito said Monday in a statement.

"Pope Francis has made fighting poverty and expanding social justice a crux of his papacy and I am excited that he will be bringing this message to New York City this fall," she said. "I thank Cardinal Dolan for his tireless advocacy in encouraging the Papal visit and look forward to working with him and the Archdiocese to ensure that Pope Francis gets to experience the wonder and beauty of New York City’s diverse neighborhoods, communities and people."
A preliminary outline of the Pope’s September visit would have him stop by the United Nations and celebrate Mass at Madison Square Garden during a three-city swing, according to a member of the organizing committee for the visit.

The New York City Mass would be a pared down version so as not to overshadow a Philadelphia stop where Francis will address the World Meeting of Families.

“He would arrive on the 22nd (of September) and he would leave the evening of the 27th. It’s really a full six days, plus the travel, so it’s really one week,” Archbishop Bernardito Auza, a Philippines native and the Holy See’s permanent observer to the UN, told the Catholic News Agency on Sunday.

Details of the trip were discussed last week during a meeting of the U.S. trip organizers. Francis just wrapped up a four-day trip to Southeast Asia and is headed back to the Vatican after a Sunday Mass in front of an estimated 6 million people at Manila’s Rizal Park in the Philippines.

Francis confirmed Monday to reporters aboard the papal plane that he will visit D.C., New York and Philly. But a Vatican official told the Daily News that the Pope may squeeze in a Boston visit as well.

Time constraints will prevent Francis from visiting California, but he plans to canonize 17th-century missionary Junipero Serra, who brought Catholicism to the West Coast, during the D.C. leg, likely at the National Shrine.

September’s visit to the United States, the first papal trek stateside since Pope Benedict XVI appeared in 2008, will likely begin the evening of Sept. 22 in Washington, D.C. Pope Francis would visit the White House the next morning and meet President Obama during an official welcoming ceremony, according to CNA.

Francis would celebrate Mass at Washington’s Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, according to organizers.

“And we might say really the highlight of the Washington visit might be his speech to the joint meeting of Congress, so the Senate and the House of Representatives,” Archbishop Auza told CNA.

Then, it’s off to the Big Apple, where Francis would likely arrive the afternoon of Sept. 24.

The next morning, the pontiff would likely address the UN General Assembly, where a three-day Post-2014 Sustainable Development Summit is set to open.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is said to be “extremely thrilled” by the Pope’s impending visit.

Francis would stop by St. Patrick’s Cathedral at some point before celebrating Mass at MSG.
“Our plan is not to have a huge Mass outside of Philadelphia, because the focus will really be Philadelphia, because the Pope is going to the United States for the World Meeting of Families,” Auza told CNA.

Francis may fit in a stop at Ground Zero to visit the scene of the 9/11 attacks and the newly opened memorial and museum.

Then, it’s off to Philadelphia, the only confirmed stop of the papal visit. There, Francis will hold a prayer vigil the evening of the 26th and Mass on Sunday, Sept. 27. He’d also likely include “a visit either to a children’s hospital or a juvenile prison,” Auza told CNA.

“But these are just proposals. At the end of February there will be the first organizational visit (from a Vatican delegation), and then we will see what we could really fill in,” the archbishop told the outlet.


January 26, 2015

Change is slow but worth it

By Rachel Myslivy
Global Sisters Report
Change is slow but worth it.

A friend commented to me the other day that my environmental work is like a ministry. It was such a wonderful thing to hear. For me, raising awareness of our environmental crisis is a calling. That doesn’t make it any easier. Sometimes it feels like I am pushing an enormous rock uphill on ever-shifting ground. Just when it seems I’m making headway, something happens and I have to redirect my efforts. Working for social change is slow-going and often feels like you’re going backwards. It is important to take the long view.

Back in August, I was feeling crushed by the enormity of the problems we face. My efforts are so small, the problems so large. Still, so many do not understand. Why should I continue to put myself out there for the Earth time and time again with so little progress? I went to Mass alone, annoyed. The first reading began,

“You duped me, O LORD . . .
All the day I am an object of laughter;
everyone mocks me.”

Yep. I thought. That’s just how I feel right now. I’m done trying to help others see the importance of conserving our resources. The reading played right along with my thinking but the ending changed the tune:

“But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart,
imprisoned in my bones;
I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it.”

Pictures flashed through my mind of children living off our wasted excess, turtles nearly cut in half by plastic rings, birds with stomachs full of plastic detritus. I am overwhelmed. I recalled my friend’s comment that my environmental work is like a ministry. How can I help others see what she sees, that our faith directs us to care for the Earth; that our throw-away culture affects the poor – precisely those who we are to protect; that simple actions can make enormous impacts? How can we renew the face of the earth? I snapped back to attention in time to hear this in the second reading:

“Do not conform yourselves to this age
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Most likely, I was the only person in the church reeling through these readings – at least from the environmental perspective. I recalled Pope Francis’s recent statements about throwaway culture and ecological sin as “the sin of our times.” I reflected on my deeply-held beliefs that we must care for creation to preserve life on Earth. It is all-too easy to get caught up in consumer culture and keeping up with the Joneses, but our addiction to stuff is depleting natural resources, polluting the air and water, and resulting in enormous piles of trash that will litter the Earth for
hundreds of years. I recalled a powerful statement by Sr. Miriam Therese MacGillis who wrote, “Resist the lure of ‘House Beautiful’ marketing which amplifies the disparity between rich and poor, and demands enormous use of Earth’s materials.”

What is the will of God when it comes to “this age” and how can we renew our minds to understand what is good and pleasing and perfect from an ecological perspective? The Gospel reading provided an answer:

“You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

The sermon expanded upon the idea of thinking like a human being vs. thinking like God. Fr. Mike commented that you can quickly learn what thinking like a human being is by watching television. He offered several topics for thinking like a human being: beauty, pleasure, money, health, power. As I was listening, I distilled human thinking down to a simple truth: Human thinking is temporally limited. My life – my things, my health, my family – all of these are high on my list of priorities but they are all short term in the grand scheme of things.

Human thinking focuses on “the now” or at least the relatively-near-to-now. This short-term thinking is what allows us to pollute water sources (“I still have clean water.”), to fight carbon regulations (“I need to make money now.”), and to consume resources unchecked (“There is plenty for me.”), and to embrace the disposable lifestyle (“It’s so easy!”). Considering that we are short-timers on the planet, this limited thinking is understandable – but the long-term environmental implications are staggering.

If there is one thing that I know for certain about God, it is that I do not know anything for certain about God. However, I assume that God has a much longer view of things. In the Gospel, Peter is worrying about losing Jesus in this life. He is focusing on the short-term while God, apparently, is taking the long view. I will never begin to fathom the way God sees our current predicament, but I can focus on the long view as much as I am able. In my own work, I can focus on the success, the positive steps, however small. I can educate others on the long-term impacts of their choices. I can have patience and hope and trust that all shall be well.

During that Mass, I heard something new that gave me motivation and strength to carry on. I heard what I needed to hear. Just a few days later, we established an Earth Care Committee at our parish – something I had hoped to see for years – years when it felt like I was pushing that rock uphill only to have it roll right back down to squash me time and time again. This time, something shifted, and now I am overwhelmed by the joyful success of our progress to promote environmental awareness in our parish and to be wise stewards of the Earth.

[Rachel Myslivy, M.A., conducted the Green Sisters in Kansas Oral History Project documenting the environmental activism of Catholic sisters in Kansas. She is involved in a number of Catholic and environmental organizations and runs a family farm.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/environment/change-slow-worth-it-18626
January 28, 2015

A New Paradigm for Catholic Energy Ethics

By Erin Lothes Biviano
Catholic Moral Theology

The following is a guest post by Erin Lothes Biviano, who teaches theology at the College of St. Elizabeth.

2015 promises to be a watershed year for climate negotiations and Catholic environmental teaching. Pope Francis’s encyclical on the environment is already widely anticipated and an ambitious statement from global Bishops has already appeared after the Lima COP-20. All this is good news in the wake of the latest news that 2014’s global temperatures were the warmest ever.

Another resource is a new Vatican text that comprehensively lays out elements of the increasingly defined Catholic energy ethic. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has just published the English translation of Energy, Justice and Peace: A Reflection on Energy in the Current Context of Development and Environmental Protection (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014). This text incorporates, references, and builds upon clear themes of Catholic social teaching whose links to the environment and sustainable development are established—themes such as solidarity, rights to health and development, participation, the option for the poor, and the rights of future generations.

Energy, Justice and Peace conveys important notes in a “new paradigm” of energy ethics. As the secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Bishop Mario Toso has stated, “in view of the realization of peace—and peace includes several goods—it is necessary that energy be thought of, produced, distributed, and used, according to a new paradigm.” I have described this new paradigm of energy ethics elsewhere.

Here I offer a brief introduction to Energy, Justice and Peace, published in Italian in 2013 as a result of a two-year study of energy by the Council with other experts. To detail some of the most evocative new messages of this text, I will highlight those that sound a new tone amidst familiar CST themes, or cast the CST themes in particularly significant form. Using the rubric of a “new paradigm of energy ethics,” I will address normative teachings, practical points, evangelical or theological themes, and exhortations- calls for action. I describe the theological messages as “evangelical” because they indeed pertain to the “good news”: the call to live out the love of neighbor in the concrete situation of the world today, a situation intersected at every dimension by the question of energy. My aim is to convey the resonances of this text with extended quotations from the document. The text’s introduction reflects on the history of energy, its indispensable nature, and its complexity, then follow sections analyzing the relationship of energy to injustice, the obstacles to energy development, and critiques of the current profit-driven economic model. Discussions of governance and public responsibility, principles for energy management, and concrete proposals are offered before the conclusion.
**Normative Teachings.** The essential normative message is the centrality of the human person. Energy sources are “indissolubly linked with the development of man, society and culture. In short, the concept of energy being a secondary concept, in order to highlight the related ethical implications, one should always consider the primary reference from which it draws its meaning and importance: the person and his or her integral promotion... Energy should be considered as a common good, as we will emphasize hereinafter, that must be guaranteed to all. *Inadequate and unequal access to energy must be, therefore, as an obstacle to the integral development of peoples and to a fair society.*

**Practical points.** Practical concerns include the competition that may result from demand for non-renewable energy sources, pitting strong economies against weak economies, “with the risk of severe penalties for the latter.” Many concrete details are reviewed, including the relationship of energy and geopolitical conflict, hazardous waste, association with cartels, biofuels, subsidies, cookstoves, the energy intensity of beef, and the water – energy – food nexus.

The Council observes that the model of development followed historically by industrial countries may not necessarily be the model for developing and rural areas. Distributed generation, small scale renewable projects, and even simple mechanical devices (replacing diesel pumps for irrigation, for example), and other local solutions must be explored.

**Evangelical/Theological Themes.** The many profound theological notes within this book constitute its richest offering of an overall vision of the human meaning of energy. This vision permits the recognition of energy and energy ethics as a theme within evangelization.

First, the very cause of ecological devastation is theologically grounded. “Creation suffers because humanity does not yet live the novelty of Easter.” Humankind’s self-knowledge as a conscious moral agent is at the core of apprehending this theological message. “Taking energy into account means looking upon man, his self-perception in history and the possibilities for humanity to understand and increasingly fulfill his vocation to improvement.”

The document’s profound economic critique condemns seeking profit for profit’s sake with great pastoral sensitivity. While profit is a legitimate goal, it cannot be the sole aim of companies. Profitability may coexist with practices that allow for “the people to be humiliated, their dignity offended and the ecosystem compromised. Besides being morally inadmissible, this will have negative repercussions also on economic efficiency.”

Sustainability must therefore be become an “ethical-moral sustainability,” a mode of development that “listens to nature,” and seeks an “economy of communion” — all consonant with the eschatological orientation of Christianity.

**Exhortations.** Many practical exhortations are offered in this volume. Increasing consumption is proscribed; energy sobriety is urged. Overall, the text calls for a new paradigm that provides “new behavioral patterns based on justice, responsibility, altruism, subsidiarity and the conception of the integral development of peoples with a view to the common good.” Toward that end, the Council advocates for “sustainable development based more on renewable energy sources than on non-renewable energy ones.”
Perhaps the most trenchant recommendation comes from the insistence that energy should “primarily solve the shortages of the most vulnerable and poorest populations, and, only subsequently, ensure greater consumption for those who already have plenty of energy.” The policy recommendation that follows is the uncompromising admonition that advanced countries have the “moral duty” of using complex energy technologies to limit and reduce their demand for energy sources that are easier to use. Poor countries will then have greater access to such sources. Advanced countries have “the moral duty of developing the use of the most complex and capital-intensive energy technologies, in order to allow poor countries to feed their development, resorting to simpler and less expensive energy technologies.”

Such strong recommendations are rooted not only in a firm call to solidarity, but the recognition of how energy intersects all forms of social, economic, technological, and political globalization. Among these multiple globalizations, *Energy, Justice and Peace* calls for increased awareness of the reality of moral globalization.

Thus a final exhortation points to the need for education and moral formation about the ethical implications of energy. Recognizing that governments may never prohibit “the use of a jeep to go to buy a superfluous item from a store around the corner,” this behavior is nonetheless labeled as aberrant. The awareness of energy choices as ethical choices must be developed in combination with the spread of the Gospel message. This evangelical education about energy seeks a “conversion of hearts and minds,” that understands the linkage of love with the universal destination of goods and the management of energy in an ethical-moral sustainability.

http://catholicmoraltheology.com/a-new-paradigm-for-catholic-energy-ethics/

**January 28, 2015**

US to Enlist Pope Francis' Help on Climate Change

Reuters

WASHINGTON—In a bid to bolster the Obama administration's "moral" case for combating climate change, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency will meet senior Vatican officials Friday to enlist papal support for its policies.

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy said Pope Francis, who has become a vocal climate advocate since his 2013 election, can be an ally for President Barack Obama's Climate Action Plan.

"As one of the world's most respected and influential leaders, Pope Francis, and those who advise him, will play a crucial part in advancing climate change [action] domestically and overseas," McCarthy, a Roman Catholic, said in an e-mail.

This marks the second time the administration has sought the Vatican's help on a controversial issue. The pope helped mediate the effort by the United States and Cuba to reopen diplomatic relations.
Francis has become an emerging voice on climate change, saying on a recent trip to the typhoon-vulnerable Philippines that "man has gone too far damaging the environment."

The EPA is finalizing a series of regulations targeting carbon emissions and air pollution amid strong resistance from the Republican-led Congress and industry.

To counter that, McCarthy has done extensive public outreach to win support for EPA proposals, touting their economic and public health benefits. She said the pope could help make her case.

"Focusing our attention on the communities that need it most is at the core of EPA's mission to protect public health and the environment, and there is no voice more credible than the church's to speak to our moral obligation as stewards of our planet," McCarthy said.

In June, the pope is expected to issue an encyclical on environmental degradation and its effects on millions of people, especially the world's poorest. The encyclical is aimed at pressuring world leaders to secure a United Nations climate agreement in Paris next December that would require rich and poor countries to halt, slow or slash their carbon emissions.

Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, said the encyclical will "add some wind to the sails" of the Paris talks.

"What he says carries significant weight as he tries to live what he teaches," Misleh said. "There is moral authority to Pope Francis that is undeniable."

Added John Grim, a director of Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology: "It is very appropriate that Gina McCarthy is visiting with the pope. Francis I is so widely respected that he will change the dialog on this issue."


January 30, 2015

EPA chief at Vatican: Obama 'aligned' with Francis on climate change

By Joshua J. McElwee
National Catholic Reporter

Rome -- Explaining her visit Friday to the Vatican, the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said she wanted to let Pope Francis know that President Barack Obama is "aligned with him" on the issue of climate change and is taking action.

"I think the pope knows his own beliefs," said EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy. "I want him to know that the president is aligned with him on these issues and that we are taking action in the United States."
McCarthy, who is visiting the Vatican Friday as part of a five-day European tour to promote the Obama administration's climate action plan, was speaking in a small meeting with press before heading to Vatican offices.

The administrator said she would be bringing a message of hope to Vatican officials that "this is not a challenge that human nature and human beings can't fix."

"This is not an issue that should be driving economic problems," said McCarthy. "It should be bringing economic solutions that [are] totally consistent with the efforts that the Catholic church with great pride has been doing ... to bring relief to folks that are most in need of relief, folks that are in poverty."

"Those are the ones that are going to be hit and we have to take the action now," she said.

McCarthy, who was speaking alongside U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See Ken Hackett, said she would be meeting Friday with Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. She also said she will also be meeting during the day with Msgr. Antoine Camilleri, an undersecretary at the Vatican's Secretariat of State.

Hackett said the U.S. embassy to the Holy See would be hosting a reception for McCarthy and other Vatican officials Friday night.

The administrator is also to tour some of the work the Vatican has done to better its environmental impact, including solar panels that have been installed in the city-state and an air filtration system that has been put in place at the Sistine Chapel.

Asked about Francis' expected encyclical on environmental issues, which the pope has indicated will be published in June or July, McCarthy first joked: "It's certainly not my place to dictate to the pope what he should be doing in an encyclical."

But she also said the pontiff's message on climate change has already been "very powerful."

That message, she said, "is to face up to the challenge of climate change, to recognize that it is a challenge how we can serve those most in need and protect them."

"One of the challenges that I think we face in the U.S. is that climate change is very often viewed as a political issue," said McCarthy. "And environmental issues are not political."

She continued: "I think we need to get this out of the political arena and get it back to the arena we work most effectively on: What's right for our kids, for our families, for public health, and what solutions do we bring to the table that are going to address those?"

McCarthy was also asked about Francis' remarks on the papal plane while traveling to Manila, Philippines, Jan. 15 that he was disappointed by a "lack of courage" by world leaders at the U.N.'s last meeting on climate change, held in December in Peru.
Referring to the next U.N. Climate Change Conference, to be held in Paris this November and December, McCarthy said: "We think there is a bit of change happening now that is making the atmosphere as we lead up to Paris more hopeful."

"Clearly, the pope wants actions and he wants real commitments and we do as well and we're providing them," she said.

"I think the pope's continued push to try and get the resolutions to the table that we need -- if that's where he wants to be -- I think that's great," said McCarthy. "It just continues to provide visibility."

Before concluding her remarks, McCarthy thanked both Catholic Relief Services and the U.S. bishops' conference for their work on climate change, saying both organizations had been "amazing" on the issue.

McCarthy also thanked the Catholic Climate Covenant, a coalition of dozens of Catholic organizations, dioceses, religious communities and colleges working on the issue.

"The faith community's voice is going to be very important here because EPA can talk about the science and reach only so far," said the administrator. "We need to get this to the point where people are as comfortable talking about this as they are other international public health threats."

"Everybody is just looking for the pope to continue to make signals that this is an issue that is important to the Catholic church and should be important to all of us," said McCarthy. "Then we can take it from there ... in terms of what it means to translate [that] into effective strategies to get the word out and to start the actions."

[Joshua J. McElwee is NCR Vatican correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: @joshjmac.]


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Solutions
Environmental Defense Fund Newsletter
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Ceres Newsletter

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February 2, 2015

Pope Francis and Climate Change: A Catholic Tradition

By Carolyn Woo
Huffington Post
In taking up the important issue of climate change, Pope Francis is acting in the long tradition of the Catholic Church to decry threats to the world God has created and entrusted to us as well as injustices that endanger humanity and disproportionately affect the poor.

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued a document called *Rerum Novarum* which addressed the moral dimensions of economic life in light of the Church's tradition dating back through Sacred Scripture. This teaching reminds us that the goods of Creation are meant to benefit all humankind. Private property and the free market system must advance the well-being of all and the earth that sustains us. The document uplifted the sanctity of the individual, responding the many collectivist ideologies proposed to redress the inequities wrought by the industrial revolution.

In subsequent generations, Popes have added to this body of work that came to be known as Catholic Social Teaching. That is what Francis is doing today, building on the established teaching of the Church and relying on the Catholic belief that science illuminates and reveals the creation of our Lord and shapes the actions of mankind.

One theme throughout Catholic Social Teaching is a respect for free markets as necessary for individual dignity along with a recognition of the injustice and despair that can result from the excesses of capitalism. It is in this tradition that Francis takes on climate change, not to constrict the entrepreneurial spirit that God has placed in humanity, but to ensure that the changes wrought by the overreliance on fossil fuels do not damage our world and its communities and countries in a way that does not allow their citizens to retain their dignity, their autonomy, their God-given rights.

At Catholic Relief Services, we are very aware of the impact of climate change on the poor around the world; that those who have contributed the least to this problem are suffering -- and will suffer -- the most from it.

In Bangladesh, rising sea levels make flooding more frequent and severe. A continued rise will send millions fleeing, affecting not just those who must leave their homes but also neighboring communities and countries that will receive them. In Central America, scientists see that temperature changes are threatening the future of traditional cash crops, sending many more into cities to seek work. There they will encounter the conditions -- poverty, violence -- that motivate thousands to embark on dangerous journeys to the United States as refugees. In the Philippines, ferocious typhoons are hitting unprepared areas that have never seen such storms before. In the Sahel region of Africa, droughts are becoming more frequent and of longer duration.

Pope John Paul II recognized that we must take responsibility for such consequences, stating, "We face a fundamental question which can be described as both ethical and ecological. How can accelerated development be prevented from turning against man? How can one prevent disasters that destroy the environment and threaten all forms of life, and how can the negative consequences that have already occurred be remedied?"

He said that, "the stronger and richer nations must have a sense of moral responsibility for the other nations, so that a real international system may be established which will rest on the
foundation of the equality of all peoples and on the necessary respect for their legitimate differences."

Pope Francis knows that God calls us to act. And that in acting, we will not only save so many poor from the sufferings brought about by climate change, but, as Leo XIII understood 123 years ago, will also preserve the role of the free market as necessary for the dignity and progress of mankind, saving it from its own excesses.

"Carolyn Woo is president of Catholic Relief Services, the official overseas humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States.


February 2, 2015

Pope Francis: cultivate and preserve Mother Earth

Vatican Radio

Pope Francis on Saturday received members of Italy’s National Federation of Farmers, who are this year celebrating the 70th anniversary of their foundation.

Pope Francis told the farmers present in the Clementine Hall that there is no humanity without the cultivation of the earth, as there is also no life without good food that is produced for men and women of every continent.

This shows, underlined the Holy Father, that agriculture has a pivotal role.

In his prepared remarks to the farmers, the Pope reflected on as he put it, two critical points. He said, “the Second Vatican Council recalled the universal destination of the goods of the earth,” but, Pope Francis added, “in fact the dominant economic system excludes many from their correct use.” The Holy Father went on to say that, “absolutizing market rules, a culture of waste and waste that in the case of food has unacceptable proportions, together with other factors, cause misery and suffering for many families.” Therefore, the Pope continued, the system of production and distribution of food must be radically rethought.

In his second point, the Holy Father said it was important to remember that man is called not only to cultivate the land, but also to preserve it. In a time of climate change the Pope noted, this is difficult, that is why, he said, it is so vital that nations are able to work together to protect creation.

Finally, Pope Francis invited the farmers, in the spirit of St Francis, to love the land as Mother earth, and proposed that they make an alliance with it, so that it can continue to be, the source of life for the entire human family.
February 3, 2015

Faculty Spotlight: John Grim

Notes from the Quad
Yale University

In the midst of humanity’s divisions and convulsions, John Grim is watching the world slowly wake up to the urgency and ethics of Earth care. At Yale he feels that he joins with others to help make that happen.

“The question is: What values do we human communities share?” says Grim, co-director of the Forum for Religion and Ecology at Yale with his wife, Yale scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker.

“Ultimately, while we can distinguish ourselves, we are not separate. We have different ways of making a similar point: We are interwoven with the natural world, and thus need an ethic of care, an ethic of respectful use. No one personality or community or denomination will trigger the ecological changes needed. I think it’s ‘a hundred flowers blooming’ across the world. Many communities, many relationships will make it happen.”

“We are not naïve to the problems of religion – its intolerance, its violence,” he says. “Despite some very sharp difference, we’ve seen the possibility of dialogue. Mary Evelyn and I are both hopeful that religions can make a contribution to a sustainable future.”

The wisdom of Native peoples

Like Tucker, Grim is a Yale senior lecturer and research scholar with appointments in the Divinity School, the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, and the Department of Religious Studies.

For five decades he has been particularly drawn to the wisdom of Native American peoples and what they can teach us about mutually enhancing human-Earth relations. He has a longtime relationship with the Crow tribe in Montana, where he and Tucker have been adopted into a Crow family.

“Adoption is a pathway into ritual life,” he says. “Certain doors open through this pathway. Through their rituals there’s a re-creation of the cosmos in order to renew nature and animals and themselves. Native people are trying to preserve values that are essential to their survival. I want to convey their resilience. Indigenous knowing is a moving balance of life-taking and life-giving relationships. In this spirit, indigenous peoples are really speaking out in the face of climate change and standing up to degradation in many places across the continent.”
Grim’s long immersion in Native American traditions has positioned him for larger, global conversations unfolding rapidly in the 21st century. His work these days is helping articulate ecological ethics at the frontier of interreligious dialogues. His teaching embraces many styles of learning – classroom, filmmaking, books, online.

**Online pioneer**

Grim and Tucker are pioneering hybrid online classes at Yale in religion and ecology. Students do the work online but also meet the professors once a week in class. This semester they are teaching Yale’s first online six-week course on East Asian religions and ecology. It is open only to Yale students for now, but they hope to expand the course offering to other interested universities – and eventually offer 10 online courses on ecology and other religious traditions. They are teaching Introduction to Religion and Ecology online this semester as well.

Grim and Tucker are also teaching “Law, Environment, and Religion” this semester with Doug Kysar, the Joseph M. Field ’55 Professor of Law at Yale Law School.

The class brings together eight divinity students, eight forestry school students, eight law students, creating much cross-fertilizing discussion, Grim says.

“We discuss how economic development can proceed with attention to the precautionary principle so that there is mutual flourishing of human beings within natural systems,” he says.

“There’s great interest in learning how to quantify the benefits of nature, not just the value of its exploitation. Does a river have value to us besides being a place for dumping? What about its role in the ecosystem, its value as a source for fresh water? What about its aesthetic value? Behind all our class discussion is a looming question: What values are driving us today? Do these values include social justice, eco-justice? These questions flow like a current through the class.”

**Journey of the Universe**

Then there’s the Emmy award-winning “Journey of the Universe” PBS film and companion book (published by Yale University Press). Grim and Tucker are executive directors of the film. Tucker and Brian Swimme are authors of the book. Together they present a fresh story about the origins of the universe, its principles of self-organization and emergence, and the hopes for an evolving Earth community of mutual concern.

The film has built a following. Some 66,000 viewers have rated it on Netflix over the past year. Grim and Tucker will be presenting the film in South Korea this summer. The film has been translated into Korean and Spanish. They have also shown it to audiences in Europe, Latin America, and China.

Grim was raised in North Dakota in a progressive Roman Catholic household, which gave him an openness to the spirit of Vatican II, other Christian traditions, as well as evolutionary theory, he says.
He went to St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minn., as an undergraduate. He received an M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in the history of religions from Fordham, conducting research in shamanism and its healing practices in Native American Anisínabe traditions.

**Fateful friendship**

At Fordham he met historian of religions Thomas Berry (1914-2009), a comprehensive thinker who endeavored to weave the findings of science with the insights of religious traditions. Berry became a lifelong friend and mentor who also saw evolution as a cosmic story that envisioned a participatory role for humans.

Grim also met his future wife at Fordham, and soon he and Tucker would forge a remarkable partnership as university professors, authors, book editors, conference organizers and conversation starters on the ever-widening relations between religion, science, and care of the Earth.

“This life work has taken us out of the silo mentality,” says Grim, who came to Yale with Tucker in 2006. “The issues are too pressing to remain isolated in particular disciplines only.”

A pivotal moment in his career came in the mid-1990s. From 1996 to 1998 they organized a series of 10 conferences on world religions and ecology at the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard. From those conferences Grim and Tucker edited a series of 10 volumes on particular religions and their ecological perspectives distributed by Harvard University Press.

“That was a decisive turn – it allowed us to see a multidisciplinary picture in the religious ecologies and religious cosmologies of particular traditions,” Grim says.

**West meets East**

His perspectives on world religions give him a glimpse of what different traditions can bring to each other. Asia can teach the West, and vice versa, he feels. Modern western worldviews and religions honor individualism, rights language, and forms of rationalism. East Asian traditions value community and holism. They see continuity in reality expressed by concepts such as qi (or ch’i). Qi is a circulating force of matter-energy foundational to life. In South Asian thought, community is also valued. For example, dharma points toward an inherent duty and responsibility to the larger community of life.

New understandings open up in his classroom when Divinity and Forestry students mingle. In one class, Grim reads from the work of a Hopi elder on the importance of blue corn within his culture in the southwest.

“It’s interesting to see how divinity students and forestry students react differently to the reading. The FES students will talk about the nutrient flow and other technicalities of root systems and soil. Divinity students pick up on the power of the symbolism of the corn. In the class, their conversation moves into peer learning. They begin to teach one another.”
For John Grim, such teaching moments inside and beyond the classroom will eventually inspire more empathetic and humanizing principles of environmental practice and community values. Religions, he feels, must find a way to be central to the conversation, realizing that they may not be sufficient but are necessary for environmental solutions.

http://notesfromthequad.yale.edu/notes/2015-02-03-131500/faculty-spotlight-john-grim

February 3, 2015

Interfaith panel tackles global environmental problems at Dallas event

By Julie Ryan
Green Source DWF

Faith leaders of Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim traditions shared their views on climate change and responsibility this Martin Luther King Day, in a panel sponsors dubbed “Love, Justice, Care for Creation.” Dallas Interfaith Power and Light, local affiliate of the national faith-based environmental group, hosted the panel at the Dallas Baha’i Center in Lake Highlands in Dallas.

Discussion spanned from teachings on the spiritual value of the Earth, to environmental degradation’s root causes, environmental justice, and solutions.

Striking differences in this forum versus others on climate change were, fossil fuels were not mentioned – but animal farming was. Raising animals for food causes almost one-fifth of global greenhouse gas emissions and extensive other environmental damage, said Buddhist priest Tashi Nyima, citing a 2011 study by Humane Society International summarizing 289 scientific reports.

Ven. Nyima of the New Jonang Buddhist Community in Dallas was joined by Dr. Hind Jarrah of the Texas Muslim Women’s Foundation and Dr. Pankaj Jain, anthropologist at University of North Texas and author of the book Dharma and Ecology of Hindu Communities: Sustenance and Sustainability. The three also spoke from their personal knowledge of environmental conditions in developing nations around the world.

"One of the five pillars of Islam,” said Jarrah, “is the unity with the Creator of all creation… Concern for one another and the environment is intrinsic to Islam.”

Nyima, who is a spokesperson for Dharma Voices for Animals, said "all sentient beings, all existence, is connected and interdependent" in Buddhist teachings. "Non-killing” is Buddhism’s first vow, and extends to animals as well as humans. Jain echoed the value of honoring animals as an Indian tradition.

A core value of Buddhism is “‘right view,' seeing things as they are," said Nyima. “World problems trace back to two wrong views: one, separation, that is, my separateness from the rest of the world, and two, the supremacy of the self.”
These views lead to consumerism. “We don’t think anything is enough.”

In 2015, according to Oxfam, 1 percent of the world's population owns as much as the bottom 50 percent of the world's population, he noted.

“India and China are the most sustainable nations in the world,” stated Jain, citing National Geographic’s eight-year Greendex project. Greendex is a scientifically derived sustainable consumption index of actual consumer behavior and material lifestyles in 18 nations. The United States ranks last.

"In the U.S., the birth of one child has the economic impact of 70 Indonesian children,” said Jain. "In the U.S., a dog or cat is the equivalent of 12 Bangladeshi children.”

“How can we overcome political and economic forces involved in [the climate crisis]?” an audience member asked.

“Change has to start with me,” said Jain. “Being more conscious of how I'm consuming.” Nyima seconded, “What we buy is primarily responsible for climate degradation.”

“Speak truth to power,” he added. “Get in the way. Stop our silent complicity… As people of faith, with dignity and constancy—not anger.”

“What use are all our churches if we cannot come together? We need to agree on what we agree… If we came together, we could do so much more.”

Jarrah added, “You have to address people based on what moves them. Weather events around the world are unbelievable, blizzards in the Middle East that have never been seen before… See what moves people and try to reach them in that manner.”

At the closing reception, audience member Sarah from Tarrant County commented: “You know, I agree with what was said about the churches coming together. There may be five of us in each congregation who are concerned about the environment. What would happen if we all connected?”

What if?

http://greensourcedfw.org/articles/interfaith-panel-tackles-global-environmental-problems-dallas-event

February 9, 2015

Pope Mass: Protecting Creation a Christian responsibility

Vatican Radio
Christians are called to care for God's creation. That was the Pope’s message at Mass this Monday morning at the Casa Santa Marta. The Holy Father also spoke about the "second creation", the one performed by Jesus that he "re-created" from what had been ruined by sin.

God creates the universe but creation does not end, "he continues to sustain what he has created." That was the focus of Pope Francis’ homily as he dwelt on a passage from Genesis, in the first reading, which recounts the creation of the universe. "In today's Gospel", the Pope commented, we see "the other creation of God", "that of Jesus, who came to re-create what had been ruined by sin."

We see Jesus among the people, he said, and "those who touched him were saved" it is the "re-creation". "This 'second creation' Pope Francis, is even more wonderful than the first; This second work is wonderful. "Finally, there is "another job", that of "perseverance in the faith" that which the Holy Spirit works on:

"God works, continues to work, and we can ask ourselves how we should respond to this creation of God, which is born of love, because he works through love. In the 'first creation' we must respond with the responsibility that the Lord gives us: 'The earth is yours, take it forward; let it grow'. Even for us there is a responsibility to nurture the Earth, to nurture Creation, to keep it and make it grow according to its laws. We are the lords of creation, not its masters."

The Pope warned, however, that we must be "careful not to become masters of Creation, but to make it go forward, faithful to its laws." Therefore, he added, "this is the first response to the work of God: to be protectors of Creation":

"When we hear that people have meetings about how to preserve creation, we can say: 'No, they are the greens!' No, they are not the greens! This is the Christian! This is 'our response to the' first creation 'of God. And' our responsibility. A Christian who does not protect Creation, who does not let it grow, is a Christian who does not care about the work of God, that work that was born from the love of God for us. And this is the first response to the first creation: protect creation, make it grow."

On the subject of the “second creation Pope Francis looked to the figure of Saint Paul saying, this Saint tells us to let ourselves be "reconciled to God", "go on the road of inner reconciliation, community reconciliation, because reconciliation is the work of Christ." And again, echoing the words of Saint Paul, the Pope said that we should be grieved that the Holy Spirit is within us, that he is within us and works in us. The Holy Father added that we "believe in the person of God": "the person is the Father, Son and the person of the Holy Spirit":

"And all three are involved in this creation, in this re-creation, in this perseverance in re-creation. And to all three of them our response is: to preserve and nurture Creation, let ourselves be reconciled with Jesus, with God in Jesus Christ, every day, and do not be grieved by the Holy Spirit, not drive it away: he is the host of our hearts, he who accompanies us, he who makes us grow."
"May the Lord – Pope Francis concluded - give us the grace to understand that he" is at work "and give us the grace to respond appropriately to this labour of love."


February 9, 2015

Rediscovering the moral dimension of climate change

By Jonathon Porritt
The Ecologist

Pope Francis’s forthcoming statement on climate change could just revitalise progress towards significant emissions cuts, writes Jonathon Porritt. But more than that, it will open up the space for a wider spirituality to guide our thinking, and campaigning, on climate and other key global challenges.

Which of the following publications will have the bigger impact on the all-important climate conference in Paris at the end of the year?

1. Individual statements from governments of their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions ('INDCs')?

2. The forthcoming encyclical from Pope Francis on the environment and climate change, rumoured to be in its final draft?

Of course both are of critical importance. If the INDCs from governments, indicating the scope of cuts in greenhouse gas emissions to be achieved over the next 15 years, demonstrate a high level of ambition, this will create the context for a hard-hitting global agreement in Paris.

And if the aggregated 'total' of all those country targets falls so far short of what the science tells us is now necessary, it will confirm for many that our politicians are incapable of understanding the true consequences of accelerating climate change for the whole of humankind.

But only Pope Francis can challenge 'Christian conservatism'

Should the Pope clearly spell out the all but inevitable consequences of today's BAAU (Business Almost As Usual) responses to accelerating climate change - especially regarding the impacts on the world's poorest people - it will force Catholic leaders the world to re-think their moral obligations.

With more than a billion Catholics all around the world, that's pretty important in its own right. Leadership from that source has been minimal, to say the least, and there are many Catholic politicians and climate change sceptics who play a very influential role in today's climate politics.
Especially in the USA, where they've formed what can only be described as an 'unholy alliance' with the evangelicals to stymie any effort by their respective churches to step up to the plate on the issue of climate change and personal responsibility.

And that's why I believe the impact of any papal edict in this area will be far, far greater than its immediate impact on the Catholic Church.

I believe such a broadside, framed essentially in the name of the world's poorest people, of all future generations, and of the rest of non-human creation, could just re-legitimise a deep and radical moral case for changing our ways before it's too late.

**Doing what's expedient - or what's right?**

For that's what's missing today. Governments are compelled, at every turn, to put national self-interest ahead of what's actually needed for humankind as a whole. Sovereign interests almost always trump the common good. In that respect, we're *all* prisoners trapped in a classic and potentially terminal dilemma.

By the same token, the business response to climate change is held back by companies' adherence to their tried-and-tested 'business cases', built up so rationally and mechanistically over the last decade, for fear of deviating in any degree from their unbending commitment to profit-maximising shareholder supremacy. No moral dimension here please!

Which in turn allows the world's media baronies to go on lying, distorting and obfuscating about climate change, ensuring that most citizens the world over end up confused and disempowered, just waiting for a different quality of leadership.

I have to admit that I feel a little odd saying that. I've spent most of my life inveighing against the Catholic Church's utterly idiotic views on procreation and family planning - and I'm not sure that Pope Francis's reminder to his believers that they 'do not have to breed like rabbits' goes quite as far as he so obviously needs to go.

However many times one comes back to the fact that there are two elements to the global metric of 'per capita emissions' - namely, emissions *and* heads - today's climate diplomacy still focusses exclusively on the emissions. And the Pope must realise that.

But who else is going to put that utterly critical moral dimension back into our deliberations? Prince Charles has laboured mightily to do exactly that, but 30 years on from the time when he first started urging politicians to get to grips with the threat of climate change, far too many people now set his continued advocacy to one side on the grounds of 'been there, done that, got the t-shirt'.

**New politics, new economics**

So what about the politicians themselves, in terms of reviving that kind of moral dimension? Until the recent triumph of Syriza in Greece, and the rise of Podemos in Spain, I would have
dismissed out of hand any suggestion that a generation of politicians totally in thrall to today’s dominant neoliberal ideology would have anything at all to offer by way of moral guidance.

But the election of Syriza in Greece provides another very powerful reminder that there’s a radically different way of doing politics. Writing in the *Financial Times* recently, Professor Mark Mazower pointed out the moral underpinning for Syriza’s surge in popularity:

"With youth unemployment above 50%, an entire generation is being consigned to the scrapheap. At the same time, the notion of the common good is being sacrificed by forced sell-offs of state-owned lands, as well as businesses, with the prospect of ecological destruction as a result. If finance is to serve Europe rather than run it, a notion of the common good needs to be restored."

Today's economic orthodoxies are so transparently not for the common good. Yet with the full support of our self-serving, right-wing media, it’s been possible for politicians to obscure the worsening impact of structural inequity on people's lives. But as that inequity bites deeper and deeper, even their obfuscatory skills can no longer paper over the cracks.

**Time to develop the spiritual dimension**

It is of course perfectly possible to define (and work for) the common good from an entirely secular perspective. But many would now argue that faith-based and spiritual perspectives can bring both a deeper and a more enduring dimension.

Which is why I was so fascinated to discover that the RSA (full name: Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce), an organisation that presents itself as a bastion of rational and enlightened secularism, has just brought out a rather intriguing publication under the title of 'Spiritualise: Revitalising Spirituality to Address 21st Century Challenges'.

As if to acknowledge that this might be a bit shocking to the RSA's empirically minded supporters, its Director, Matthew Taylor, was in somewhat sheepish mode in introducing the publication:

"The fact that the RSA - known for its work on policy issues like city growth, self-employment and public service reform - undertook this project is a sign of the growing importance being attached to spirituality as a source of motivation, meaning and creativity.

"Spirituality is coming into the mainstream. It could powerfully affect the way we approach major 21st century possibilities and challenges."

Only in the UK could you get away with the utterly absurd notion that spirituality is only just "coming into the main stream"! Blinded as we are by decades of de-spiritualised materialism in this little country of ours, we conveniently forget that the vast majority of human beings on this planet still lead lives informed (and, for the most part, enriched) by spiritual insights and practice.
Climate change is a moral issue

To be honest, I'm not sure that I either understood or ended up sympathising with the publication's explicit aim of "giving spirituality an improved intellectual grounding and greater cultural and political salience."

But I did find myself aligned with its explanation of how spirituality might help inform our deliberations about many of today's key issues: "The overarching societal role of spirituality is to serve as a counterweight to instrumental and utilitarian thinking.

"At an economic level, that means intelligently critiquing the fetishisation of economic growth as a panacea and global competition as the only game in town. At a political level, it means that citizens need to be the subjects of social change, not just its objects, with spiritual perspectives playing a key role in shaping and expressing the roots and values of democratic culture."

So can we now look forward to spiritual perspectives playing a bigger part in the debate about climate change?

Will the Pope's increasingly trenchant comments about the moral deficiencies (or even 'sinfulness') of much of today's politics encourage other religious and spiritual leaders to join the fray, to demand that we take a more morally-based approach to delivering the kind of radically decarbonised world that we now so urgently need?


http://www.theecologist.org/ecologist_partners/2739744/rediscovering_the_moral_dimension_of_climate_change.html

February 9, 2015

Pope Francis: It's Christian to protect the environment

By David Gibson, Religion News Service
USA Today

VATICAN CITY — If you are a Christian, protecting the environment is part of your identity, not an ideological option, Pope Francis said Monday.

"When we hear that people have meetings about how to preserve creation, we can say: 'No, they are the greens!'" Francis said in his homily at morning Mass, using a common name for environmental activists.

"No, they are not the greens! This is the Christian!" he said.
"A Christian who does not protect creation, who does not let it grow, is a Christian who does not care about the work of God; that work that was born from the love of God for us," Francis continued. "And this is the first response to the first creation: protect creation, make it grow."

The pope — who took his name from St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of the environment — has made care for the environment a hallmark of his papacy since he was elected nearly two years ago.

In fact, the pontiff is preparing a major document, called an encyclical, on the environment. It is likely to reiterate his frequent calls for governments and individuals to take steps to combat climate change, a phenomenon he attributes in part to human activity.

That conclusion, and his focus on protecting creation, as he calls it, has angered some conservative Catholics in the U.S., who see it as further evidence that Francis is pushing a liberal agenda that slights traditional Catholic talking points on issues like abortion and gay marriage.

The issue is likely to get more heated in the coming months. The encyclical is expected by July, and Francis will be making his first visit to the U.S. in September.

In his homily Monday in the chapel at his Vatican residence, Francis dwelt on the first reading of the Mass, the passage from Genesis that recounts the creation of the universe.

"In the 'first creation,'" the pope said, "we must respond with the responsibility that the Lord gives us."

"Even for us there is a responsibility to nurture the Earth, to nurture creation, to keep it and make it grow according to its laws," he said. "We are the lords of creation, not its masters."


February 9, 2015

The Role of Religious Environmentalism

Speaker: Mary Evelyn Tucker, Codirector, Forum on Religion and Ecology, Yale University

Moderator: Irina A. Faskianos, Vice President, National Program & Outreach, Council on Foreign Relations

Council on Foreign Relations

Listen to the audio: http://www.cfr.org/energy-and-environment/role-religious-environmentalism/p36105
FASKIANOS: Good afternoon from New York, and welcome to the Council on Foreign Relations Religion and Foreign Policy conference call series. I'm Irina Faskianos, vice president for the national program and outreach here at CFR. Thank you for joining us. As a reminder, today's call is on the record and the audio will be available on our website, www.cfr.org.

We're delighted to have Mary Evelyn Tucker with us today to talk about the role of religion and ecology and to explore how faith-based organizations and global efforts can address environmental issues. Mary Evelyn Tucker is co-director of Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology. The website for that is www.fore.research.yale.edu, and it really is a network and a place for religions to be in dialogue with other disciplines to seek solutions to both global and local environmental problems. She is also senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale, where she teaches in a joint master's program between the University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Divinity School.

Dr. Tucker is the author or editor of numerous volumes on religious environmentalism, and most recently she completed a new overview of the field with John Grim entitled Ecology and Religion. You can find more of her work and information about the forum, the Web site, as well as sign for their monthly newsletter there. So Mary Evelyn, thank you very much for joining us today. It would be great if you could give us a glimpse into, or talk about, how you got into this field. And, over the course of you career, how you've seen it evolved and where you see it going.

TUCKER: Well, thank you very much, Irina, for this opportunity to speak with so many of you out there. And what a wonderful mixture of both academics and religious leaders, community leaders, laity, NGO organizations, media and many interfaith groups. So welcome.

And I know many of you have been doing this work for a long time, and I just wanted to give a little bit of an overview of the last twenty years to begin. Of course, I was very much inspired by Thomas Berry, whom many of you know is a historian or religion at Fordham. But it was about twenty years ago that a range of groups came together to try and secure religious voices, religious concerns, ethics and values, theology with the pressing environmental problems of our day. And that included our work that began at Harvard from '95 to '98. But is also included the Alliance on Religion and Conservation from the U.K.; Religion, Science and the Environment that was a movement largely in the E.U. but spearheaded by the ecumenical patriarch, Bartholomew, the Greek Orthodox tradition.

Here in the U.S., the National Religious Partnership for the Environment began; the Coalition on the Environment in Jewish Life; the Islamic scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr was speaking widely on these issues; and the Baha'i, as well, for a long, long time. In Latin America, there was a very
interesting movement that brought together liberation theology with ecology, and that was spearheaded by Leonardo Boff in an Orbis book series on ecology and justice. Eco-feminists joined in the movement – Ivone Gebara in Latin America – but also people in North America – Mary Daly, Mary Hunt, Rosemary Ruether, Heather Eaton in Canada. And they engaged Buddhists, too; Gary Snyder, Joanna Macy, Ken Krafts (ph) and Stephanie Cozit (ph) here in the U.S. talking about that profound interconnectedness of all life that the Buddhists teach.

So in this period of '95 to '98, John Grim, my husband and I did this series, as many of you know, at Harvard to try and pick up on that energy and to try and explore and investigate what are the resources of the world's religions, the Abrahamic traditions of the West, the Asian traditions of India and China and Japan and Southeast Asia, and the indigenous traditions. So this series, over 3 years, brought several hundred scholars and laity and activists together. And out of that, over 7 more years, 10 volumes were published. So the spirit of these Harvard conferences was very much a sense of theory and practice. That theology and engagement had to go together.

In fact, that's what was already happening. But the traditions were reexamining their texts and their ritual practices, their symbolic ways of knowing and so on. But they also were doing movements on the ground; activism, new rituals, new prayers and so on. So the 10 volumes had this mix of theology and engagement. In fact, we call this "engaged scholarship," very much so. So the forum Web site, which we hope you'll find as a useful resource, has this presence of an academic and an activist integration. So on the Web site, there's bibliographies that are annotated of all the books that have been published over these last twenty years, and it's an astonishing explosion, actually. And there's syllabi and teaching and video materials.

But then there are listings of engaged projects. Of course, many of them have to be updated because so much has happened in each of these traditions. And there are statements of all the world's religions. None of this was here 20 years ago. So that is the marker of how far we've come: the explosion of books, the syllabi, the teaching, the engaged projects on the ground and the statements. What we were trying to do was retrieve and reevaluate and reconstruct these great wisdom traditions; to bring forward their beliefs and their practices for renewal and for engagement with these challenging problems of pollution, of biodiversity law, of climate change. How would these traditions, with their values and attitudes towards nature that have guided them through the millennium, begin to intersect their spiritual energy and their moral concerns with the most pressing problems facing all future generations and the planet as a whole.

We felt that we needed to create a field within academia, but also a force within society. And this has come of age just as of last year, in some ways, as a marker. The American Academy of Religion, the largest group of teachers of religion in North America -- about 10,000 largely college professors -- came together in November in San Diego. And of the panels over the three or four days, a third of them were on the environment and religion, climate change, and ethics and so on. A major watershed. The force within society was also evident, I think we can say, with the People's Climate March in September in New York. It was an amazing event.

John and I were with there with our students from Yale; 400,000 people came, again, from all over North America and different parts of the world. But 10,000 of those have been attended by as (ph) most likely religious leaders and laity. There was a conference at Union Seminary, two
hundred religious leaders came. There was a major celebration ritual at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine that evening. So all of this is coming together right now in another kind of remarkable event. Which is the fact that in the middle of this year, sometime in the summer, the Pope will release an encyclical on the environment. This will be a major watershed.

As you know, he chose his name after Francis of Assisi, and he has been speaking for some time about the challenges we're facing that bring together the poor, social justice and the degradation of the environment. Now, 1.2 billion Catholics will be affected by this, but also two billion Christians. And it's not just religious people alone. We've already been getting calls for the media, which is why we have a frequently asked questions now up on our forum Web site. All of this is leading to the Pope speaking in New York at the General Assembly in September, calling together a community of religious leaders on this issue and leading up to the climate change negotiations in Paris in December.

Even our scientist dean at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies here at Yale wants to do something this semester to highlight this important document, even before it's out, with a major panel at Yale. So taking a step back, how has this field grown and what were my early motivations. Well, as many of you know I went to Japan in the early '70s and traveled extensively throughout Asia in the last forty years. My living and traveling and studying in Asia made me realize that as China and India began to modernize, a billion people on each of those major continental masses, the whole world would be drawn into the need for resources and pollution issues, water shortages, food pollution issues. And we know this is already very much in our midst.

So what we wanted to do in those Harvard conferences was bring forward values that were culturally grounded in the religious traditions of these areas, regionally connected and yet globally significant. In India, for example, now Hindu temples are doing tree planting. And there are efforts to clean up sacred rivers like the Ganges and the Yamuna. We did a conference there on the Yamuna in 2012, bringing together scientists and religious leaders. And now not only Hindus, be interreligious groups are coming together. In 2013, the Karmapa, a major Tibetan Buddhist leader, held a conference on environmental protection for the Yamuna River. He has organized and been helped by the Kela Chimyapa (ph). He has organized sixty monasteries across the whole Himalayan region to be environmentally concerned, connected and teaching their lay people.

In China, amazing things are happening along with the relentless destruction of the environment. And in the 15 years that I've been going to China, it's hard to describe what has happened. But we are aware of the air pollution, water pollution, the soil damage, deforestation, et cetera. But against all odds and in the face of over 100,000 protests a year on environmental issues and land disputes in China, the Chinese government, academics and others are beginning to formulate what they are describing as the need for ecological civilization; drawing on the values of Confucianism and Taoism and Buddhism for their culturally-based environmental ethics.

The Harvard conference books have been translated into Chinese. There is now a statement in the constitution of this need for ecological civilization. The prime minister and president reference it regularly in their speeches. And in 2008, we met Pan Yue, the deputy minister for the
environment. And he was one of the leading people pushing dissent of retrieving, reevaluating and reconstructing this ancient tradition for modernity; Confucianism being one of the lead restoration of ideas of how humans are embedded in the whole cosmic processes.

In Latin America, I've mentioned this amazing movement of liberation theology and ecology. But I also wanted to highlight the indigenous environmental network. And here in North America, native peoples in both the western parts of the U.S. and Canada have helped to stop Keystone Pipeline being actually built, and the processes and protests have been extraordinary; saying these are sacred lands, these are lands of our peoples, and they cannot be exploited. Now, I just want to conclude with some examples from the Christian churches and also from engaged projects here at home, and then open it up to some discussion.

You know, all of these traditions have, across the range of their various schools and – and denominations, like in Judaism, Conservative Orthodox Reform, Reconstructionists – each one is bringing to bear their own theological positions. So in the Christian churches, and we had these represented at the Harvard conferences, the Catholic nuns, for example, have created amazing eco-literacy centers and conservation of their lands. I can highlight Genesis Farm with Miriam McGillis, in New Jersey and Crystal Spring in Massachusetts. The Orthodox Church has led the way with the ecumenical patriarch, Bartholomew, and his Religion, Science, Environment conferences for 15 years on water issues across the European community and also in the Amazon and in Mississippi.

These angelical environmental networks have been extremely active in Katharine Hayhoe, a scientist and an evangelical herself, has been outspoken on these issues of care for creation. Protestant groups are abundant, and we'll highlight a few of those. But the Green Seminary Movement, led by Laurel Kears and Beth Norcross and Fletcher Harper, has been bringing seminaries into this discussion; how can we educate future generations. And then we have leaders like Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church here in the U.S.

So these engaged projects across North America -- from Seattle Earth Ministry led by Lee Ann Barris; in Chicago, Safe in Place (ph); GreenFaith in New Jersey, with Fletcher Harper. And now moving towards our voices that he's combined with a movement around the world for prayers on climate change that Tessa Tennant and he are leading. Interfaith Power & Light with Sally Bingham out of San Francisco has almost all of the states in the U.S. involved in measuring their carbon footprint in churches and synagogues and mosques. It's an amazing movement. And this kind of interreligious work, interfaith work, I think can be highlighted, as well, in the Friends of the Earth Middle East in the Jordan River, where they are trying to restore the river to its full health once again.

So let me conclude by saying we now have what we didn't have 20 years ago: a field in academia. High schools are teaching this, colleges and universities and seminaries, as I've mentioned. We have a new and vibrant force in society, bringing together the three elements of The Earth Charter, of ecological integrity, social economic justice, and democracy, nonviolence and peace. And all of this is for the flourishing of the Earth's community, as we know, for present and for future generations. And I think there's so much we can bring to this issue.
But let me conclude by saying we're at a moment when we're searching for renewable energies of all kinds around the planet. But what religions can bring, in addition to their activism and moral concern for the planet and for people, they can bring a spiritual energy of renewal for the work that's to be done. And that's where all of you, I thank you for what you are doing already.

FASKIANOS: Thank you very much, Mary Evelyn. Let’s it open up to group for questions and comments. If you want to share the work that you're doing and give us the best practices, we welcome all of that. So let's open it up.

OPERATOR: Thank you. At this time, we will open the floor for questions. If you would like to ask a question or if you have a comment, please press the "star" key followed by the "1" key on your touch-tone phone now. Again, that was "star-1". Questions will be taken in the order in which they are received. If at any time you would like to be removed from the questioning queue, just press "star-2." Please limit your questions to one at a time. Again, to ask a question please press "star-1"

QUESTION: Hi. Hello, Mary Evelyn. It's nice to be a part of this. A question about the relationship of local to global concerns. I know you have addressed that in the past, but can you just help us see how the interplay between the two of those is an important factor.

TUCKER: Thank you, and a shout out to you for your amazing work on the field of animal studies and broadening our concern from people to the whole mammalian bird, fish world and so on. So thank you for your amazing work with the more than human world.

I think this question of local and global is so essential. Because there's such a feeling, isn't there? Of disempowerment of what can I do, I think, often on the local level. But this is where some of the organizations that I've mentioned – Interfaith Power & Light and others – are giving people that sense that they can make a difference, they can make the changes. And, you know, to connect this sense of an energy revolution in our homes, in -- in our churches, in our schools, in our civic centers – new building codes and so on – you know, this is part of not just a protest against something. But it's part of an energy revolution.

And that's how Todd Stern put it, who's our chief negotiator for the U.S. to these climate conferences. He said we're in the midst of an energy revolution. So I think that's how we connect what we can do on a local level to the larger global scene. And he said, and I agree, we can't expect everything to happen in Paris, but we have to keep doing what we're doing. And the creativity of humans is remarkable, I think, frankly.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Thank you for providing this forum. My question is, considering that confined animal feeding operations contribute directly to global warming by releasing vast amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere – more than the entire global transportation industry – how do you see religious institutions being involved in trying to minimize the negative impact from factory farming?
TUCKER: Thank you. That is -- that's one question. And as a vegetarian for almost 30 years, I'm very interested in this issue. And actually, I was part of the Humane Society Center for Respect of Life and Environment for many, many years, as was Thomas Berry. And Wayne Pacelli and HSUS is doing some remarkable work on this. And they have people there who've been drawing in the religious communities: Victoria Strang, Paul Waldau's (ph) daughter, is one of them. So I think, you know, the animal groups are realizing that religion is part of the change agent and so they're drawing them in.

But I also think your question brings us to, you know, how do we treat the world. Is it sentient or is it a commodity or is it a community? And I think our students here at Yale and all across the country are so keenly interested in food, in sustainability, in appropriate use, shall we say -- I don't even like that word -- but in – in careful, thoughtful, healthy food for all people; for people in inner cities, and so on. So the factory farming of animals, because of antibiotics and a number of things, I think is going to take its course. It has – it's not that old, it's spreading around the world and that's extremely worrisome.

But, you know, just two days ago Breyers said they will not have ice cream with, you know, antibiotics or hormones from the milk of cows. So these are major, major changes. And I thank you for your question.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Hi, thanks all. I really have two questions, and they somewhat connect. Following up on the local-global question – local and global organizing – obviously, a revolution, a movement isn't going to have one single umbrella that engages it. At the same time, my experience is that at the local level folks feel like where – which way do I turn, which place do I get connected? And then, of course, our response is connect somewhere, just pick one. But I think people are looking to be strategically additive. And I don't mean only people on the pews, but bishops and executives of the denominations. How do we think strategically about what's going to be most additive at what time, and where do we go to find that answer.

And then the second question that goes with it is, I'm wondering whether the National Religious Partnership for the Environment is part of this landscape.

TUCKER: Yes. Certainly, I mention them at the being of this National Religious partnership for the Environment under Paul Gorman. They did amazing work in bringing together the Jewish and Christian groups. And one of the things that I think we all hope that NRPE can do is, you know, be even more inclusive of the spectrum of religious groups in the U.S. So they've done good work and we hope they'll continue to do that, and Cassandra Carmichael is leading the way.

And your other question, again I think this is very important. I think you're asking about strategies and perhaps tactics. One of the things Thomas Berry used to say is, we need principles, and strategies and tactics. So I think there's a ray of strategies and there's a ray of tactics out there that are doable and already operational. As I've mentioned a number of them; what Earth Ministry's doing, what Faith in Place is doing in urban communities in Chicago is just
astounding. But, you know, I think we also have to get the principles, the world view shifts, the change of mind and heart behind these strategies and tactics.

Because that's what's going to dynamize (ph) the energy for these changes. That we're going to have to live differently is clear. But we can do that. You know, "sacrifice" is a word that people don't like to use. But that was used throughout the Second World War, when people had Victory Gardens, when people used less, when they did not waste and so on. We need to reinhabit that space of sacrifice, which actually means to make holy. And it could be "holy" with an H, or "wholly" with a W. That we are part of this interconnected world and we need that sense continually of that interconnection.

So the strategies, I think, are definitely there. We need communities, certainly, that can reinforce that. But I take my hope in this next generation of students that we teach as this School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. They have more strategies than you can imagine, and they want to bring the religious communities into their transforming work. It's very exciting, I think.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Hello. Thank you very much, Evelyn Tucker, for this talk. I want to ask one question. Politically, it might be very hard to break the package (ph) of growth because it's (inaudible) to vote (ph) in many areas. But would it be better to target consumers just like rain forest areas, alliance or fair trade did with a symbol associated with the movement? Would that be a better strategy? Just a question.

TUCKER: Yeah. I think I missed a few words, but can you just give me the final question again? Or, Irina, can you help? It was a little unclear.

QUESTION: Yeah. Instead of – instead of getting into the politics, wouldn't it be a better strategy to address to consumers, consumer products? And (inaudible) all over the (inaudible) or fair trade guys did with this? And maybe like a greenstate (ph) symbol or something for consumer products.

TUCKER: Yes, I see. Thank you. Yes, I think that's a great idea. Because clearly, as consumers we can make a difference. Consumers are beginning to speak out about GMOs, about antibiotics in food, and so on. And coming back to the food question, you know, all religions take food in both its growing processes, in its harvesting processes, as sacred. And this is, I think, where we have power to bring that back into the marketplace. I mean, we're poisoning ourselves with the amount of chemicals and so on in our food and in our soil.

So I think a consumer-based movement around food would be essential. And -- and, certainly, a whole range of other issues which can bring in justice for workers. You know, factory farming of animals has tremendous injustice in the meat industry and so on. So I think that's an excellent suggestion. There's a very interesting new graduate program being offered in the U.K. – actually, a full-funded PhD scholarship – on the impact of meat consumption and the idea of animals as resources. You know, this is where the religious communities can weigh in, in a very powerful way. Thank you for that question.
FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Hello. This is a very interesting conversation so glad to be part of it. One of the things, if we go back to principles, is starting to identify what – what do we want to really uphold. And those of us in the World Council of Churches and, indeed, an interface a grouping around the climate change talks have been upholding solidarity with those who are most affected, the most vulnerable, who are victims of climate change, for example. And as a result of that – trying to uphold that principle of solidarity – I don't know how many of you know, but some of you on this call do, we've started a fast, Fast for the Climate.

It's something that is individual as well as local and global. Anybody can do it. And we -- we have a concentration of that fasting on the first day of every month, from all the different religious traditions. It's a way to make the personal-political statement. And to fast and pray, but also to use that time for some political activity to make a difference. It's something that we can all do together. And so the question is, how can we find things like that, can galvanize so many religious traditions in North America and around the world in ways that can have an impact? We believe this one.

TUCKER: Well, thank you. That's terrific. And the Canadian churches are doing amazing things in their support of the indigenous people, and Idle No More is really so welcome. You know, again, on our Forum on Religion and Ecology Web site there's an ecumenical Lenten carbon fast, which picks up on your point. And that has been going for several years, and the WCC, of course, has led the way in these issues of especially of solidarity for the poor. And that's why I was trying to bring in the Latin American perspective of liberation theology and social justice and ecology.

That's why I think Pope Francis, frankly – from Argentina – will have that particular blend that we so need of eco-justice. You know, as well, there's this effort at preach-ins on global warming; again, some of it being led by Interfaith Power & Light. How does one preach about this issue of climate change, when in the U.S. and North America it's been so contested? I have to underscore this has not been so contested in other parts of the world. My friends in Japan understand the effects of typhoons and so on from global warming, et cetera.

But I take my hat off to people within the churches that you just highlighted who are helping people to know how to preach on this, how to do actions like fasting, how to do the divestment of the resources from fossil fuels. Like Jim Antel has led the UCC churches on this issue, and others are following. So I do think there's lots that can be done by religious leaders and lay people. So thank you very much for what you're doing.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question or comment.

QUESTION: Hi. Thanks very much for your work. I'm interested where we can tune for expressly neo-Confucian and new Confucian experiments in eco – eco-social, the eco-social reinvention of the human, so to speak. You got any reading on that?
TUCKER: Well, thank you, as that happens to be my own area of, you know, research and writing and so on. And I'm going to a conference in Hong Kong this summer on Confucianism and the ecology. And one of the books, of course, in the Harvard Conference is exactly on that topic, Confucianism and ecology. And it certainly is the case, contrary to most people's impression, that Confucianism has amazing resources or situating the human in what they would call the "Trinity" or the "triad" of Heaven, Earth and human. So the whole cosmos, the whole Earth community. And the human completes that dynamic, creative process by the – by interacting with the flourishing and the fecundity of nature.

It's a very, very rich tradition, which I was mentioning as part of this recovery, if you will, revival of Confucianism that's happening on the mainland of China and, certainly, in Singapore and Hong Kong, as well. So, in fact, one academic in Beijing, a professor of sociology, did a book on Confucius and it sold 10 million copies. So this isn't something, you know, just on the -- in the political order of the prime minister or the constitution. But there's a popular interest in this, the academic conferences that I've mentioned. Duay Ming (ph), a good friend has headed up this new Institute for Humanities at Beijing University. And he is one of the leading thinkers of how neo-Confucianism can enter into modernity and not -- not just be apart from it, but tradition in modernity, to make a change.

And I can tell you, our students love Confucianism. And we have them listen to his talks online and do the readings of his books. I can recommend any of Duay Ming's (ph) book – books to you. So thank you for that question.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you, Mary Evelyn. This -- my question may have been addressed already with the carbon fasting and looking at ways that we can, you know, in a way model the behavior that we want to see. And one of the contradictions I've experienced in myself is air travel and, you know, choosing to travel by air even after I know the science on climate change. And especially now, when we're looking at a really urgent matter. You know, it's not as if we have a decade even to turn things around. You know, the change that we're looking at is really wants to be so immediate if we take into account what's happening in Antarctica with the decline of the West Antarctic ice sheet.

And so a question is, you know, with something like is happening in Paris, do we -- is this -- does this statement want to be we're not traveling there. We'll fly in, you know, we'll enter in through telecommunication. But to have our children who are standing for climate change – I'm thinking of the Climate Silence group – to tell them and to suggest that they – that the statement is that they fly to talk about this, maybe it's not that. Maybe it's nobody shows up and we're just – we're being real about what is. Yeah.

TUCKER: Yeah, well, I appreciate that question. And I appreciate your work on extinction and so on. The president of the American Academy of Religion, in November, Laurie Zoloth made exactly that point in her plenary address. To say, well, maybe we shouldn't have an American
Academy of Religion conference every year. And it's gotten quite a bit of discussion. You know, I think – I don't go to the top conferences for lots of reasons, one of them the carbon footprint. But I think we all have to choose what is appropriate for what we can contribute or what we feel is important.

I would not want to say to the people at the UN, you know, who are heavily invested in this just call it off, no carbon footprint. I do think the difficulty is, we can become, you know, somewhat moralistic. And that's part of the danger of religions and so on. But I think more and more people are taking up your point. Either they're paying into carbon offsets for sure, and there's, you know, native energy and lots of these carbon offsets. They're planting trees if they travel, and so on. But I do think that the networking that has happened in the last twenty years – and especially since '92 and the Earth Summit in Rio – has been astonishing.

So that the changes that are ahead of us are now on the tips of our tongues, in the centers of our minds, and are bursting from our hearts because everyone knows – and everyone on this conference call, I suspect, knows – the urgency of the changes that you are calling for. But I do think we need to breadth of each person makes that decision. We're doing online classes right now, you know, to get the information out and not travel as well. So thank you for the question, and let's keep going forward with careful discernment around that.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Yes, thank you. How can we, as an interfaith community build upon the momentum and also the opportunity of Pope Francis' upcoming encyclical on human ecology?

TUCKER: Wonderful question. And as I say, I think many of us are very much looking forward to it. I happen to come from the Catholic progressive tradition, I would say, and was very much affected by social justice teachings in my youth and especially in civil rights and the anti-Vietnam War and so on. And I see this as a movement, you know, way past Vatican II when the changes came flowing into the Catholic Church and a lot of tragedies and scandals, as well. But I do see this as a moment when laity, when theologians, when seminaries, when departments of religion, when churches and synagogues and mosques, et cetera need to pick this up.

It'll probably be, you know, maybe 50 pages or so. So it'll be a lengthy document. But if we can pick up parts of it, begin to study it, begin to take it in in terms of what does this mean, this new, vast sense of interdependence, of ecology, of justice and of peace I think that's going to be the message. And I would take this, like the Earth Charter, to be a new invitation into a declaration of interdependence. We had the Universal Declaration of Human Rights after World War II as, you know, the premier foundational document of the UN And – and that's a declaration that's independence. It's a modern document. It celebrates individual freedom.

But now we need to move towards interdependence, interconnectedness. And I think that's what the encyclical is going to invite us into. It's going to be very invitational, I think. And we can pick it up and literally nourish ourselves on some of these ideas, I think.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.
QUESTION: Yes, hello and thank you. I will – I'm just wondering if you have considered the interactions between religion and mental health and care for the ecology. Because, you know, the care that is required for the environment and issues of the environment has to come from mental health. And there are people who might not have that because of childhood abuse or other issues in their life. So I'm just wondering how religion and mental health, and also social health, might interact with the care for the environment.

You know, how -- for example, the breakdown of relationships, how many people are living in different homes and this increases consumerism because they cannot function together because they cannot live together, and so on. So I'm just wondering if you have been considering these factors. Thank you.

TUCKER: Yes. What a superb question. You know, the suffering in our world is immense, as you know. Every family, every one of us has tremendous suffering in our own families, whether addiction or abuse or whatever it might be. So I think this is absolutely critical. But I do think part of our mental health, both personal and collective, is reinhabiting these great cycles of nature, which are healing cycles, which are restoring cycles, which give us literally air and water and nourishment and food. So it's a very primal thing that this is about.

Yes, it's a sacred restoration of our connections to nature, yes it's an environmental recovery and restoration and so on. But there's something of our mental, spiritual soul capacity here that is being tremendously challenged. And I would also say that what we're finding is that environmentalists, be they studying extinct species or degraded landscapes or glacial melting, they are dealing with something like trauma. Because when I spoke to those who were dealing with the spotted owl, the extinction up in the Pacific Northwest, it was almost like listening to a great tragedy. I was in tears. And these are people who have to deal with this day in and day out. So I think that's part of the ministry that religions will have to develop.

We need to mourn what's being lost, and we need to have rituals of healing and restoration. Let me give you a final example. In China, the mental illness because of such rapid development and modernization is so huge that there are many young people who simply stay at home. They can't even cope with the society. But a whole range of other mental challenges. And there's an institute in California that is now setting up a collaborative project of counseling for Chinese, especially living in these cities of -- cities the size of thirty, thirty-four million people, some of them. It's inconceivable how big these cities are and how impersonal and how challenging that is to live with a sense of hope and purpose and stability.

FASKIANOS: Next question.

QUESTION: Hello, and thank you so much to the Council on Foreign Relations for this forum. And Mary Evelyn, for your great work. I'm just always deeply grateful. My question is in regards to investments. What advice or counsel or guidance can you give to religious congregations who continue to be invested in oil industry that are involved in the tar sands, even as we grow in our consciousness about them because these companies that we're invested in still pass our existing social screen?
TUCKER: Yes. Well, Maureen, thank you for your work, too, and for helping to coordinate Sisters of Earth and all that you do, that great organization of Catholic numbers across North America. And for your witness in the tar sands. It's really very, very moving. And, you know, the tar sands are largely going to China. That's why I mentioned that early on. And the -- that interconnection of this need, endless need, for energy around the world. But specifically to your question of divestment and so on, it's very complicated and it's going to take some time.

But I do think the moral issue that Bill McKibben and 350.org set before all of us is that this was a tactic that worked with apartheid in South Africa. And it is a tactic that seems to be having more and more traction, contrary to what some people first said. The New School in New York just announced yesterday that they are divesting. As I say, some religious communities have already, like UCC. Yale said they wouldn't divest, but they're going to move further and further towards sustainability, which is true. But their chief environmental officer, David Swenson, sent a message to all of his portfolio people with investment, and he said we have got to pay attention to this, we have got to think about this for the long term.

And you know what? He's one of the smartest investors in all the universities across the country. And someone at Goldman Sachs told me that alone has had such effect on the divestment movement. Also, of course, the price of oil is going down so it's going to be easier to divest, and so on. But I think we do need to raise it up as a moral issue. Certainly the students at Yale are doing that. And it's an issue that draws all of our conscious into this. I mean, the seas are rising. People at Yale, one geologist, said, "Well, they're building new colleges but, you know, we're right on the sound here, the Long Island Sound. And you go up to Boston on the train and the sound is five feet away from the train."

We are all subject to this relentless climate change, rising seas, the greenhouse gases and so on. And we've got to do something about divesting from oil and gas and reinvesting our creativity in alternative energies. We should've been doing this twenty years ago, of course, but that's where the religious communities can say go solar. You know, let's de-dam, which is happening in the Pacific Northwest, too. So thank you for your question, Maureen, and your great work.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Thank you, and thank you for this amazing program. My question has to do with how do we -- you mention the United Nations. And I had the privilege of sitting on a panel this past Sunday on a multi-religious partnership for sustainable development that was hosted by the President of the United Nations General Assembly as part of World Interfaith Harmony Week. Now, I know all the NGOs who are working on this. I'm a member of United Religions Initiative, as well. But outside the United Nations there's no communication that says this is what's going on in the United Nations, unless you go to un.org and start finding your way through it.

Is there a way that we can make it more public so that we invite more people to think that something can happen at the United Nations. Because I think, overall, the population of this country at least thinks the United Nations is a farce. How do we open that up to something that
says they could be an incredible partner on this, and this is how we might be able to do some work with them?

TUCKER: Right. Well, an excellent question. We have been working the UNEP, the United Nations Environment Program, since about 1987 on what was initially called the Environmental Sabbath. And we did a booklet for religious communities to use, I'm sure some of you did. We distributed about 50,000 of those. And we did a number of programs at the UN through that New York office. And I think you're absolutely right to say that we need to continue – and good for you for being on that panel and the other NGOs that are persistent there and raising the voice of ethics and spirituality and moral concern.

The issue, as you know well, is that the UN doesn't really like to engage religion because we all know, and we like to say over and over again, religion has its problems and its promise. And they don't know how to move past this problematic dimension of religion. So it's not easy to engage it. There's no formal representations there. I mean, the Vatican has – is somewhat represented, but there's no representation of the religions and there's been many efforts to do that. The Millennium Summit in 200 was one effort. But it's very hard to represent religions that are not as hierarchical as something like the Catholic Church. WCC, of course, is a very effective organization, as well.

But all I can say is, one of the things at the UN which I do think we can work best as religious communities is to try and overcome the immense distrust between the so-called "developing nations" and the so-called "developed nations." Because that barrier is over and over again what creates the blockage to climate agreements, the blockage to all kinds of cooperative issues. And I think if we identified that and if we work, as many of you do already, in relief services and education and aid overseas and so on, if we can build trust I think we have further grounds for saying the religions can be a positive contributing agency on the environment and development issues.

QUESTION: Thank you.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mary. That's – it's been great. And my PhD's actually focused on faith-based organizations in the U.K. and how they can impact climate change policy. And I wanted to ask, like, because FPOs in the U.K. are focused on political lobbying and advocacy – and I was wondering what you thought about the value of this as opposed to using resources for actually dealing with the challenges of climate change in a bottom-up program.

TUCKER: Yeah. Well, that's a good – very good question. And, of course, with limited resources it's why we all have to be asking it. You know, there's, I think, great lobbyists in the religious communities down in Washington. The Quakers, of course, have been at this for a long, long time on peace and justice and ecology in our Congress. And many other religious communities doing superb and relentless work against gray dogs. So I think that certainly has to be done. And I would say Todd Stern, or chief climate negotiator, who came to Yale in the fall and gave a remarkable talk, actually, and said climate change is a moral issue. And he said to
John and me directly, he said, "Send us more religious people because we need that force in – in terms of the negotiations.

So, you know, your issues in the U.K. are very complex, as well. But certainly, the Tony Blair Faith Foundation is trying to do some of this work, and I think that's terrific. But I think everything we can do to give people a sense of hope in very, very difficult times. And, you know, history does tell us – my grandfather was a historian at Columbia and he tried to understand the causes of the two world wars – anyone who lives through those wars knows tragedy of such immense proportions. But the human spirit can survive that. And if we can empower our churches, our mosques, or synagogues, our next generation in particular, that they can make a difference I think we have a good chance to go through this hourglass of extinction and diminishment into a new phase.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Next question.

QUESTION: Yes. No, I thank you so much for this. I was going to mention, after 10 years of doing regenerative strategies on three continents we're proposing a mobilization of outreach between the western congregations and the most climate change-affected communities in the tropical belt for restoration and regeneration. And this is often framed in terms of food security and poverty alleviation and climate change resilience. But it also, I think as you know, has a powerful potential effect at scale on climate change mitigation, which has been mentioned, I think, too little.

So how to go beyond sustainability to regeneration with generativity and inherently religious imperative, and to really create any kind of mobilization that – that we're able to. I would just like any advice and any participation by anybody on this call.

TUCKER: Yeah, well, thank you. I love the language that you're using, and it's very resonant with what we like to use; namely (inaudible) contested and so on. And we like to use, as Thomas Berry did, the word "flourishing." And we love the word "resilience" and "resiliency," "regeneration" and so on. Because it's exactly that that taps into, I think, what a spiritual, ethical religious perspective can offer. And I think you're quite right, you know, mitigation and adaptation of climate change are still themselves being contested. But you are so right – and I'd love to hear more about your work, you know, in terms of food security and stability. And connecting up these varied issues of the food, of water, of human security is Earth security.

And I think, again, more and more people are seeing this. I mean, the Pentagon issue, the major report on climate change as a security issue, there's – there's no doubt about it. So I applaud the language that you're using. As I say, I like to think of the flourishing of the whole earth community for future generations.

QUESTION: Thank you.

FASKIANOS: Thank you. Let's to try to sneak in one last question.
QUESTION: Hi, thank you so much. And I was particularly interested in your comment about educating the next generation because that's where my question is. Getting your head around climate change is difficult for adults and students in higher education. And I was wondering what advice or resources that you might have that would highlight efforts to educate younger students, particularly in the kindergarten through 12th grade years. If there's anything in particular that you might recommend or suggest.

TUCKER: Yes, well, thank you. This is so important. And it's one of the reasons why we made this film Journey of the Universe, which is also a book from Yale Press. And Journey of the Universe went on PBS, as you may know, and it's now on Netflix. You know, and in one year 66,000 people rated it, which was astonishing to Brian Swimme and John and I who were involved in this project. And John – Brian is a great narrator, of course. But this perspective – that we're part of a vast evolving universe – this is a fourteen billion-year, amazingly creative process. And the Earth, you know, is six billion years old, and we as humans are only about 200,000 years old.

This perspective, I think, awakens awe and wonder and beauty, and therefore transformative action. And we have found, of course, even high schools are very, very keen on this. Because it brings together science and ecology and biology with the humanities, and – and ethics and so on. And there's – this has been adapted by Montessori teachers who've been very, very keen on this universe story perspective of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme and – and ourselves. And Jennifer Morgan has done three books, which I highly recommend for young people. And she does workshops for early childhood and – education on this, and especially with the Montessori teachers who are deeply inspired. Maria Montessori's had a vast feeling for the cosmos.

And maybe I'll just end with Rachel Carson. We took our students to the Beinecke Library here at Yale last week to see Rachel Carson's papers on Silent Spring. And, you know, she brings together so much of what we're talking about. She brings together the sense of awe and wonder and beauty and complexity, but she also brings metaphor and poetry into her science and her deep understanding of these processes.

Silent Spring is a metaphor, you know, that captures our – our imagination and speaks to our whole person. So I think this is part of what we need to do for younger people; bring in the whole person. And that is certainly being done in a lot of wonderful environmental education. Like Richard Louv, who is also inspired by Thomas Berry, Last Child in the – in the Woods.

So I thank you all for this conversation. And I especially thank you for the work that is ahead for all of us. Let us know about your work. Please join the forum. Email list, if you like, it just goes out once a month. But I hope this will be a network of continuing conversation. And I especially thank the Council on Foreign Relations and Irina for organizing this. Thank you.

FASKIANOS: Thank you very much, Mary Evelyn Tucker. We really appreciate your spending the hour with us. And to all of you for your really great questions and comments. I think this is an invaluable hour, and we hope as Mary Evelyn said, that you will check out her Web site at www.fore.research.yale.edu as well as follow our religion and foreign policy on Twitter, @CFR_Religion for announcements about upcoming events and information about the council's
latest resources. And I also just would welcome you all, or invite you all, to email us with questions or suggestions of topics and speakers we can cover in the future to outreach@cfr.org.

So thank you all, and thank you to Mary Evelyn Tucker.

TUCKER: Thank you, Irina.

OPERATOR: Thank you for listening to this Council on Foreign Relations podcast.

http://www.cfr.org/energy-and-environment/role-religious-environmentalism/p36109

February 11, 2015

Religious Leaders Confronting Climate Change

Yale Climate Connection

Podcast with Mary Evelyn Tucker

Most of the world’s religions — including Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism — have said that protecting vulnerable people and the earth are moral imperatives. These values are inspiring religious leaders to speak out on climate change.

TUCKER: “Clearly this is already adversely affecting vulnerable people of lower incomes be it in the first world or the 3rd world. So there is an environmental justice issue here.”

That’s Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. She says religious organizations have a special role to play, given their size, power and unique voice.

TUCKER: “Right now the climate discussions are driven by science, by economists, and by policy makers, all of which are absolutely crucial. But the behavioral changes, the moral sense of what is happening to the planet, is something that only the religions can bring in a certain way. Religions can raise a moral voice.”

Tucker believes science, policy and religion — working together — can achieve global action on climate change.

http://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2015/02/religious-leaders-confronting-climate-change/
Anticipation building for papal encyclical on environment

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The much-anticipated encyclical by Pope Francis on the environment, expected sometime this spring or early summer, is generating a lot of buzz in Washington and elsewhere.

At the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, a Feb. 9 panel discussion on climate change and other environmental issues had to be moved to a larger room.

“We usually get 15, 20 people,” said Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, prefacing his remarks. Surveying the scene in the larger room, he added, “It’s never been this full.”

In St. Paul, Minnesota, in November, there were hopes that an address by Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Institute for Justice and Peace, at Catholic Rural Life’s “Faith, Food and the Environment” symposium would give listeners an early glimpse into the mind of the pope in hopes that the cardinal and the pope were of like mind on the topic. However, Cardinal Turkson was reassigned to coordinate the Vatican’s response to the Ebola crisis and never made an address.

But in Washington, like-mindedness can be hard to come by. “Already there are people criticizing the pope” over the encyclical “and they haven’t even seen it,” Misleh said.

Franciscan Sister Ilia Delio, director of Catholic studies at Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington, noted one remark by Pope Francis: “This is our sin, exploiting the earth.”

“Do we really love the earth that is our home?” Sister Ilia asked, noting the pope’s reference to sin. “It’s a collective sin. We have become radically disconnected from the earth and from the poor,” she said.

Sister Ilia acknowledged “a little bit of ambiguity” in the biblical injunction of humans to have “dominion” over the earth. “Does nature exist for the sake of human life, and what does that mean for us?” she asked.

She also noted a separate remark by Pope Francis, in which the pope said, “One of the greatest challenges of our time (is) to convert ourselves to a type of development that respects creation.” Sister Ilia said the comment harks back to the papal namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, who moved his orientation “from a self-centeredness to a cadre-centeredness.”

“We tend to hold on to things as if they are ours, as if we own them,” she added. “According to (St.) Francis, anything we cling to or hold on to prevents us from letting God in.”
Sister Ilia described sin as “the exile of living in non-relatedness,” in which a person acts as if “I don’t want to live in relation to the earth or to the poor.”

“We have become such capitalists,” she added, “we have lost sight of what money is for.”

Misleh quoted Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, who said, “Man finds himself to be a technical giant and an ethical child,” and asked the audience to consider how that applies to environmental ethics.

If only 5 percent of the estimated 75 million U.S. Catholics got involved in environmental matters, Misleh said, that number would be three times the size of the World Wildlife Fund’s 1.3 million members.

Climate change is gaining attention in different and unexpected quarters, he added. “The Pentagon and insurance companies are looking into it. So there must be something to this,” Misleh said. “There’s going to be some pain as we transition to a more sustainable future.”

Eric Garduno, senior legislative specialist in Washington for Catholic Relief Services, pointed to a map of countries colored by the suspected impact of climate change on their populations. Sub-Saharan Africa fared worst of all nations, with those nations directly south of the Sahara the worst of the worst.

The U.S. Agency for International Development is dealing with adaptations to climate change with poor farmers, helping with such initiatives as clean energy programs and dealing with deforestation,” Garduno said.

A CRS project in Ethiopia stymied the cycle of topsoil-eroding downpours on barely arable farmland by developing terraced plots that retain the rainfall and help the crops planted on the terraced land to grow.

CRS, the U.S. bishops’ overseas relief and development agency, prepared a report, “Tortillas on the Roaster,” about the potential for climate change to take out land for cultivation in Central America. “We don’t want folks, in Central America or anywhere, to have to make that decision” between fewer crops to plant or trees felled to find new cropland.

Misleh said the Catholic Climate Covenant was preparing for the encyclical’s issuance with the help of a 12-week program on the encyclical developed in conjunction with Renew International, and taking part in joint events with interfaith groups that are keeping their eye out for the encyclical.

“Our ecumenical and interfaith partners seem even more excited (about the encyclical) than we are on some days,” Misleh said.

February 12, 2015

Deep in the Amazon, a Tiny Tribe Is Beating Big Oil

The people of Sarayaku are a leading force in 21st century indigenous resistance, engaging the western world politically, legally, and philosophically.

By David Goodman
Yes! Magazine

Patricia Gualinga stands serenely as chaos swirls about her. I find this petite woman with striking black and red face paint at the head of the People’s Climate March in New York City on September 21, 2014. She is adorned with earrings made of brilliant bird feathers and a thick necklace of yellow and blue beads. She has come here from Sarayaku, a community deep in the heart of the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador.

Behind Gualinga, 400,000 people are in the streets calling for global action to stop climate change. Beside her, celebrities Leonardo DiCaprio, Sting, and Mark Ruffalo prepare to lead the historic march alongside a group of indigenous leaders. Gualinga stands beneath a sign, “Keep the Oil in the Ground.” She has traveled across continents and cultures to deliver this message.

“Our ancestors and our spiritual leaders have been talking about climate change for a long time,” she tells me in Spanish above the din, flashing a soft smile as photographers crush around the celebrities. She motions to the throngs around her. “We are actually speaking the same language right now.”

A year earlier, I traveled to her village in the Ecuadorian Amazon to research the improbable story of a rainforest community of 1,200 Kichwa people that has successfully fended off oil companies and a government intent on exploiting their land for profit. How, I wondered, has Sarayaku been winning?

This is not the story most people know from Ecuador. Headlines have focused on northern Ecuador, where Chevron is fighting a landmark $9.5 billion judgment for dumping millions of gallons of toxic wastewater into rivers and leaving unlined pits of contaminated sludge that poisoned thousands of people.

Sarayaku lies in southern Ecuador, where the government is selling drilling rights to a vast swath of indigenous lands—except for Sarayaku. The community has become a beacon of hope to other indigenous groups and to global climate change activists as it mobilizes to stop a new round of oil exploration.

What I found in Sarayaku was not just a community defending its territory. I encountered a people who believe that their lifestyle, deeply connected to nature, holds promise for humans to save themselves from global warming and extinction. They are fighting back by advancing a
counter-capitalist vision called *sumak kawsay*—Kichwa for “living well”—living in harmony with the natural world and insisting that nature has rights deserving of protection.

Naively romantic? Think again: In 2008, Ecuador’s constitution became the first in the world to codify the rights of nature and specifically *sumak kawsay*. Bolivia’s constitution has a similar provision, and rights-of-nature ordinances are now being passed in communities in the United States.

Sarayaku residents describe *sumac kawsay* as “choosing our responsibility to the seventh generation over quarterly earnings, regeneration over economic growth, and the pursuit of well-being and harmony over wealth and financial success.”

The people of Sarayaku are the face of 21st-century indigenous resistance. Sarayaku may be a remote, pastoral community, but it is engaging the Western world politically, legally, and philosophically. Patricia Gualinga and other Sarayaku community members have traveled to Europe to meet with foreign leaders and warn energy company executives about their opposition to oil extraction from their lands, produced their own documentary film about their struggle, filed lawsuits, leveraged their message with international groups such as Amazon Watch and Amnesty International, marched thousands of kilometers in public protest, and testified at the United Nations. Sarayaku’s resistance has angered the pro-development Ecuadorian government—which bizarrely hails *sumak kawsay* while selling hotly contested oil drilling leases—but has inspired other indigenous communities across the globe.

**Defending life and land**

I climb aboard a four-seater Cessna parked at a small airstrip in the town of Shell, a rambling settlement on the edge of the Amazon rainforest in southeastern Ecuador. The town is named for Shell Oil Company, which established operations here a half century ago.

Our plane flies low over the thick green jungle. The dense growth below is broken only by rivers the color of chocolate milk, the sinewy arteries of the rainforest.

The forest canopy parts to reveal a grass airstrip and clusters of thatched huts. This is Sarayaku. Moist jungle air envelops me as I step out of the plane. The villagers escort me and my daughter, Ariel, who has been living in Ecuador and is translating for me, past a large communal hut where a woman tends a small fire. Gerardo Gualinga, Patricia’s brother and one of the community leaders, arrives dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, and knee-high rubber boots, the signature footwear of the rainforest. He carries a tall, carved wooden staff, a symbol of his authority.

“The community is in the middle of a three-day meeting to plan our political and development work for the next year. Come along—I think you will find it interesting,” he says, motioning for us to follow him down to the edge of the broad Bobonaza River.

We board a motorized canoe and head upstream, passing slender dugouts propelled by men pushing long poles. In 10 minutes, we clamber out on the river bank and hike up to a sandy village square.
Inside an oval building with a thatched roof, we find José Gualinga, another of Patricia’s brothers, who was then president of Sarayaku. He is holding his ceremonial staff and wearing a black headband and a Che Guevara T-shirt. Gualinga is leading a discussion of how the community should pressure the Ecuadorian government to comply with the judgment of the Inter-American Court on Human Rights, which ruled in 2012 that the Ecuadorian government should have obtained the consent of the native people when it permitted oil drilling on Sarayaku’s territory. Following hearings in Costa Rica, the court ordered the government to apologize and pay Sarayaku $1.25 million, plus attorney’s fees.

The court decision, declared Mario Melo, attorney for Sarayaku from the Quito-based Fundación Pachamama, is “a significant contribution to a more profound safeguard of indigenous peoples’ rights, and it is an example of dignity that will surely inspire many other nations and peoples around the world.”

At a lunch break, Mario Santi, Sarayaku’s president until 2008, explains the history of the struggle here.

In the early 2000s, “The government let oil businesses exploit and explore for oil in this territory. There was no consultation. Many communities sold out to the oil companies. Sarayaku was the only pueblo that didn’t sell the right for oil companies to explore.”

Ecuador’s government ignored the community’s refusal to sell oil-drilling rights and signed a contract in 1996 with the Argentinian oil company C.G.C. to explore for oil in Sarayaku. In 2003, C.G.C. petroleros—oil workers and private security guards—and Ecuadorian soldiers came by helicopter to lay explosives and dig test wells.

Sarayaku mobilized. “We stopped the schools and our own work and dedicated ourselves to the struggle for six months,” says Santi. As the oil workers cleared a large area of forest—which was community farmland—the citizens of Sarayaku retreated deep into the jungle, where they established emergency camps and plotted their resistance.

“In the six months of struggle, there was torture, rape, and strong suffering of our people, especially our mothers and children,” Santi recounts. “We returned with psychological illness. All the military who came …” He pauses to compose himself. “This was a very, very bad time.”

In their jungle camps, the Sarayaku leaders hatched a plan. The women of the community prepared a strong batch of chicha, the traditional Ecuadorian homebrew made from fermented cassava. One night, a group of them traveled stealthily through the jungle, shadowed by men of the village. The women emerged at the main encampment of the petroleros. They offered their chicha and watched as the oil workers happily partied.

As their drinking binge ended, the petroleros fell asleep. When they awoke, what they saw sobered them: They were staring into the muzzle of their own automatic weapons. Wielding the guns were the women and men of Sarayaku.
The Sarayaku residents ordered the petroleros off their ancestral land. The terrified workers called in helicopters and fled, abandoning their weapons. The oil workers never returned. An Ecuadorian general came later and negotiated with community leaders—five of whom had been arrested and beaten—for the return of the weapons.

I ask Santi why Sarayaku has resisted. His tan, weathered face breaks into a gentle smile even as he recounts a difficult story.

“Our fathers told us that for future generations not to suffer, we needed to struggle for our territory and our liberty. So we wouldn’t be slaves of the new kind of colonization.

“The waterfall, the insects, the animals, the jungle gives us life,” he tells me. “Because man and the jungle have a relationship. For the Western capitalist world, the jungle is simply for exploiting resources and ending all this. The indigenous pueblos without jungle—we can’t live.”

Sarayaku now wants to help indigenous people around the world resist and defend their way of life. “Our message that we are also taking to Asia, Africa, Brazil, and other countries that are discussing climate change, we propose an alternative development—the development of life. This is our economy for living—sumak kawsay—not just for us but for the Western world. They don’t have to be afraid of global warming if they support the life of the jungle.

“It’s not a big thing,” he says understatedly. “It’s just to continue living.”

Indigenous climate change warriors

The Sarayaku story is just the latest in a long-running battle over Ecuador’s natural resources. Oil extraction began in northern Ecuador in 1964, when the American oil giant Texaco set up drilling operations in indigenous lands (Chevron later purchased Texaco). When the oil company exited in 1992, it “left behind the worst oil-related environmental disaster on the planet,” according to Amazon Watch, a nonprofit organization that defends indigenous rights. The devastated and poisoned region is known as the “rainforest Chernobyl.”

Despite pursuing Chevron for damages, the Ecuadorian government of President Rafael Correa has embarked on an aggressive new round of oil development in southern Ecuador, opening thousands of acres to exploration. The government has cracked down on resisters, recently ordering the closure of the Quito headquarters of CONAIE, Ecuador’s national indigenous organization, attempting to stop Ecuadorian activists opposed to oil drilling from attending a U.N. climate summit in Peru, and closing Fundación Pachamama, an NGO supporting indigenous groups. Most of Sarayaku’s land has been excluded in the new round of oil drilling, though nearby communities, including those of the neighboring Sápara people, are threatened. Sarayaku is joining the protests of its neighbors.

José Gualinga says these struggles have bigger implications. “We are doing this to stop carbon emissions and global warming. This struggle of indigenous pueblos is a doorway to saving Pachamama [Mother Earth].”
Women have been at the center of the indigenous resistance. Patricia Gualinga tells me, “The women have been very steadfast and strong in saying we are not negotiating about this. We are the ones who have mobilized for life.” She recounts how, in 2013, 100 women from seven different indigenous groups marched 250 kilometers from their jungle communities to Quito, where they addressed the National Assembly. In the 1990s, Patricia’s mother embarked on a similar march with thousands of other indigenous women.

Sarayaku community members travel widely around Ecuador and beyond, but most return to their pastoral village.

“We want to continue living a good life within the forest,” Patricia tells me. “We want to be respected, and we want to be a model that could be replicated.”

The living jungle

I follow Sabino Gualinga, a 70-year-old shaman, as he walks lightly through the dense tangle of growth. He deftly flicks his machete to make a path through the jungle for me and Ariel. He stops and points up toward a tree.

“The bark of that tree helps cure grippe [flu]. This one,” he says, pointing to a weathered, gray tree trunk, “helps to break a fever. That one,” he motions to a fern-like plant, “helps with psychological problems.”

That night, Sabino’s sons, Gerardo and José, join us in front of a flickering fire to talk about Sarayaku’s journey. They are unwinding after a long day of meetings. José wears a white soccer jersey and his long black hair hangs loosely at his shoulders.

José, president of Sarayaku from 2011 to 2014, led his community to take its fight to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights. Part of the court judgment required Ecuadorian government leaders to apologize to Sarayaku. I doubted this would occur, but José was insistent that it would.

In October 2014, Ecuador’s Minister of Justice, Ledy Zuniga, stood in Sarayaku’s sandy community square and delivered an extraordinary message: “We offer a public apology for the violation of indigenous property, cultural identity, the right to consultation, having put at serious risk their lives and personal integrity, and for the violation of the right to judicial guarantee and judicial protections,” she declared.

The court decision and official apology appear to have given Sarayaku an extra measure of protection from new oil exploration. The government must now secure at least the appearance of consent, contested though it may be, lest they get dragged back into court.

Sarayaku may be a remote, pastoral community, but it is engaging the Western world politically, legally, and philosophically.

“We’ve shown that laws can change,” reflects Gerardo. “We’ve won not only for Sarayaku, we’ve won for South America.”
A key element in Sarayaku’s success is telling its story everywhere it can. Sarayaku resident Eriberto Gualinga trained in videography and made a film about his community, *Children of the Jaguar*, which won best documentary at the 2012 National Geographic All Roads Film Festival. Sarayaku has also embraced social media. Community members showed me to a thatched hut. Inside, young people were clustered around several computers updating Facebook pages and websites via a satellite Internet connection.

Now, says José, “When the state says, ‘Sarayaku, we are going to destroy you,’ we have international witnesses. We can tell people the truth.”

José draws a distinction between Sarayaku’s struggles and those led by leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Che Guevara. “They wanted their freedom. We don’t need to win our freedom. Here in Sarayaku, we are free. But we take from the experience of these leaders. It strengthens us.”

A steady rain falls on the thatched roof overhead. The fat raindrops make a hard thwack on the broad leaves of the trees. A guitarist strums softly in another hut. Chickens and children run free.

“We are millionaires,” says Gerardo, motioning to the jungle that embraces us. “Everything we need we have here.” José peers into the fire. “We are a small pueblo, but we are a symbol of life. Everyone must come together to support the life of human beings and Earth.”

*David Goodman wrote this article for Together, With Earth, the Spring 2015 issue of YES! Magazine. David is a journalist, a contributing writer for Mother Jones, and author of 10 books. He and his sister Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now!, have co-authored three New York Times bestsellers.*


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**February 16, 2015**

Historic Catholic Climate Lenten Fast To Be Held in 45 Countries

Global Catholic Climate Movement

Press Release

The Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) announced on February 16 that more than 45 countries will take part in a 40-day Lenten fast for climate justice, from Ash Wednesday, February 18, to March 28. Participants in the Lenten fast are praying for unity on climate change within the Catholic church and asking world leaders to take all steps possible to meet the goal of a global temperature increase of less than 1.5 degrees Celsius (relative to pre-industrial levels),
by means that include a fair, ambitious, and legally binding global agreement in the COP 21 summit in Paris.

On a personal level, the GCCM 40-day fast encourages participants to fast from both food as well as reduce their use of carbon i.e. reduce their use such as oil, electricity, plastic, paper, water, and toxins and recycle during Lent.

The movement chose fasting for its first worldwide action because, “Pope Francis made it clear from the start that all people need to act as ‘protectors of creation.’ We encourage Catholics around the world to unite, pray and fast in solidarity with those who are most affected by the changing global climate,” stated Patrick Carolan, Executive Director of the U.S. based Franciscan Action Network.

Yeb Saño, who is the Climate Commissioner from the Philippines who captured the world’s attention with his own fast during U.N. meetings following Typhoon Haiyan, said: “The power behind fasting lies in its purity of purpose and the sense of selflessness necessary to embark on fasting. This is the power of the fast—because it is meant for our aspirations of a better world.”

Jacqui Rémond, Executive Director of Catholic Earthcare Australia added: “It is important that we call for a strong climate agreement that keeps global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 °C – this threshold was in the first three Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessments and also in the IPCC Fifth Assessment report (AR5). A world even at 1.5°C warmer would mean more severe droughts, flooding and sea level rise, increasing the risk of damage from storm surges and crop loss, as well as food and water security issues. Vulnerable human coastal communities and species across the world especially need to be protected.”

Ciara Shannon, coordinator of Our Voices in Asia stated: “Amidst our busy, consumption led lives – fasting during Lent is a great opportunity to reflect and abstain. The GCCM Lenten Fast also includes the option to do a carbon fast. This gives us a great opportunity to think about the food itself, how it is grown, how much water is used, how it is transported and then packaged. It always shocks me the amount of emissions that are involved.”

The GCCM 40 day Climate Justice Fast is part of the 365 day #FASTFORTHECLIMATE which has been happening since the 1st of December 2014 the start of COP20 in Lima and will continue until the 30th of November 2015, at the beginning of COP21 in Paris. The GCCM Climate Justice Fast is also in collaboration with the Green Anglicans Carbon Fast and Our Voices Climate Fast.

Further information on #FASTFORTHECLIMATE can be found at: www.fastfortheclimateg.org
Further information on the Carbon Fast at: www.greenanglicans.org/carbon-fast-lent-2015/
Further information on Our Voices can be found at: www.ourvoices.net

http://www.scny.org/historic-catholic-climate-lenten-fast-to-be-held-in-45-countries/
February 17, 2015

Catholic group launches global climate-focused Lenten fast

By Brian Roewe
Eco Catholic
National Catholic Reporter

Forty days of Lent this year will equate to 40 days of fasting for Catholics in 40-plus countries in a push for greater unity and action around the issue of climate change.

The Global Catholic Climate Movement, which formed in January, officially announced on Monday the Lenten Fast for Climate Justice. The goal is to raise awareness on climate change as well as for Pope Francis’ Lenten call to confront “a globalization of indifference,” and to spur world leaders to work out a binding agreement to stave off a temperature rise above 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit), compared to pre-industrial levels. Climate scientists and politicians have regularly pointed to maintaining an increase of no more than 2 degrees Celsius to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

“The essential message is reduce our carbon footprint and increase our spiritual footprint,” said Jacqui Rémond, director of Catholic Earthcare Australia, which is coordinating the fast there.

The climate justice fast is one of several similar efforts worldwide. The Fast for the Climate is an interfaith campaign that began Dec. 1 -- the start of the United Nations climate negotiations in Lima, Peru -- and will continue through the end of November when the talks resume in Paris. The interfaith group Our Voices and the Anglican church is South Africa are also holding climate-focused Lenten fasts.

So far, Catholics from 44 countries and one U.S. territory (Guam) have signed onto the climate justice fast. Support for it has picked up in recent days, with climate movement members activating their broad network to spread the word.

“Two weeks ago, we had six countries signed up,” Patrick Carolan, executive director of the U.S.-based Franciscan Action Network, told NCR.

Rather than asking each country to hold a continuous 40-day fast, the climate fast will operate in a pass-the-baton fashion, with a different country -- represented by a group of people or, in some cases, an individual -- observing it each day before giving way to the next nation in line. In keeping with church tradition, all Catholics are asked to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

The U.S. fasting date is set for March 16.
Organizers are asking Catholics on their country’s day not only to abstain from food, but also to incorporate carbon-limiting behaviors, as well: walking, biking or using public transportation in lieu of a car; working from home; using less electricity or water.

They have also encouraged fasters in each country to share statements and videos explaining why they fast and how climate change has affected their homelands. The Global Catholic Climate Movement will then share the testimonials on its website as a way for people to follow the fast.

The first country up Thursday is Peru, the site of the most recent round of U.N. climate talks. From there, the fast moves east, stopping in Zambia (Friday) and Kenya (Saturday) in Africa, before heading to Hong Kong (Feb. 23) and Japan (Feb. 25).

In all, nine African nations and seven Asian countries will participate -- more than a third of all partaking. In addition, the fast will feature seven countries in South America, 11 in North America and the Caribbean, and nine in Europe.

The reasons for the climate fast are both unique and shared. In Australia, Rémont said it would call Catholics, as citizens of the highest per capita emissions country, “to play our part” in addressing climate change. For many, the act is one in solidarity with those who have and will suffer from the negative impacts of climate change.

Allen Ottaro, director of the Kenyan-based Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa, described severe flooding in Malawi and Mozambique “that has killed hundreds and left thousands homeless,” in addition to the destruction of crops and farmlands that has affected food security.

On a continent that has contributed the least to climate change but expected to be struck the hardest, Ottaro said it’s important for Catholics to lead on climate justice, as it has on other peace and justice issues.

“Besides fasting from food, it will also be a time of prayer for and with these communities,” he told NCR in an email.

In his 2015 Lenten message [3], the pope described a tendency for healthy and comfortable people to become unconcerned with others and their problems, and called on Christians to confront “a globalization of indifference” by forming more merciful hearts.

“Every Christian community is called to go out of itself and to be engaged in the life of the greater society of which it is a part, especially with the poor and those who are far away,” Francis said.

Ottaro, who has seen the gap between rich and poor grow in his hometown Nairobi, believes the climate fast is an opportunity for Christians to examine ways they can live simpler, but also how they can challenge structures that perpetuate such globalized indifference.
“Very often we are caught up in our own worries and activities and have no time to pause to reflect and pray. Fasting offers us the opportunity to stop and reflect, and to feel the absence of things we might consider ‘normal,’ like three meals in a day,” he said.

Plans are still in the development phase for the U.S. fasting day, but Franciscan Action Network is hoping to recruit Catholic members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, to join the fast, “to raise awareness that climate change is a moral and spiritual issue, not a political issue,” Carolan said.

Already on board is former Maryland Gov. Martin O’Malley. “Uniting people of all faiths is the principle that we are called upon to be good and responsible stewards of God's creation,” he said in the climate fast press release.

During the 2013 Fast for Families on immigration reform, Carolan said the communal fasting experience led to a strong spiritual connection among the participants.

“We started out each day in that fast in a circle, and we started out in prayer and shared our stories … And really built that sense of connectedness, that we’re all part of the one,” Carolan said.

Carolan hopes the global climate fast, in addition to the upcoming papal encyclical on the environment, has a similar effect in uniting Catholics behind the need for serious action on climate change -- not for political or environmental purposes, but on moral and ethical grounds.

“Maybe that changes people’s hearts and helps more with the transformation of our society and into a society of interconnectedness, not a society of separation. And that includes connected to all of creation,” he said.

[Brian Roewe is an NCR staff writer. His email address is broewe@nronline.org [4]. Follow him on Twitter: @BrianRoewe [5]. Map of fasting nations created by NCR Bertelsen intern Mick Forgey (@mcforgs [6]).]

Editor's note: Want more stories from Eco Catholic? We can send you an email alert once a week with the latest. Just go to this page and follow directions: Email alert sign-up [7].


Links:
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February 17, 2015

Will the Vatican Become a New Leader Against Climate Change?

By Kevin Mathews
Care2

As political leaders make only moderate concessions in the name of fighting climate change, will anyone emerge to apply the pressure necessary to enact legitimate policy change? Surprisingly, the planet’s savior could wind up being the Pope. The latest rumors indicate that the Vatican is planning to take a serious leadership role in trying to avoid our disastrous climate change problem.

While nothing has been made official, Father Federico Lombardi confirmed that an international group of cardinals assembled privately to discuss forming a new environmental think-tank of sorts. “We see a growth in the awareness and in the importance of reflection, commitment, and study of environmental issues and their relation to social and human questions,” Lombardi said. A formal announcement about the next steps the church will take is expected by this summer.

Say what you will about the Catholicism, but even environmentalists without a religious affiliation should be excited at this potential new alliance. With over one billion people in the world identifying as Roman Catholic, a papal decree could theoretically enliven the largest bloc of eco-activists yet.

Pope Francis isn’t dancing around the subject either. He’s not only acknowledging that climate change is real, he’s also assigning humans with the majority of the blame for said climate change. “It is man who continuously slaps down nature,” Francis said. It is expected that he will instruct Catholics to take care of the earth that God created. Assuming the pope’s followers take it as a legitimate, God-endorsed call-to-action, that’s the kind of sway that results in actual change.

Environmental advocacy by the pope is not unusual – even John Paul II encouraged his followers to take care of the environment back in the ‘90s. However, Francis appears poised to actually challenge the status quo. While he may have as many as a billion faithful Catholics in his corner, Francis’ call will directly oppose the agendas of powerful political and moneyed interests, which means that the Vatican is probably going to be in for a fight with this one.

Given that it took 350 years for the Vatican to acknowledge that the earth does in fact revolve around the sun and not the other way around, it’s nice to see the Catholic Church
(comparatively) ahead of the game this time by accepting the overwhelming scientific evidence even when it’s not necessarily “convenient” for everyone involved. With the stakes of climate change so high, environmentalists need every advocate on their side as they can muster, including some unexpected ones like the folks at the Vatican.


February 17, 2015

Tonga’s King talks climate change with Pope Francis

King of Tonga discusses environment with the Pope, as Vatican gets its first Tongan Cardinal

By Sophie Yeo
Responding to Climate Change

Tonga’s King has taken the environmental challenges facing the small island states in the Pacific to the Vatican.

King Tupou VI, a Methodist, and his wife, Queen Nanasiapau’u Tuku’aho, discussed the topic with Pope Francis during a tour of Rome and London.

A statement from the Vatican press office said that the Pope and the King had an “exchange of opinions on the international situation, with particular reference to the insular States of the Pacific and the environmental problems that some of them are compelled to face.”

These small island states are among the most vulnerable nations in the world when it comes to climate change.

As global warming causes sea levels to rise, the low lying nations face coastal erosion and increased flooding.

According to the 2013 World Risk Report, Tonga is the second most vulnerable country to natural disasters in the world after Vanuatu, another small island state.

Green Pope

Pope Francis’ discussion with the King of Tonga is the first time that he has explicitly addressed the climate concerns of the small island states.

Yet the Pontiff has become increasingly vocal on climate change since he was elected as head of the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics in March 2013.

This has been combined with a concern for the poor and underrepresented.
Ahead of a trip to Tacloban – the area of the Philippines hardest hit by the deadly Typhoon Haiyan – Francis described environmental neglect as a betrayal of the “noble calling” to be stewards of God’s creation.

Francis’ decision to appoint Tongan bishop Soane Patita Paini Mafi as Cardinal has been regarded as an attempt to reach out to the fringes.

Mafi – who was formally elevated to the College of Cardinals at St Peter’s Basilica on Saturday – has previously expressed his concern over the damage that climate change is causing to the Pacific islands.

In an interview with America magazine, he described “our permanent vulnerability to the impact of climate change and global warming, especially to our low lying areas in the Pacific” as one of the most pressing issues facing his community.


February 18, 2015

Bigger Than Science, Bigger Than Religion

We’re closer to environmental disaster than ever before. We need a new story for our relationship with the Earth, one that goes beyond science and religion.

By Richard Schiffman
Yes! Magazine

The world as we know it is slipping away. At the current rate of destruction, tropical rainforest could be gone within as little as 40 years. The seas are being overfished to the point of exhaustion, and coral reefs are dying from ocean acidification. Biologists say that we are currently at the start of the largest mass extinction event since the disappearance of the dinosaurs. As greenhouse gases increasingly accumulate in the atmosphere, temperatures are likely to rise faster than our current ecological and agricultural systems can adapt.

It is no secret that the Earth is in trouble and that we humans are to blame. Just knowing these grim facts, however, won’t get us very far. We have to transform this knowledge into a deep passion to change course. But passion does not come primarily from the head; it is a product of the heart. And the heart is not aroused by the bare facts alone. It needs stories that weave those facts into a moving and meaningful narrative.

We need a powerful new story that we are a part of nature and not separate from it. We need a story that properly situates humans in the world—neither above it by virtue of our superior intellect, nor dwarfed by the universe into cosmic insignificance. We are equal partners with all that exists, co-creators with trees and galaxies and the microorganisms in our own gut, in a materially and spiritually evolving universe.
This was the breathtaking vision of the late Father Thomas Berry. Berry taught that humanity is presently at a critical decision point. Either we develop a more heart-full relationship with the Earth that sustains us, or we destroy ourselves and life on the planet. I interviewed the white-maned theologian (he preferred the term “geologian,” by which he meant “student of the Earth”) in 1997 at the Riverdale Center of Religious Research on the Hudson River north of New York City. Berry spoke slowly and with the hint of a southern drawl, revealing his North Carolina upbringing.

“I say that my generation has been autistic,” he told me. “An autistic child is locked into themselves, they cannot get out and the outer world cannot get in. They cannot receive affection, cannot give affection. And this is, I think, a very appropriate way of identifying this generation in its relationship to the natural world.

“We have no feeling for the natural world. We’d as soon cut down our most beautiful tree, the most beautiful forest in the world. We cut it down for what? For timber, for board feet. We don’t see the tree, we only see it in terms of its commercial value.”

It is no accident that we have come to our current crisis, according to Berry. Rather, it is the natural consequence of certain core cultural beliefs that comprise what Berry called “the Old Story.” At the heart of the Old Story is the idea that we humans are set apart from nature and here to conquer it. Berry cited the teaching in Genesis that humans should “subdue the Earth … and have dominion over every living thing.”

But if religion provided the outline for the story, science wrote it large—developing a mind-boggling mastery of the natural world. Indeed, science over time became the new religion, said Berry, an idolatrous worship of our own human prowess. Like true believers, many today are convinced that, however bad things might seem, science and technology will eventually solve all of our problems and fulfill all of our needs.

Berry acknowledged that this naive belief in science served a useful purpose during the formative era when we were still building the modern world and becoming aware of our immense power to transform things.

Like adolescents staking out their own place in the world, we asserted our independence from nature and the greater family of life. But over time, this self-assertion became unbalanced, pushing the Earth to the brink of environmental cataclysm. The time has come to leave this adolescent stage behind, said Berry, and develop a new, mature relationship with the Earth and its inhabitants.

We’ll need to approach this crucial transition on many different fronts. Scientific research has too frequently become the willing handmaiden of what Berry called “the extractive economy,” an economic system that treats our fellow creatures as objects to be exploited rather than as living beings with their own awareness and rights. Moreover, technology, in Berry’s view, potentially separates us from intimacy with life. We flee into “cyberspace”—spending more time on smart phones, iPods, and video games than communing with the real world.
Science and technology are not the problem. Our misuse of them is. Berry said that science needs to acknowledge that the universe is not a random assemblage of dead matter and empty space, but is alive, intelligent, and continually evolving. And it needs to recognize that not only is the world alive, it is alive in us. “We bear the universe in our beings,” Berry reflected, “as the universe bears us in its being.” In Berry’s view, our human lives are no accident. We are the eyes, the minds, and the hearts that the cosmos is evolving so that it can come to know itself ever more perfectly through us.

It’s a view that has been winning some surprising adherents. Several years ago, I had dinner with Edgar Mitchell, one of only a dozen humans who have walked upon the lunar surface. Mitchell, the descendant of New Mexico pioneers and an aeronautical engineer by training, spoke precisely and almost clinically—until he related an experience that happened on his way back to Earth during the Apollo 14 mission. At that point, his voice brightened with awe.

“I was gazing out of the window, at the Earth, moon, sun, and star-studded blackness of space in turn as our capsule slowly rotated,” he said. “Gradually, I was flooded with the ecstatic awareness that I was a part of what I was observing. Every molecule in my body was birthed in a star hanging in space. I became aware that everything that exists is part of one intricately interconnected whole.”

The Overview Effect

In a recent phone chat, Mitchell called this realization “the Overview Effect,” and he said that virtually all of the moon astronauts experienced it during their flights. In his case, it changed the direction of his life: “I realized that the story of ourselves as told by our scientific cosmology and our religion was incomplete and likely flawed. I saw that the Newtonian idea of separate, independent, discrete things in the universe wasn’t a fully accurate description.”

In pursuit of a holistic understanding, Mitchell founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) to explore the nature of human consciousness. The question of consciousness might seem remote from issues like climate change. But it is central to the question of how we treat the world. At the core of our abuse of nature is the belief that we humans are essentially islands unto ourselves, alienated from the world beyond our skins. A little god locked within the gated community of his or her own skull won’t feel much responsibility for what goes on outside.

“The classical scientific approach says that observation and consciousness are completely independent of the way the world works,” IONS Chief Scientist Dean Radin told me. But physics has known for decades that mind and matter are not as separable as we once supposed. Radin cites as an example Heisenberg’s discovery that the act of observation changes the phenomenon that is being observed.

Moreover, quantum physics has shown that subatomic particles that are separated in space are nevertheless responsive to one another in ways that are not yet fully understood. We are discovering that there is “some underlying form of connection in which literally everything is connected to everything else all of the time,” asserts Radin. “The universe is less a collection of objects than a web of interrelationships.”
As we come to grasp how inextricably embedded in this vast web of cosmic life we are, Radin hopes that humans will be persuaded to move beyond the idea of ourselves as masters and the world as slave to embrace an equal and mutually beneficial partnership.

Another prophet of a new scientific paradigm is renowned Harvard biologist Edward (E.O.) Wilson. Wilson is best known for his biophilia hypothesis, which says there is an instinctive emotional bond between humans and other life forms. Evolution has fostered in us the drive to love and care for other living beings, Wilson says, as a way to promote the survival not just of our own kind but of life as a whole.

Darwin’s theory of natural selection is invoked to argue that we humans are conditioned by nature to struggle tooth and nail for access to limited resources. But Wilson contends that evolution does not just promote violent competition but also favors the development of compassion and cooperation—traits that serve the interests of the group as a whole.

He calls this radical new idea “group selection.” Groups of altruistically inclined individuals have an evolutionary advantage over groups that are composed of members pursuing only their own survival needs. This collective advantage, he argues, has helped to promote powerful social bonds and cooperative behaviors in species as diverse as ants, geese, elk, and human beings.

In championing the evolutionary importance of love and cooperation in the flourishing of life, Wilson is not just revolutionizing biology. He is also venturing into territory usually occupied by religion. But, like Berry, Wilson argues that we need a story that cuts across traditional boundaries between fields to present a new, integral vision. “Science and religion are two of the most potent forces on Earth,” Wilson asserts, “and they should come together to save the Creation.”

*A thousand-year worldview*

At its heart, the new story that Wilson and Berry advocate is actually a very old one. Indigenous spiritual traditions taught that all beings are our relatives long before the science of ecology “discovered” the seamless web of life that binds humans to other creatures. “The world is alive, everything has spirit, has standing, has the right to be recognized,” proclaims Anishinaabe activist and former Green Party candidate for vice president Winona LaDuke.

“One of our fundamental teachings is that in all our actions we consider the impact it will have on seven generations,” LaDuke told an audience at the University of Ottawa in 2012. “Think about what it would mean to have a worldview that could last a thousand years, instead of the current corporate mindset that can’t see beyond the next quarterly earnings statement.”

When LaDuke speaks of Native values, people sometimes ask her what relevance these have for us today. She answers that the respect for the sacredness of nature that inspired people to live in harmony with their environment for millennia is not a relic of the past. It is a roadmap for living lightly on the Earth that we desperately need in a time of climate change.
This ethic has spread beyond the reservation into religiously inspired communities, like Genesis Farm, founded by the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell, New Jersey. Set on ancestral Lenape lands amidst wooded hills and wetlands and within view of the Delaware Water Gap, Genesis has served for the last quarter century as an environmental learning center and working biodynamic farm grounded in Berry’s vision.

I spoke to the community’s founder Sister Miriam MacGillis, a friend and student of Berry, in a room studded with satellite images of the farm and its bioregion. MacGillis told me that she underwent decades of struggle trying to reconcile Berry’s 13-billion-year vision of an evolutionary cosmos with the ultimately incompatible biblical teachings that “creation is finished: Humans were made, history began, there was the fall, and history will end with the apocalypse.” She says, “The pictures I had of God were too small, too parochial, too much a reflection of the ways humans think. We made God in our image!”

Taking the long view fundamentally transforms the basis for environmental action, says MacGillis: “We need to realize that we are the universe in the form of the human. We are not just on Earth to do good ecological things. That is where the religious perspective takes us with the stewardship model—take care of it; it’s holy because God made it. That hasn’t worked real well … The idea of stewardship is too small, it’s too human-centered, like we can do that. It’s really the opposite. Earth is taking total care of us.”

Genesis Farm has propagated these ideas through its Earth Literacy training, which has now spread to many places throughout the world. Their work is a small part of a larger greening of religion, says Yale religious scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-creator with Brian Swimme of Journey of the Universe, an exhilarating trek through time and space portraying an evolutionary universe.

Tucker expects that the upcoming encyclical on climate change and the environment that Pope Francis will issue in early 2015 will be “a game changer” for Catholics. She adds that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has also been outspoken, labeling crimes against the natural world “a sin.” The Dalai Lama, for his part, has been speaking about the importance of safeguarding the environment based on Buddhism’s sense of the profound interdependence of all life. China has recently enshrined in its constitution the need for a new ecological civilization rooted in Confucian values, which preach the harmony between humans, Earth, and Heaven.

“All civilizations have drawn on the wisdom traditions that have gotten people through death, tragedy, destruction, immense despair,” says Tucker, adding that we are currently in a perilous rite of passage. “We will need all of the world’s religions to help as well as a shared sense of an evolutionary story to get us through this.”

Richard Schiffman wrote this for Together, With Earth, the Spring 2015 issue of YES! Magazine. Richard is an environmental journalist whose work has been featured on National Public Radio, in The Guardian, The Atlantic, and many other publications. He is the author of two biographies, and a poet whose collection What the Dust Doesn’t Know is forthcoming from Salmon Poetry.
Catholics Fast for Lent in Support of Pope Francis’ Call for Climate Action

By Cole Mellino
EcoWatch

Today marks Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent for Catholics. The 40-day period leading up to Easter is a time when Catholics fast, and many try to give up something as a way to deepen their faith. This Lenten season, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, which formed in January, officially announced today the Lenten Fast for Climate Justice.

The goal is to “raise awareness on climate change” and to challenge Catholics to confront what Pope Francis has called “a globalization of indifference,” according to the National Catholic Reporter (NCR). “The essential message is reduce our carbon footprint and increase our spiritual footprint,” Jacqui Rémond, director of Catholic Earthcare Australia, told NCR.

So far, Catholics from 44 countries have signed up for the climate justice fast. Global Catholic Climate Movement hopes that the faithful’s unified front on climate will “spur world leaders to work out a binding agreement” to avoid the worst effects of climate change. The organizers are not asking anyone to fast for all 40 days. Instead they are asking each country to fast for one day. In keeping with church tradition, they are asking all Catholics to fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Along with fasting from food, organizers are asking Catholics to do a “carbon fast” by incorporating carbon-limiting behaviors, such as walking, biking or using public transportation, working from home, and using less electricity or water. The organizers are also asking participants to share statements or a video explaining why they are fasting and “how climate change has affected their homelands.”

Fasting has become a theme for climate activists. Filipino delegate, Yeb Sano, initiated a fast during the UN’s 2014 climate talks in Lima to protest the lack of progress. Climate activists have also been holding a 365-day fasting chain, “which began on the Dec. 1, 2014 and will run until the Dec. 30, 2015 when the UN’s climate negotiations kick off in Paris,” according to Responding to Climate Change (RTCC).

“The power behind fasting lies in its purity of purpose and the sense of selflessness necessary to embark on fasting,” Sano told RTCC. “This is the power of the fast—because it is meant for our aspirations of a better world.”

Catholics have been fasting for centuries as part of Lent. Why make this one about climate change? “The fast is partially to respond to a lot of the Pope’s call to have a conversion on this
issue,” Rhett Engelking, director of the Franciscan Earth Corps and coordinator of the U.S. Day of Fasting, told VICE News.

The Pope has been making headlines right and left with statements like taking action on climate is essential to faith. In January, the pontificate visited the Philippines and met with survivors of Super Typhoon Haiyan, and on Feb. 14 he met with Tonga’s king and queen at the Vatican to discuss the damage that climate change is causing to the Pacific island.

Pope Francis is already living up to his promise to escalate his demand for climate action in 2015. Last week, church officials met to consider creating a new environmental think tank, which would “influence the opinion of the world’s 1.2 billion Roman Catholics on such thorny issues as climate change,” according to Reuters.

The pope’s highly awaited encyclical on the environment is due in early summer, and his visit to the U.S.—particularly his address to a joint session of Congress—this September is already getting a lot of attention. It will be the first time a pope will address the U.S. Congress, a third of whose members are Catholic.

http://ecowatch.com/2015/02/18/catholics-fast-lent-support-pope-francis-climate-action/

February 20, 2015

Solar energy’s new best friend is … the Christian Coalition

By Chris Mooney
Washington Post

The politics of solar power keeps getting more and more interesting.

In Indiana, a fight over net metering — basically, whether people with rooftop solar can return their excess power to the grid and thereby lower their utility bills — has drawn out groups ranging from the state chapter of the NAACP to the conservative TUSK (Tell Utilities Solar won’t be Killed) in favor of the practice.

Arrayed on the other side of the issue, meanwhile, are the Indiana Energy Association, a group of utilities, and Republican Rep. Eric Koch, sponsor of a bill that would potentially change how net metering works in the state. The legislation, in its current form, would let utility companies ask the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission to include various “tariffs, rates and charges, and credits” for those customers generating their own energy at home.

Net metering advocates charge that this would reduce how much money rooftop solar installers save on their electricity bills. But the bill’s supporters say it will “level the playing field to ensure that all of those who use the electric grid — whether consuming or generating power — are paying for its upkeep,” in the words of the Indiana Energy Association.
Forty-three states and the District of Columbia currently allow net metering — among them, Indiana. The fight is important because the solar industry in the state, and the number of people installing rooftop solar, is expected to grow in coming years — that is, so long as solar remains a good deal financially.

What’s particularly fascinating is how this debate has mobilized the religious community. Solar panels are going up on church rooftops in Indiana, and on Wednesday, the head of the Christian Coalition of America wrote a blog post favoring solar and referring specifically to the Indiana fight (although without getting into the technical details of net metering).

Roberta Combs, president of the group, titled her post “For God and Country, Indiana and America Need Better Energy Policies,” writing,

Indiana’s utilities are interested in keeping us reliant on traditional fuel sources that hurt our national security and weaken our economy. We must allow homes, businesses, public organizations, and churches to create local, American power by installing solar.

As conservatives, we stand up for our country’s national security and the health of our economy. And, as Christians, we recognize the biblical mandate to care for God’s creation and protect our children’s future.

This is not the first time that Combs has come out for an initiative that might be described as “green.” She previously supported efforts by Secretary of State John F. Kerry, former senator Joe Lieberman and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) to battle global warming. Her daughter, Michele Combs, is the founder of a group called Young Conservatives for Energy Reform, which stands for “weaning our nation from foreign oil, boosting efficiency, and developing homegrown alternatives from natural gas to biofuels to wind and solar.”

“This whole concept of conservative support for solar has certainly gotten a lot of attention, but this is the most remarkable chapter in the story,” said Bryan Miller, who co-chairs the Alliance for Solar Choice, which advocates in favor of net metering across the country. “We’ve seen a lot of grass-roots activism for sure, but we haven’t seen a major national group, associated with the far right of American politics, coming out on a renewable energy issue.”

The reason this has happened in Indiana, suggests Miller, is that “we’ve had houses of worship who have gone solar, speaking out about this for weeks.” The South Carolina Christian Coalition has also supported solar power in the state.

The Christian Coalition did not immediately return requests for comment.

Energy in the United States is changing so fast, it seems, that politics barely knows how to adapt to it.

Religious leaders urge action to combat climate change

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Religious leaders from across the faith spectrum gathered Feb. 20 at the Capitol to seek action to combat climate change and to mitigate its effects, whether it be at the federal level or in local communities.

The ongoing buzz about the forthcoming encyclical from Pope Francis on the environment was addressed by Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

"This is the first time a pope has addressed the issue of the environment and climate change with an encyclical -- and for us Catholics and not only for Catholics, this is a big deal," Archbishop Wenski said, noting, "Encyclicals are an important way for popes to exercise their teaching office."

Archbishop Wenski added, "Although I am not privy to what the pope will say, I think he will insist that the 'natural ecology' is inseparably linked to 'human ecology.' In other words, we have to recognize the interrelatedness of the various social, economic, political or environmental crises that confront the human family today."

The archbishop made the comments as part of a panel sponsored by the National Religious Partnership for the Environment and held in a meeting room at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in Washington.

Given what Pope Francis has said in the past on the environment, "I think that he will call us to prudent action that promotes the common good for present and future generations and respects human life and dignity while always giving priority to the poor and vulnerable," Archbishop Wenski said.

"Care for creation should engage us all -- and thus I also think that the pope will tell us also to be mindful of and heed the voices of poor who are impacted most by climate change and certainly will be impacted either for good or ill by the policies proposed to address climate change."

At their essence, the archbishop said, "these all are moral crises which require new rules and forms of engagement -- in other words, a rethinking of the path that we are traveling down together."

Bishops are not scientists, Archbishop Wenski cautioned, "but we are pastors -- and insofar as climate change affects concrete human beings, it is a moral issue; and, pastors in exercising their care of their flocks do weigh in -- and appropriately so -- on moral issues. Also, as Catholics, we
firmly believe that the poor have a first claim on our consciences in matters pertaining to the common good."

Archbishop Wenski alluded to past statements on the environment by Pope Benedict XVI and the U.S. bishops' own 2001 statement, "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good," in which "we expressed our concern that disproportionate and unfair burdens not be placed on poor, developing nations. We called for collective action for the common good."

The Rev. Emilio Marrero, vice president of national programs at Esperanza, an umbrella group for Hispanic evangelicals, said evangelicals "believe that salvation bears fruit," and that God wants to see "evidence" of faith "through our actions."

Rev. Marrero cited Matthew 25:36 as saying that Christians should be "concerned for the least of these," as climate change tends to more adversely affect those with less means to adapt to its impact. "In Mexico, 1 million people have been forced to leave their land because of climate change and the desertification of their pastures," he added.

Rabbi Fred Dobb, chair of the Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life, said the struggle over climate change is one of "hubris vs. humility." People, he added, should search within themselves to understand "how much are people at the center, vs. how much God is at the center, vs. how much the earth is at the center" of their lives.

Rabbi Dobb said he is the father of two children, ages 10 and 5. "I have stewardship over them," he said, "but that does not mean I can frack them, or strip-mine them." The same is true, he said of the earth: "The earth is God's and the fullness thereof."

The Rev. Carroll Baltimore, first vice president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, quoted the Rev. Martin Luther King, who also was a Baptist, as saying, "An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." African-Americans, Rev. Baltimore said, make up only 12 percent of the U.S. population, but suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change.

"Majorities of blacks and Hispanics live in counties with a bad quality of air," he said. And he cited U.S. Census statistics showing "there are 65 percent fewer African-American women living in New Orleans" than there were before Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005.

http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1500810.htm

February 25, 2015

Sacred Water, Klamath People and the Struggle for Cultural Survival

Press Release

(Upper Klamath Basin, Oregon) -- Entangled in the heart of an arduous century long battle over
water rights in the Upper Klamath Basin, is the struggle of the Klamath, Modoc, Yahooskin Peoples for cultural survivance.

Our elders have always told us that water is life, water is priceless. Our water is so sacred it should never be quantified, compromised or negotiated. But what happens to the future of a culture, whose spiritual foundation is water, when even to tribal negotiators, the priceless becomes a mere commodity?

In a world where some believe everything has its price, many of us as Klamath, Modoc, Yahooskin descendants hold strong to the values of our ancestors.

The values of our ancestors have taught us that water, above all else, is essential to our way of life as Indigenous People.

Our water sustains all our sacred foods and medicines, which have supported us since time immemorial in the Upper Klamath Basin.

Without it, we cease to be a People.

We are the descendants of Kientpoos, Captain Jack, who refused to be tamed by the United States and their destructive colonial agenda to tap our aquifers, irrigate our beautiful homelands and degrade them into barren farm lands.

On October 3, 1873 the US government sentenced Kientpoos (Captain Jack), Schonchin John, Black Jim, and Boston Charley to death by hanging at Fort Klamath. 9 years later in 1882, farmers introduced irrigation to the Klamath area.

In 1905, the Bureau of Reclamation’s massive project, otherwise known as the Klamath Reclamation Project, replumbed the region.

Today, seven dams, 45 pumping stations, 185 miles of canals and 516 miles of irrigation ditches stretch like a watery web over the land. Less than 25 percent of the original wetlands remain. Some 25,000 acres of those wetlands have been leased to farmers while another 200,000 acres have been turned into farmland. Agricultural runoff has altered the chemistry of the lakes and wetlands and waterfowl populations have declined by two-thirds. It is a familiar story in the arid West – water moved from where it was to places where it should not be.

“What we have,” explains former Klamath Tribe Water Attorney Bud Ullman, “is an over-commitment of the water resource and general ecosystem degradation. There have been promises of water initially to Indians in the Treaty…, then there were promises to the farmers in a big irrigation project…, then promises for water to other farms. This all adds up to more water than nature gives us to work with. (Winona Laduke, Klamath Water, Klamath Life 2002)

The irrigable lands of the Klamath Project are in south-central Oregon (62 percent) and north-central California (38 percent). The Project currently provides full service water to approximately 210,000 acres of cropland.
The two main sources that supply water for the project: Upper Klamath Lake and the Klamath River; and Clear Lake Reservoir, Gerber Reservoir, and Lost River, which are located in a closed basin. ([www.usbr.gov](http://www.usbr.gov))

An over commitment of water paired with climate change is hastily altering the water cycle in the Klamath Basin. Snow pack levels melted out 2-4 weeks early in 2014. In November 2014, Gerber Reservoir was reported to be 99 percent dry.

In an attempt to resolve conflicts between Indigenous senior water rights holders and junior rights holders, the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) was introduced in 2009 and the final document was signed on February 18, 2010 in Salem, Oregon.

Since then, two more agreements have been drafted and introduced, the Klamath Basin Hydroelectric Settlement (KHSA) on February 18, 2010 and the Upper Klamath Basin Comprehensive Agreement (UKBCA) on March 4, 2014.

While the Klamath Basin has glorified these agreements as a historical reconciliation, Indian Water Settlement agreements similar to the KBRA have been on the rise, and since 1989 congress has ratified at least 30.

Spring 2014, Klamath Tribal members were notified at a series of community meetings in Portland, Eugene, Chiloquin and Klamath Falls that the UKBCA had been finalized and referendum ballots would be mailed the following week. This left tribal members only 19 days to review over 100 pages of legal and scientific documentation and cast a vote to approve (or deny) and direct the Klamath Tribal chairman, Donald Gentry, to sign the proposed legislation.

According to the Klamath Tribes Referendum Official Ballot, “all ballots must be received by the US Post Office in Chiloquin by 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, April 9, 2014. Or they will not be counted.”

Many tribal members, primarily those who live out of area, either did not receive their ballots or received their ballots after the deadline for submission. 564 Tribal members voted yes, in favor of the Agreement, and 419 voted no. Less than one third of eligible voters cast a vote.

Lack in ethical leadership has affected business at home and many have not been given the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. Administration is not updating addresses for tribal members to tribal departments. Members who live out of area have also had their ballots rejected because addresses didn’t match elections. There were two tribal newsletters in 2014 which some still have not received. This has left countless tribal members disenfranchised.

Numerous tribal members have now been questioning the motives of their own tribal government and the tribal negotiators of these water agreements.

As of last week, Fidelity National Financial Ventures announced it had sold the assets of Cascade Timberlands, LLC to Whitefish Cascade Forest Resources, LLC, based in Singapore. The sale included the Mazama Tree Farm, which is a key component in the Klamath Tribes negotiations regarding the KBRA. This may now give the Klamath Tribes a special circumstance
to file for withdrawal from the agreements as outlined in section 33.2.2. in the KBRA. This option is not currently being shared or discussed with Tribal members. And the actions of Klamath Tribal negotiators regarding this issue are yet to be determined.

Within this last year we have watched the UKBCA, turn into Senate Bill 2379 and witnessed it die in Senate at the end of 2014.

Every time a new document is drafted, new language is introduced. On January 8th 2015 Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon reintroduced the agreements as Senate Bill 133.

Direct quote from SB 133:

“**Prohibits water allocations for fish and wildlife and National Wildlife Refuge purposes from adversely affecting water allocations for irrigation purposes.**”

There were originally 80,000 acres of seasonal marshes in the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge. On average the Refuge served about 10 million birds and had a large winter population of threatened Bald Eagles. At the current status, the Refuge will essentially be a cracked lake-bed.

Now a year after the signing of the UKBCA, for us as Tribal People whose primary interest is to protect all sacred things that are outlined in the 1864 Treaty that pertain to our survivance as a culturally distinct People, more is coming to light in regards to these documents along with various reasons to not support them. These “agreements” do not secure that which is necessary to protect what is promised under the Treaty. These agreements do not protect that which is crucial to our spirituality and way of life.

“The adverse effects of KBRA on water needed for fish became much clearer during the dam removal EIS stage than they were earlier. Buried in the klamathrestoration.gov list of engineering studies is a definitive report showing that KBRA means less water during many key times than is currently required by the BiOps protecting Coho Salmon., e.g., during dry year months. The irrigators like this outcome but no one who wants Salmon to thrive should be satisfied.” Tom Schlosser, legal counsel for Hoopa Valley Tribe.

Signatory tribes, such as the Klamath, Yurok, and Karuk Tribes have hailed the agreements as a path toward dam removal and fisheries restoration. Through the KBRA and Upper Basin agreement those Basin Tribes with water rights, or which have advocated for Salmon, have been promised funding for restoration and economic development in exchange for not pressing for increased flows in the Klamath River.

Klamath Tribal Members have been told the agreements do not relinquish any rights, however, the agreements irrefutably contain language that limits the federal trust responsibility. Both the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) have resolutions opposing any action that limits or abolishes the federal trust responsibility. Nevertheless, signatory tribes have chosen to proceed into the agreements.
The Hoopa Valley, Quartz Valley and Resighini tribes did not sign. They argued the agreement subordinates priority tribal water rights and the Endangered Species Act. They argued the lack of water effects Chinook and Coho Salmon health and future salmon runs in the Klamath Basin. They argued that the inexpensive, direct path to dam removal is restarting the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission process for these facilities. The Klamath agreement has blocked this process for years.

The government is frequently conflicted in their obligation to protect Tribes but often chooses to protect irrigators that have created a large economy based on Tribal resources. The crux of the dispute is the United States government has been involved by providing assets and paying for resources to advance the cases (sell-out our rights), when they have a fiduciary duty as trustee to protect Tribes.

Clearly, the Bureau of Reclamation is also pulling levers behind the scenes with the Pacificorp power company. In 2014, salmon were sick and dying in the Klamath River and BOR prompted Pacificorp to provide water, with the promise to pay back that water the following year. Though residents complain about the toxic river conditions, Pacificorp continues to operate outside the guidelines of the clean water act.

The Klamath Basin long term plan for 2015 provides no water for the environment.

In Sec. 2.5.1 footnote 8 and 4.3.1 n. 14 of the KBRA indicate that Upper Klamath water will not be used to address lower Klamath fish health; the Upper Klamath will be managed by the KID BiOp.

As it stands now, the most senior water right goes to support agriculture and to the flooding of fields to prove usage, for increased farm subsidies in the Upper Basin.

The KBRA and associated agreements are not at all an exercise in self-determination but advocating for a blood oath from Tribes. Although, we are faced with drought, contamination and over-consumption, the Klamath Tribal council and Klamath Tribes Negotiation Team continue to support an agreement that permits destructive acts against our culture, environment, and our future as Klamath, Modoc, Yahooskin Peoples.

Honor The Treaty of 1864 is a group of like minded individuals who want to honor our ancestors and our 7th generation by protecting our resources and our rights. While these ideas are not new and many people before us stood for the same things we do, our group was officially formed in 2014. We welcome all people who support our cause.

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Many young people feel they have too much at stake to wait for our leaders to get their act together and take meaningful action on climate change. In the words of one young climate activist, Alec Loorz, we need to demand our political leaders “govern as if our future matters.” With their future at stake, many youth have taken their case to the courts in the hopes that the judiciary will require the legislature to take action.

“We are all in imminent danger,” Loorz, who founded the nonprofit Kids vs. Global Warming, told Outside Magazine. “Scientists have said we have 10 years to make changes if we want to stabilize the climate by 2100—and that was back in 2005 … We care more about money and power than we do about future generations. The judicial system is the only branch of government not bought out by corporate interests.”

On Bill Moyer’s show last month, Mary Christina Wood, law professor at the University of Oregon and author of Nature’s Trust: Environmental Law for a New Ecological Age, explains what is being called the “Children’s Climate Crusade.”

What exactly are these young people asking for? “Every suit and every administrative petition filed in every state in the country and against the federal government asks for the same relief,” Wood says. “And that is for the government … to bring down carbon emissions in compliance with what scientists say is necessary to avoid catastrophic climate change.”

The young plaintiffs simply want the courts to require “the legislatures and the agencies to do their job in figuring out how to lower carbon emissions,” says Wood. Do these litigants have any legal grounds to stand on, though?

Turns out, yes. “You find it in case law going back to the beginning years of this country,” says Wood. “The U.S. Supreme Court has announced the Public Trust Doctrine in multiple cases over the years and it’s in every state jurisprudence as well.”

The Public Trust Doctrine says “the government is a trustee of the resources that support our public welfare and survival,” according to Woods. The doctrine “requires our government to protect and maintain survival resources for future generations.” Relying on this long-standing legal principle, young plaintiffs have cases at the state and federal level.

At the federal level, five teenagers, and two non-profit organizations—Kids vs. Global Warming and WildEarth Guardians—partnered with Our Children’s Trust to file a federal lawsuit. Their
petition for their case to be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court was denied in December, but the plaintiffs vow “to advance their climate claims” in lower federal courts until the federal government is ordered to take immediate action on human-made climate change.”

At the state level, there are cases pending in Oregon, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Washington and Colorado. Courts in Alaska, Texas, Arizona, Kansas, Montana and Pennsylvania have issued “developmental decisions on which the pending cases are in part based.” Youth plaintiffs supported by Our Children’s Trust have filed administrative rule-making petitions in every state in the country.

“I think there are a lot of kids here in Colorado and around the world who would be so excited to get the gift of clean air and water, snow in the mountains, abundant wildlife and safe communities,” said Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, one of the young plaintiffs in the Colorado anti-fracking case, after learning the court rejected the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission’s request for dismissal of their lawsuit. “New York showed us all [by banning fracking] that a state can value the health of kids as a top priority. That’s what this whole thing is about, making Colorado a safe place to live for ours and future generations.”

Oregon’s and Massachusetts’ cases are moving forward. Legal arguments began last month in Oregon’s case and will culminate in a court hearing before Judge Rasmussen once again on March 13.

The Oregon Court of Appeals ruled last summer that “The court must decide whether the atmosphere is a public trust resource that the state of Oregon, as a trustee, has a duty to protect along with recognized public trust assets such as estuaries, rivers and wildlife.” Now the plaintiffs will argue in the Circuit Court that not only does the state have a duty to protect the atmosphere, “but that it is violating its trustee obligation to present and future generations if it does not.”

Kelsey Juliana, one of the young plaintiffs in the Oregon case, said, “As a youth, and therefore someone on the front lines of climate change chaos, I have everything to gain from taking action and everything to lose from not.”

In Massachusetts, Judge Gordon will hear oral arguments on March 9 in a case brought by four young litigants who say that the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection is “failing to fulfill its legal obligations to reduce Massachusetts’ greenhouse gas emissions, as required by the Massachusetts Global Warming Solutions Act.”

Watch these videos from the iMatter campaign, an initiative of Kids vs. Global Warming and Our Children’s Trust to see what’s at stake for young people and how they are driving change.

March 2015

Forum: The Climate Change Crisis

The Episcopal Church

The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society presents The Climate Change Crisis, a 90-minute live webcast originating from Campbell Hall Episcopal School in North Hollywood, California, in partnership with Bishop J. Jon Bruno and the Diocese of Los Angeles.

The webcast begins March 24 at 11 a.m. Pacific time (12 p.m. Mountain/1 p.m. Central/2 p.m. Eastern/10 a.m. Alaska/9 a.m. Hawaii). Video will be available on-demand here following the live webcast.

The webcast is in support of Mark 5 of the Five Marks of Mission.

The Climate Change Crisis will feature Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori delivering the keynote address followed by two panel discussions: Regional Impacts of Climate Change and Reclaiming Climate Change as a Moral Issue.

The panel discussions will be moderated by well-known climatologist Fritz Coleman of KNBC 4 news.

Panelists include:

- **Bishop Marc Andrus**, Bishop of the Diocese of California. Climate change has been a focus of his work as a bishop.

- **Princess Daazhraii Johnson**, former Executive Director of the Gwich’in Steering Committee, one of the oldest Indigenous non-profit groups in Alaska focused on protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. She currently serves on the SAG-AFTRA Native American Committee, the Dancing with the Spirit committee and is active in her community.

- **Dr. Lucy Jones**, seismologist with the US Geological Survey and a Visiting Research Associate at the Seismological Laboratory of Caltech since 1983. She currently serves as Science Advisor for Risk Reduction in the Natural Hazards Mission of the US Geological Survey.

- **Mary D. Nichols, J.D.**, Chairman of the California Air Resources Board. She is responsible for implementing California's landmark greenhouse gas emissions legislation as well as setting air pollution standards for motor vehicles, fuels and consumer products.

The Climate Change Crisis forum will kick off 30 Days of Action—activities, advocacy and education that will culminate on Earth Day, April 22, 2015.
March 1, 2015

_Faced with human aggressions, the Earth responds with flowers_

By Leonardo Boff
Opinion Sur, N. 139

More than being in the center of a crisis of planetary proportions, today, we face a nonreversible process. The Earth will never be the same again. It has been transformed in its physical-chemical-biological base in such a profound way that it ended up losing its internal equilibrium. It entered a process of chaos, i.e., it lost its sustainability and affected the continuity of what has been doing through millennia: to produce and reproduce life.

Every chaos has two sides: one, destructive and, another one, creative. The destructive one represents the dismantling of one type of equilibrium and implies the erosion of part of the biodiversity and, at the edge, the reduction of the human species, that is produced either by the incapacity to adapt to the new situation or by being unable to mitigate the lethal effects. Finalized such purification process, chaos begins showing its generative face. It creates new orders, equilibrates the weathers, and lets surviving human beings build another type of civilization.

The Earth’s history teaches us that she went through fifteen great destructions, like that of the cambric, 480 years ago, that destroyed 80-90% of the species. But as she is a generous mother, she slowly rebuilt life diversity.

Nowadays, the majority of the scientific community alerts us about an eventual collapse of the life-system that can threaten the own future of the human species. We can all perceive the changes that are occurring before our eyes. Great extreme effects: on the one side, prolonged summers associated with large water shortage that affect the ecosystems and the society as a whole, as it is happening in the South-Eastern part of our country (Brazil). In other parts of the planet, as in the United States, harsh winters not seen since tenths and even hundreds of years. The fact is that we have reached the physical limits of planet Earth. By forcing them as our consumerist and productivist voracity does, the Earth responds with hurricanes, tsunamis, devastating floods, earthquakes and an uncontrollable raise in global warming. If we were to increase the temperature by two degrees Celsius, the situation would still be manageable. But if we do not do our homework, by drastically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and we do not reorient our relationship with nature towards collective self-restraint and the respect of the supportable limits of each ecosystem, then it is foreseen that the weather might elevate between four and six degrees Celsius. Then, we will meet the “Great Tribulation”, to use a biblical expression, and most of the life forms we know, even parts of the humanity, could not survive.
The renowned magazine Science has just published (January 15, 2015) a paper on planetary limits written by 18 scientists (Planetary Boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing Planet). They identified nine main dimensions for the continuity of life and our civilizing experiment. They are worth citing: (1) climate changes, (2) changes in the biosphere integrity with the erosion of the biodiversity and accelerated extinction of species, (3) diminishing of the stratospheric ozone layer that protects us from the lethal solar rays, (4) growing acidification of oceans, (5) disruptions in the biogeochemical flows, (6) changes in the use of soil such as growing deforestation and desertification, (7) threatening shortage of fresh water, (8) concentration of aerosols in the atmosphere (microscopic particles that affect the weather and living beings), (9) introduction of synthetic chemical agents, radioactive materials, and nanomaterials that threaten life. From these nine dimensions, the first four have already surpassed their limits and the rest are at a high level of degeneration. This systematic war against Gaia can lead to the collapse as it occurs with people.

Despite this dramatic scenario, I look around and watch in ecstasy the woods full of violet lent trees, yellow cassias, and at the corner of my block amaryllis belladonnas in blossom, toucans resting on the trees in front of my window and macaws nesting under my roof. Then, I realize that the Earth is a truly generous mother: faced with our aggressions, she still smiles with flora and fauna. And she instills us hope that this is not the apocalypse but rather a new genesis on its way. The Earth is still going to survive. As it is written in Jewish-Christian Scriptures: “God is the ruler lover of life” (Sab 11.26).

http://opinionsur.org.ar/Faced-with-human-aggressions-the

March 2, 2015

Christians pray and march together to urge that it is time to act on climate change

Operation Noah

The Christian environment charity, Operation Noah, will be hosting an ecumenical climate service before the ‘Time to Act’ national climate march this Saturday, 7 March, at St Mary le Strand Church, starting at 11.30am. As party leaders make pledges to tackle climate change ahead of the election in May, civil society – including the Christian community – is marching to demand action not words. They will be joined at the climate service by longstanding peace activist Scott Albrecht of the Catholic Worker Farm, who will share his insights into what we can learn from the Christian peace movement.

Scott has said, ‘The powerful are only beginning to accept the reality of climate change and still doing too little too late. We have a responsibility, given to humanity by the Creator, and that is to tend to the Earth like one would to one’s own Mother; for indeed it is. She has treated us with kindness for aeons: feeding us, clothing us and providing for our every need. We need to develop a relationship of mutuality, love and respect and nurse her back to health!’
Westley Ingram, one of the organisers of the service, adds, ‘The Church says it is the community devoted to changing its ways. What does it mean for the Christian community to act faithfully as we watch the devastation of God’s beloved creation? Since “Peace on Earth” must be our call for this election season, perhaps we can learn something from the example of the Christian peace movement.’

After the service, the congregation will join other faith groups to march through London as a multi-faith block.

Further details of the climate service can be found here. For further information about the climate march see the Time to Act website.


March 3, 2015

Canadian government pushing First Nations to give up land rights for oil and gas profits

By Martin Lukacs
The Guardian

The Harper government is trying to win support for its pipelines and resource agenda by pushing First Nations to sideline their aboriginal rights in exchange for business opportunities, documents reveal.

The news that Canada’s Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs is working to this end by collaborating with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is sparking strong criticism from grassroots Indigenous people.

Funded by the federal government, the Working Group on Natural Resource Development held private meetings in Toronto and Edmonton in the fall of 2014 that were attended by several invited Chiefs and representatives from Enbridge, Syncrude and other oil corporations, as well as mining companies and business lobby groups.

In one email, a government official writes that it was “widely agreed” at the meetings that “unlocking resource development projects is squarely in the national interest,” a suggestion that will be contested by many First Nations involved in mounting protests against pipelines and other industrial projects around the country.

It was “noted repeatedly” that “we can no longer afford the investment uncertainty created by issues around Aboriginal participation,” the official writes. The transcripts of the meetings were redacted in the documents, which were obtained through access-to-information.
The documents cite $600 billion of investment that the Harper government hopes will flow in the next decade into mining, forestry, gas and oil projects. As of March 2013, 94 of 105 projects under federal review were “located on reserve, within an historic treaty area, or in a settled or unsettled claims area”.

In response to these pressures, considerations for the groups’ mandate include “reducing uncertainty and investment risk” and “advancing business-to-business partnerships rather than through a rights-based agenda.”

The federal government has been criticized for trying to minimize or ignore the land rights of First Nations, including refusing to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It has been doing extensive risk evaluations, increasingly worried that the growing power of indigenous rights could hamper its aggressive resource extraction plans.

One document suggests that “case studies have shown that separating rights-based agenda (politics) from economic development (business) is key to wealth generation in First Nations communities.”

The case studies cited from “expert bodies” include a Fraser Institute report entitled “Opportunities for First Nations Prosperity Through Oil and Gas Development.” The right-wing think tank has been heavily funded by the American Koch brothers, who are one of the largest owners, purchasers and refiners of the Alberta tar sands.

Also referenced is a report by envoy Douglas Eyford, whose appointment by Harper in late 2013 was seen as strategic shift to increasingly woo First Nations in the path of planned pipelines in British Columbia with an economic stake in resource plans. Eyford warned that the federal government’s failure to build good relationships with First Nations had set back the chances for their energy projects.

“Opposition to these projects by aboriginal groups may doom the development of oil, and natural gas pipelines and related infrastructure because neither industry nor our trading partners are prepared to idly stand by to wait out the results of judicial proceedings that can take a generation to complete,” Eyford said in a speech last year.

“The Harper government and resource corporations are keenly aware that Indigenous rights movements are standing in the way of their polluting, destructive projects,” said Clayton Thomas Mueller, Indigenous Extreme Energy Campaigner with 350.org. “Harper is desperately trying to manipulate the Assembly of First Nations and some of our Chiefs into sacrificing our rights and our lands at the altar of profit. But respect for our rights must be a basis for economic decision-making – indeed our rights offer a pathway to a more sustainable economic order for everyone in this country.”

The group was launched in December 2013, its creation among the pledges made by Prime Minister Harper at a January 2013 meeting with former National Chief Shawn Atleo, a meeting triggered by Theresa Spence’s hunger strike and the Idle No More movement.
It has two representatives from the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and two from the Assembly of First Nations, an organization which has been accused of being out of touch with grassroots Indigenous concerns. According to the documents, the representatives discussed renaming the group to “downplay” the connection between the Assembly of First Nations and the government and to make clear that it operates at “arms-length.”

The documents acknowledge that Indigenous community members are increasingly resisting those Chiefs who “try to establish and advance a “business to business” relationship with industry proponents.”

Included are detailed charts of economic opportunities that some First Nations located near oil and mining operations have been able to access.

The documents say that the group may propose that Canada’s largest corporate lobby, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, be “engaged to champion a new approach including through formal statements at First Minister’s Meetings or major political events.”

Other suggestions include a “centre of expertise on resource development” and a national roundtable, emphasizing the need to get more aboriginal organizations involved.

The group is releasing a final report on Tuesday with recommendations to the federal government and the AFN.

The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs was unable to respond to a request for comment.


March 3, 2015

The Sacrament of Creation: What Can We Expect from Pope Francis’s Ecological Encyclical?

By Clive Hamilton
ABC Religion and Ethics

Pope Francis has made no secret of his conviction that human-induced climate change, along with other forms of environmental degradation, represents a grave threat to humanity's future.

At times he even speaks in quasi-apocalyptic terms: "Let us not allow omens of destruction and death to accompany the advance of this world!"

His forthcoming "ecological encyclical" - expected around the middle of this year - is shaping up as a decisive intervention. We can surmise that he hopes it will help turn the world away from a path of self-destruction.
I want here to try to anticipate the message and the meaning of the encyclical by considering what appear to be the principal influences feeding into its preparation - namely, Francis's own public statements, previous encyclicals on the environment, the science as expressed by the Pontifical Academy of Science, the example of Saint Francis of Assisi and the eco-theology of Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff.

The encyclical is anticipated with excitement by climate change campaigners and dread by some Catholic conservatives. But beyond the immediate political impact, a more enduring implication could lie in the theological shift it may represent.

In a valuable contribution, Irish theologian Donal Dorr has shown that Francis's formal starting point will almost certainly be the encyclicals of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

After two decades of rising environmental concern around the world, John Paul's 1991 encyclical, Centesimus annus, can be read as designed to keep the Church relevant to the times. The core of the theological question is the relationship between humans and the natural world, and John Paul cleaved to theological tradition in representing nature as separate from man and to be used, albeit more prudently, as his instrument. Thus: "It is through work that man, using his intelligence and exercising his freedom, succeeds in dominating the earth and making it a fitting home."

Eighteen years later, in Caritas in Veritate Benedict shifted Church teaching more firmly in the direction of environmental protection while weakening the language of domination. In a pregnant turn of phrase, Benedict described the laws governing the natural world as a "grammar ... which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use." He reaffirmed that the natural world is "God's gift" to humankind, and rejected the drift towards the "total technical domination over nature" that is manifest in practice and still defended by some theologically. Nevertheless, neutralizing any accusation of "neo-paganism," Benedict retained an essentially anthropocentric theology of man in nature that deprives the natural world of any value in itself.

Donal Dorr expresses the hope that Benedict's successor will initiate a theological conversion "situating us humans ... within the wider context of nature." In his public statements, Pope Francis has already raised the stakes considerably. Catholics are "called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens but as followers of Christ." And, perhaps revealing the inner motive behind the forthcoming encyclical, he has said that to protect creation is a service that "the Bishop of Rome is called to carry out."

In a departure from those conservatives who denounce the greens as the new pagans, Francis has affirmed that those who work to preserve creation are Christians, adding in strong language: "A Christian who does not protect creation, who does not let it grow, is a Christian who does not care about the work of God."

Admittedly, the call to let creation "grow" rather than merely protect it, includes the idea of humans as builders and transformers and so marks out Francis's Catholic vision as incompatible with that of deep greens, for it endorses what the pontiff calls "a positive judgment about the
The legitimacy of interventions on nature" (although he stresses that they must always be beneficial ones, performed responsibly).

**The message of creation**

Politically and theologically, Francis's starting point is always solidarity with the poor. If we examine his various statements on the environment, we find he consistently links ecological decline to the immiserisation of the poor and vulnerable, sometimes referring to the destruction of South American forests as an example.

For Francis, environmental preservation is linked directly to Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a link that makes his position less vulnerable to criticism from conservatives. Certainly, as the scientific evidence has mounted, the fundamental principles of CST - solidarity with the poor and vulnerable; the protection of the life and dignity of the human person - demand that the Church take a stronger position on the harms from anthropogenic climate change, which promises to visit widespread and long-lasting suffering on the world's poorest. There can be no economic justice without environmental justice.

Francis has several times stressed that nature is God's gift to humankind. In his ecological encyclical, he may well point out the obvious implications: those who exploit nature are spurning the most precious gift, and by exploiting nature for themselves they are depriving the poor of God's gift. Denying future generations the fruits of God's gift is surely a sin in any language.

I will suggest that, theologically, Francis seems to leading the Church towards a contemporary recovery of a pre-modern understanding of the creation. What, though, is he thinking of when he speaks of creation? What, exactly, are we called to protect?

Of course, a simple answer can be given in scientific terms. Yet when Francis speaks of creation as the common gift to humanity, "entrusted to our protection" and not our property to rule over, he is not speaking of the world in a material sense - that is, a collection of interdependent ecosystems and resources, although he sometimes seems to equate it with "nature." Creation is the place created by God for us to inhabit and which embodies His divine plan for us.

Yet there are many ways humans can dwell in their environment, and in the history of Christianity there are precedents for overturning the idea of separation from nature and domination over it. As Giovanni Monastra shows, the idea of domination came into Christian dogma not from the Old Testament but at the threshold of modernity in the Renaissance. As Europeans acquired the power to manipulate and control nature, they looked for a warrant to do so in their sacred texts.

In Caritas in Veritate, Benedict did stress that we should not think of the natural world in purely "naturalistic" - that is, scientific - terms, for creation has an “intrinsic balance.” This idea is not so much the ecological one of the environment as a fragile balance of the forces of nature, but imagines nature as invested with a teleological purpose, as essential to God's plan for humanity. And yet the two exist together, as the outer dimension and the inner dimension. By disturbing the
ecological balance we upset God's plan, we deny Him his purpose of making a habitable place in which humans, His chosen creatures, may flourish.

Is there room in such a theology for allotting any *intrinsic* value to animals or other element of the natural world? For his part, Benedict gave three kinds of reason for protecting the environment, each of which was human-centred: destroying the environment causes suffering for the poor and powerless and harms the prospects of future generations; harming the environment shows disrespect for the creation whose purpose is to serve human ends; and, exploitative attitudes to the natural environment reflect and spill over into exploitative attitudes to other humans.

However, judging by several of his public utterances and his deep admiration for Saint Francis, it may be that Pope Francis is tempted to go significantly further than Benedict, and introduce a theological break by both situating humans within nature and ascribing to nature an uncontrollable, autonomous and even divinely-infused dimension. Consider these comments:

- Francis **adopts Benedict's emphasis** on the "grammar" inscribed in nature and the idea that interventions in nature are legitimate if they are meant to "be beneficial and are performed responsibly" so that the environment is used wisely for the benefit of all. Yet he hints that humans must abide by the grammar in the sense of living within ecological limits and respecting natural laws. These injunctions are undoubtedly reinforced by those around him in the Pontifical Academy of Science.
- In a remarkable statement, Francis said, "God sometimes forgives, but when mistreated nature never forgives." If accepted, this thought would represent the deathblow for all understandings of dominion as domination. For Francis is saying that, far from being a passive domain in which man asserts his mastery, nature has her own agenda, is more powerful than man and will punish us if we push her too far. It is a view of nature consistent with the emerging understanding of Earth system science and captured by eminent palaeoclimatologist **Wallace Broecker**: "The palaeoclimate record shouts out to us that, far from being self-stabilizing, the Earth's climate system is an ornery beast which overreacts even to small nudges."
- In his **message for the 2014 World Day of Peace**, Francis called on all people to respect not just the usefulness of every living thing but its "beauty" and "finality" - descriptors loaded with theological meaning and suggesting some intrinsic value to non-human life that departs from the more utilitarian attitudes of his predecessors.
- In a radical break from all theology consistent with nature's disenchantment - that is, theologies that view nature in purely secular terms, with God displaced from the earth to another realm - Francis may be reintroducing a theology of God's being-in-the-world. He decries the loss of an attitude of wonder towards nature in favour of an instrumentalist one. He **laments** that we are no longer "listening to creation," implying that nature has a message for us. More strikingly, he writes: "Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of species as a painful disfigurement."

This last is, of course, the essence of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi. Indeed, behind the pope's various declarations one can detect the spirit of the saint in homage to whom the new
pontiff chose his name. So what could he have derived from Saint Francis that may provide clues to the forthcoming encyclical?

**The spirit of Saint Francis**

Saint Francis is remembered for the simplicity and loving-kindness of his life rather than for theological disquisitions. He was renowned for speaking of animals as his brothers and sisters, arising out of intense spiritual experiences of oneness with all creation. In his divine *Canticle of the Sun*, he famously wrote of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, and of "our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us."

It would be easy to interpret these familial passions as no more than poetic license, but a view *more consistent with his life and words* is that Saint Francis saw divine perfection in all created things, in stones as well as birds and trees. As all things are created by the one Father, reasoned Francis, they are brothers and sisters in a real sense. His theology was thus "horizontal" rather than hierarchical; instead of the divine order moving down from God on high to man to ever more lowly creatures, God's investment in nature displaces belief in His remote sovereignty from above.

Yet Saint Francis says here something even more striking, one that breaks from the tendencies of much Catholic theology. In writing that Mother Earth "rules over us," he diverges from all notions of human dominion over Earth, wherever the notion may fall on the spectrum from full mastery to the most respectful stewardship. For here Saint Francis tells us that Mother Earth rules over us, not merely because we depend on her for sustenance, but because it is in the order of things - the order created by God.

In intimating that God as Father and Creator is in all things, Saint Francis adopts a kind of incipient panentheism. "Everything in God, God in everything." God does more than overlook His Creation; He revealed Himself in it from the outset and shines forth from it - that is why one can *experience* God directly and overwhelmingly in nature, as many Christians have attested.

Chiding humankind who "continuously slaps down nature," Pope Francis recently *channelled his namesake in lamenting* how we lord it "over Sister Earth, over Mother Earth." So could Pope Francis bring a "Franciscan" revolution to Catholic theology? If there are definite hints in his public statements to date, it would be another thing to enshrine them in an encyclical. So how far might he go?

The trend in official Vatican thinking is away from the view, adhered to by many conservative Catholics and Protestants, that God and humans must be placed at the centre of the physical world, so that, in the *blunt words of one*: "only God and human persons are ends in themselves. God gives us nature to serve man, not man to serve nature." However, the shift from domination to stewardship and an obligation to care for the Earth is now entrenched in the Church's teaching, and can be justified by various readings of the scriptures.

While Francis appears to view nature as intrinsically valuable, with its own path that resists any attempt at total human mastery, and which is invested with some kind of divine spirit, he has
never gone so far as to say that the Earth is sacred. He is unlikely to do so for both theological and political reasons. Politically, it would provoke conservatives, opening him up to accusations (however unfounded) of neo-paganism.

Theologically, there is a subtle but decisive difference between pantheism and the Catholic view of creation to which Francis cleaves. As God's creation the natural world is not God; it is the other. Yet He is invested in it. God's transcendence is not remoteness from creation but familiarity and intimacy with it. By implication it has a telos, and that telos is to provide "the setting for our life" - the conditions in which humans may live and flourish.

Moreover, that telos means that God respects the created order, allowing it to grow and evolve according to its own "grammar" and nature. The unbridgeable gap between a secular natural world and sacred human life is now an anachronism. The bridges have been built.

So if the Earth is not sacred, one can nevertheless see Francis moving towards a position in which the Earth becomes sacramental, indicative of God's presence and a channel for His grace. Such a theology finds explicit development in theologians after Saint Francis, particularly the Franciscan Bonaventure (1221-1274).

For Bonaventure, "the created world is a kind of book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker." In her excellent commentary, Ilia Delio explains that, for Bonaventure, the world is the external expression of God so that "we know the Word of God through the world ... All of creation ... in some way reflects the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Trinity. God shines forth through creation ..."

The sin of exploitation

On several occasions, Pope Francis has spoken of the contrast between the way humans are greedily exploiting the environment and the imperative for us to act towards it responsibly - that is, in a way that protects the interests of the poor and future generations and respects the integrity of the natural world as a whole.

As one would expect from a Latin American bishop with radical social doctrines, economic development is essential to draw people out of poverty and so Francis says our duty is not only to protect creation but also to improve it. We are not put on Earth merely to live with nature, but to transform it. Here he identifies with a particular kind of environmentalism - pale green rather than deep green - and avoids some of the more ideologically charged criticism he is likely to encounter from conservatives.

So the essence of his message, and the heart of the forthcoming encyclical, will be how we transform nature, whether we exploit it greedily or care for it responsibly. He calls for a new model of development, one that "knows how to respect creation" in place of the growth-at-any-cost mentality used to justify the wholesale degradation of the natural world.

Whereas deep greens might stumble if asked from where our responsibility to protect the Earth comes, for Francis there is no doubt. If the natural world is God's gift to us, then to "nurture the
Earth [is] to nurture creation." Thus environmental protection becomes not a self-interested act
nor even a moral duty, but a divine calling. Degrading the Earth is, he declares, a sin: "This is
our sin, exploiting the Earth and not allowing her to give us what she has within her."

What about population growth?

If Francis's encyclical calls on humankind to tread more lightly on the earth, it will be met with
the objection that his appeal would carry more weight if he acknowledged the way population
growth adds pressure on the environment.

The facts are clear. The growth in greenhouse gas emissions is driven by the combined effect of
economic growth per person and population growth, and is offset by improvements in energy
efficiency and shifts from high- to low-emissions energy sources. Continued population growth
could, however, undermine all efforts to reduce emissions, sending the world beyond a tipping
point into catastrophic warming, with massive ecological devastation and loss of human life.

The pope's scientific advisers understand these facts. We know he takes expert advice seriously
and so he is conflicted on the question because his commitment to the Church's long-held
prohibition on contraception seems firm.

There are signs, however, that he may believe there is a way out of the trap. In January 2015 he
caused a stir by saying that good Roman Catholics do not need to "breed like rabbits" and should
practice "responsible parenting." Drawing on the authority of "population experts" he advised
Catholic families to limit the number of their children to three. So the big Catholic family no
longer has papal endorsement.

To add force to this position, he spoke of how he had chided a woman for "irresponsibly" falling
pregnant after she had already had seven children by caesarean section. He seemed to be saying
that if some pregnancies cannot be justified medically, other pregnancies cannot be justified
environmentally.

If Pope Francis is not going to lift the ban on artificial forms of contraception, he is urging
Catholics to use natural ones more effectively. Perhaps he is hinting that Catholics who do not
abide by the ban on artificial contraception (most of them) may now feel less guilty about it. At
any rate, the most important test will be whether the Church eases up on its efforts to block the
spread of family planning around the world, in the same way that Francis has attempted to soften
the Church's hard line on same-sex relationships.

The temptation of geoengineering

Pope Francis is said to be corresponding with Leonardo Boff, asking to see all of his writings on
eco-theology. The former Brazilian Franciscan priest was in 1992 forced to leave the Church for
his liberation theology activism. (Ironically, he was forced out by Cardinal Ratzinger, who had
been Boff's doctoral supervisor in Germany.) In books published in the 1990s Boff began to
locate liberation theology within a wider ecological context. Those who oppress the poor are
those who exploit nature, and for the same reason, he wrote.
The title of his 1997 book, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, reflected the close connection between social justice with environmental protection, a link often made by Pope Francis and certain to feature in the encyclical. Like the new pope, Boff was deeply influenced by Saint Francis whom he called "the purest figure of Western history." Boff has argued for a radical Christian eco-theology representing a return to a pre-Cartesian reverence for the Earth, a living world created by the Father as home for all things. For him, ecological destruction is a sin.

Boff sees the world today as dominated by a "vast scientific-technological apparatus" that contains a compulsion to turn always to the technological on the principle that "if we can do it, we must do it." It is a mentality in which we define ourselves in opposition to nature and that inevitably gives rise to its exploitation.

The belief that the system instinctively responds to problems with more technology instead of a change in orientation raises another issue that Francis may need to grapple with in his ecological encyclical: geoengineering. Sometimes known as Plan B - to differentiate it from the Plan A of cutting greenhouse gas emissions - geoengineering covers a number of technologies designed to counter global warming or offset some of its effects.

While some approaches are relatively benign, the scheme attracting most interest involves spraying the upper atmosphere with a layer of sulphate particles in order to reduce the amount of solar radiation reaching the Earth. The particle shield would mimic the global cooling effect of large volcanic eruptions. Some climate scientists are so alarmed by the unfolding climatic consequences of the world's failure to reduce carbon emissions that they expect this kind of planetary intervention, with all of its perils, to be almost inevitable within the next few decades.

As I have written elsewhere, for some, instead of global warming being proof of human failure, engineering the climate would represent the triumph of human ingenuity. While climate change threatens to destabilize the system of exploitation, geoengineering promises to protect it. It would not only entrench the prevailing idea of man's domination of nature but radically extend it.

There could be no more vivid illustration of Boff's "vast scientific-technological apparatus" turning to technology to escape a social conundrum than the proposal for humans to take control of and regulate the Earth's climate system, probably in perpetuity. Controlling the climate would be an expression of human mastery consistent with the most hubristic reading of Genesis and its call to "have dominion."

Pope Francis would be expected to see this kind of geoengineering as an abdication of our responsibility to care for creation - even as an invitation to an "unforgiving" nature to take revenge on us. Indeed, he may see it as humankind attempting to play God, thereby tempting fate.

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How much difference will Francis's ecological encyclical make? Daniel DiLeo has written a helpful essay on the question of the authority of papal encyclicals and the interpretation of the one due soon. It is a murky doctrinal area but, noting the passionate rejection of climate science
by some conservatives in the Church, DiLeo concludes: "Catholics will only be able to disagree with him in good conscience after serious reflection and the determination that the pope has reasoned incorrectly." That is a low hurdle for deniers of climate science, some of whom have rejected the encyclical already.

But what will it mean for the majority of the world's 1.2 billion people who call themselves Roman Catholics? Despite today's widespread disinclination to view the official pronouncements of the Vicar of Christ as infallible, and despite even the resistance of conservative bishops and laity, the pontiff's words still carry considerable authority, and the weight attached to the office can be augmented by the personal qualities of its occupant.

As a much-loved pope, Francis has influence, not least among the bishops many of whom are hoping the Vatican will take a stronger stance on climate change. Ironically, on becoming Bishop or Rome Francis set about denouncing the dangers of authoritarian leadership and reforming the entrenched curial culture of the Vatican, yet his humility as the "people's pope" is likely to lend his exhortations in the ecological encyclical more authority rather than less.

While Francis seems to be absorbing Leonardo Boff's eco-theology, we can be sure that his encyclical will pull back theologically from the radicalized Franciscan vision to which Boff tends, one in which God is present in the world in the form of the "energy" that is the Holy Spirit. What remains to be seen though is how much Francis himself has been gripped by the apocalyptic anxiety in Boff's writing: "We are on a fast moving train headed towards an encounter with the abyss ahead, and we do not know how to stop it." It is a vision that would be endorsed by most climate scientists, including the Pontifical Academy of Sciences: "If current trends continue, this century will witness unprecedented climate changes and ecosystem destruction that will severely impact us all."

If humans and their institutions are unwilling to do what is needed to avoid catastrophe, where can those who see the looming danger turn? Boff turns to Martin Heidegger and his startling prophecy, "Only a God can save us." If modern humans have driven God from the natural world and then trashed it, will He be inclined to appear as our saviour? Between the lines of Francis's encyclical, will he be asking us to prepare ourselves for the appearance of the saviour while at the same time bracing ourselves for the end if He declines?

Clive Hamilton is Professor of Public Ethics at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University, Canberra. His most recent book is Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering. He wishes to acknowledge his debt to Canon Scott Cowdell for his advice and comments, as well as to the Right Reverend Stephen Pickard and Professor Wayne Hudson for their helpful discussions.

http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2015/03/03/4190521.htm

March 6, 2015

Papal envoy to UN: Climate change 'an issue of justice for everyone'
Addressing climate change is “an issue of justice for everyone” and one requiring global cooperation, the Vatican envoy to the United Nations told the international body Friday.

“No one is exempt from either the impacts of climate change or our moral responsibility to act in solidarity with one another to address this global concern,” said Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Holy See’s permanent observer to the United Nations in Geneva.

Tomasi’s comments came during the 28th session of the Human Rights Council, during a full-day discussion on human rights and climate change.

“Solidarity with the most vulnerable nations and peoples that are experiencing the impact of climate change in a more prominent and immediate way impels us to contribute to improving their situation and defending their right to development.

“Poverty and climate change are now intimately linked,” he said.

The connection between poverty and climate change was also made by Administrator Gina McCarthy of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency during her January meeting with Vatican officials, as did the fifth assessment report from the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The archbishop cited statistics that estimate 600 million people will face malnutrition as a result of climate change, with particularly high rates in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, he said that the estimated 1 billion people worldwide living in urban slums, fragile hillsides and flood-prone river banks -- all areas vulnerable rising sea levels and storm surges -- have “the human right to adequate housing.”

Tomasi’s address comes as the latest strong statement from the Vatican on the issue of climate change. Pope Francis has stated he has timed the release of his encyclical on the environment, which will likely address climate change, so it can be discussed before the next round of U.N. climate negotiations, scheduled for December in Paris.

"There was a lack of courage," the pope told journalists in January of the negotiations in Lima, Peru. "Let’s hope that in Paris, they are more courageous."

The encyclical is expected to be released in June or July.

Tomasi described the Paris climate talks as offering “a significant opportunity to make two ethical decisions”: first, for all nations to commit to curbing carbon emissions at the minimum level “to avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system,” and second, for them to fund adaptation measures, such as the Green Climate Fund, in order to assist nations and people facing the greatest dangers.
“While science continues to research the full implications of climate change, the virtue of prudence calls us to take the responsibility to act to reduce the potential damages, particularly for those individuals who live in poverty, for those who live in very vulnerable climate impact areas, and for future generations,” he said.

The first deadline for countries to submit their individual carbon-cutting plans -- a result of the Lima Accord reached last December, and fueled by pledges made before international negotiations by the U.S., China and the European Union -- comes in March. A second follows in June.

Together, those commitments will serve as the basis for a potential internationally binding agreement to address climate change for world leaders to sign in Paris.

In his speech, Tomasi stressed that the new agreement include binding measures and that it rest on the idea that “climate change is, in fact, an issue of justice for everyone.”

“Both developed and developing countries have a responsibility to protect: they constitute the one human family of this earth with an equal mandate to manage and protect creation in a responsible manner to ensure that also our future generations find a world that allows them to flourish,” he said.

[Brian Roewe is an NCR staff writer. Follow him on Twitter: @BrianRoewe.]

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March 6, 2015

Cardinal Turkson sheds light on Pope Francis’s environmental encyclical

By Bob Gronski
Catholic Rural Life

On March 5 at Saint Patrick’s Pontifical University in Maynooth, Ireland, Cardinal Peter Turkson spoke at length about Pope Francis’s intention this year to publish an encyclical letter on human ecology. The Vatican has made clear that global inequality and the destruction of the environment are interrelated.

Cardinal Turkson is President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and was invited to deliver the Trócaire 2015 Lenten Lecture. Trócaire is the overseas aid agency of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and their focus for Lent this year is the growing problem of drought as a result of climate change.
Cardinal Turkson stressed the idea of “integral ecology” — the intertwining of social development, concern for the poor, and responsibility for the environment.

“Pope Francis intends to publish an encyclical letter later this year on the theme of human ecology,” Cardinal Turkson said. “It will explore the relationship between care for creation, integral human development and concern for the poor.”

Cardinal Turkson went on to say that the timing of the encyclical is significant because “2015 is a critical year for humanity.” Later this year, the U.N. General Assembly is expected to agree on a new set of sustainable development goals running until 2030.

In December, the Climate Change Conference in Paris will receive the plans and commitments of each Government to slow or reduce global warming. “The coming 10 months are crucial, then, for decisions about international development, human flourishing and care for the common home we call planet Earth,” Cardinal Turkson said.

In the evening lecture at Saint Patrick’s Pontifical University in Maynooth, just west of Dublin, Cardinal Turkson focused on four principles related to integral ecology. He described these in detail as reflected in the ministry and teaching of Pope Francis. The basic principles are:

1. The call (to all people) to be protectors is integral and all-embracing.
2. The care for creation is a virtue in its own right.
3. It is necessary to care for what we cherish and revere.
4. A new global solidarity is a key value to direct our search for the common good.

On this last principle, Cardinal Turkson explained that everyone has a part to play, no matter how small, in order to make the changes needed. These actions reach to the fundamental pillars that govern a nation, he said: “life, family, integral education, health, including the spiritual dimension of well-being, and security.”

In responding to the threats that arise from global inequality and the destruction of the environment, Cardinal Turkson reiterated that every action counts. “We all have a part to play in protecting and sustaining what Pope Francis has repeatedly called our common home.”

An integral approach to ecology, he said, is not limited to scientific, economic or technical solutions.

“At the heart of this integral ecology is the call to dialogue and a new solidarity, a changing of human hearts in which the good of the human person, and not the pursuit of profit, is the key value that directs our search for the global, the universal common good.”

Early on in lecture, Cardinal Turkson spoke of mercy.
Misericordia in Latin, or trócaire in Irish or mercy in English: this has become a keyword in the ministry of Pope Francis. As in the Scriptures, Pope Francis often associates mercy and tenderness. Indeed, in his Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, he appeals to all of us to bring about a ‘revolution of tenderness’, a revolution of the heart. For ‘there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor’ when our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests, or when our national life and economy become caught up in their own interests.

At the conclusion of his address, Cardinal Turkson said it plainly: “Let us become artisans of the revolution of tenderness.”

Catholic Rural Life is working closely with Cardinal Turkson and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to incorporate the Church’s teachings on “human ecology” into a faith-based approach to agriculture. This project, entitled Faith, Food & the Environment: The Vocation of the Agricultural Leader, continues to unfold, with an international gathering taking place in Milan in June 2015. Cardinal Turkson is expected to be in attendance.

To learn more about the Faith, Food & the Environment project, please visit the dedicated website.

https://catholicrurallife.org/cardinal-turkson-sheds-light-on-pope-franciss-environmentalencyclical/

March 7, 2015

The Environment’s Pope

By John L. Allen Jr.

Time

Francis is making the environment a top concern and speaking out against the ‘sin’ of ‘exploiting the Earth’

This month marks the second anniversary of Pope Francis’ election. The following is taken from THE FRANCIS MIRACLE: Inside the Transformation of the Pope and the Church by John L. Allen Jr.

It was probably inevitable that the first pope named Francis—inspired by a saint who preached to birds and gave pet names to the sun and the moon—has turned out to be a strong environmentalist. In fact, Francis has said that concern for the environment is a defining Christian virtue. (The young Jorge Bergoglio trained as a chemist, so he has a foundation to appreciate the scientific issues involved.) This element of the social gospel bubbled to the surface as early as his inaugural mass, when Francis issued a plea to “let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.”
St. Francis’s imprint on this pope is clearly strong. In unscripted comments during a meeting with the president of Ecuador in April 2013, he said, “Take good care of creation. St. Francis wanted that. People occasionally forgive, but nature never does. If we don’t take care of the environment, there’s no way of getting around it.”

The two previous popes were also environmentalists. The mountain-climbing, kayaking John Paul II was a strong apostle for ecology, once issuing an almost apocalyptic warning that humans “must finally stop before the abyss” and take better care of nature. Benedict XVI’s ecological streak was so strong that he earned a reputation as “the Green Pope” because of his repeated calls for stronger environmental protection, as well as gestures such as installing solar panels atop a Vatican audience hall and signing an agreement to make the Vatican Europe’s first carbon-neutral state.

Francis is carrying that tradition forward. Among other things, he told French President François Hollande during a January 2014 meeting that he is working on an encyclical on the environment. (An encyclical is considered the most developed and authoritative form of papal teaching.) The Vatican has since confirmed that Francis indeed intends to deliver the first encyclical ever devoted entirely to environmental issues.

In a July 2014 talk at the Italian university of Molise, Francis described harm to the environment as “one of the greatest challenges of our times.” It’s a challenge, he said, that’s theological as well as political in nature. “I look at . . . so many forests, all cut, that have become land . . . that can [no] longer give life,” the pope continued, citing South American woodlands in particular. “This is our sin, exploiting the Earth. . . . This is one of the greatest challenges of our time: to convert ourselves to a type of development that knows how to respect creation.”

Not so long ago, the idea of Catholic environmentalism would have struck some as a contradiction in terms. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was fashionable among pioneers of the environmental movement to fault the entire Judeo-Christian tradition for humanity’s savage indifference to the earth. Lynn White, Jr., of the University of California published an influential article in the journal Science in 1967 in which he blamed the Bible for making Westerners feel “superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.” While acknowledging contrary currents in Christian history such as St. Francis, White nonetheless ended with a sweeping indictment: “We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.”

Today things are virtually upside down, with Pope Francis seen as an important environmental advocate. Writing in The Atlantic Monthly, Tara Isabella Burton praised Francis for “publicly—with the dizzying reach granted to a man in his position—emphasizing an understanding of nature that, in contrast to the combative dichotomy so prevalent in mainstream politico-religious discourse, is intrinsically positive in its treatment of the physical world.” Burton called the pope’s vision one “that is, radically and profoundly, pro-life.” Burton’s reference to “pro-life” connotes that Francis is leading Catholics to view environmental concern as part and parcel of what it means to foster a “culture of life,” and therefore of equivalent importance as resisting abortion and gay marriage.
In the argot of contemporary environmental thinkers, if Benedict XVI was the Green Pope, then Francis may be remembered as the “Dark Green Pope”—a figure who intensifies the Church’s commitment to the environment by linking it to the corrosive effects of consumerism and runaway global capitalism. Before Francis arrived on the scene, the American political theorist Jeremy Rifkin forecast that issues such as GMOs and climate change would dissolve the old left-right divisions, creating a new “biopolitics” in which defenders of nature on the left and defenders of human life on the right would find themselves allies, standing against a 21st-century hyper-industrialism that sees everything, including nature and organic life, as a commodity. Francis, the pope of the social gospel, could develop into the leader who makes Rifkin’s prediction come true.

Excerpted from THE FRANCIS MIRACLE: Inside the Transformation of the Pope and the Church by John L. Allen Jr., published by TIME Books, an imprint of Time Home Entertainment Inc.

http://time.com/3729925/francis-environment/

March 10, 2015

Turkson talks papal encyclical, 'integral ecology' at Irish lecture

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

Offering a possible glimpse into the upcoming papal encyclical on ecology, a top Vatican official stated that disagreements over the cause of climate change do not preclude the need for action, and that religion plays a vital role in bringing about meaningful and lasting solutions.

Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, spoke Thursday at St. Patrick’s Pontifical University in Maynooth, Ireland, at a Lenten lecture for Trócaire, the overseas aid agency of the Irish Bishops’ Conference. The conference has made the growing problem of drought due to climate change its Lenten theme.

The Ghanaian cardinal began by addressing the idea of trócaire (“mercy”), described as a keyword of Pope Francis’ ministry, and ended by calling for all to “become artisans of the revolution of tenderness,” in a move toward a new global solidarity among all people.

Global inequality and the destruction of the environment “are the greatest threats we face as a human family today,” he said.

As for the encyclical, expected to be released in June or July, Turkson said it would explore the relationship among care for creation, integral human development and concern for the poor -- what he described as “integral ecology.” According to Catholic News Service, the cardinal -- who provided the pope a first draft of the teaching document in August -- added that many
people continue to work on it, and that it would be a “sciocchezza” (foolishness) to guess at what it might say.

The encyclical’s timing, Turkson said, was significant, in that 2015 is “a critical year for humanity.”

In addition to the United Nations climate change conference in Paris in December -- where world leaders could sign a binding agreement toward reducing global greenhouse gas emissions -- he listed as key events the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in July in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and the U.N. General Assembly’s meeting in September, where they are expected to agree to a new set of sustainable development goals that would carry into 2030.

“The coming 10 months are crucial, then, for decisions about international development, human flourishing and care for the common home we call planet Earth,” he said.

Turkson said the pope “has echoed the sense of crisis that many in the scientific and development communities convey” about the state of the planet and the poor. What Francis seeks to contribute, he said, is the “warmth of hope … in the midst of those he has called the ‘Herods,’ the ‘omens of destruction and death’ that so often ‘accompany the advance of this world.’”

The cardinal outlined four themes of the pope’s teachings on integral ecology:

- The call to be protectors is integral and all-embracing
- Care for creation and humanity are virtues in their own right
- We will -- we must -- care for what we cherish and revere
- A need for dialogue and “a new global solidarity,” where all have a part to play

“We are called to protect and care for both creation and the human person,” he said in describing the first principle. “These concepts are reciprocal and, together, they make for authentic and sustainable human development.”

Turkson pointed out that Francis moved the protection of creation “to the very forefront of his own ministry and the vocation of every Christian” in addressing the issue as part of his inaugural Mass, celebrated on the feast of St. Joseph (March 19). On that day two years ago, the pope outlined the vocation of the protector, saying it requires the care of the earth and all creatures, in addition to showing loving concern for all people, especially children, the elderly and those in need.

“Clearly this is not some narrow agenda for the greening [of] the Church or the world. It is a vision of care and protection that embraces the human person and the human environment in all possible dimensions,” Turkson said.

When Francis has described environmental destruction as a grave sin, or criticized an economy that kills and places money ahead of people, Turkson said that “he is not making some political comment about the relative merits of capitalism and communism. He is rather restating ancient Biblical teaching.”
“He is pointing to the fact that being a protector of creation, of the poor, of the dignity of every human person is a *sine qua non* of being Christian, of being fully human. He is pointing to the ominous signs in nature that suggest that humanity may now have *tilled* too much and *kept* too little, that our relationship with the Creator, with our neighbour, especially the poor, and with the environment has become fundamentally “un-kept,” and that we are now at serious risk of a concomitant human, environmental and relational degradation,” Turkson said.

On climate change, the cardinal acknowledged debate exists about its origins, despite consensus among the majority of scientists within the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that human activity has played a primary role.

“Is it the outcome of cyclical processes of nature, of human activities (anthropogenic), or perhaps both? What is not contested is that our planet is getting warmer,” he said before describing the latest U.N. climate change report “as stark as it was challenging.”

“For Pope Francis, however, this is not the point. For the Christian, to care for God’s ongoing work of creation is a duty, irrespective of the causes of climate change. To care for creation, to develop and live an integral ecology as the basis for development and peace in the world, is a fundamental Christian duty,” he said.

While binding regulations to address climate change and poverty are necessary, they will likely fail “without moral conversion and a change of heart,” said Turkson. He noted that the Millenium Development Goals have come up short, with more than 1 billion people still living in extreme poverty, while the wealth held by the world’s richest has continued to grow. At the same time, international efforts to reduce carbon emissions has so far not slowed their growth, while deforestation, species extinction and water sources continue as challenges.

“Certainly international agreements are important, they can help. But they are not enough in themselves to sustain change in human behavior,” Turkson said.

The cardinal pointed to St. Francis of Assisi’s reverence for the world and Pope John Paul II’s idea of “ecological conversion” as important contributions to sustainable development discussions. Leaving faith outside such conversation, he said, “undermines a vital and powerful source of meaning and action in the common effort to address both climate change and sustainable development.”

“Giving space to the religious voice and to its ancient experience, wisdom and insight therefore can transform our attitudes to creation and to others in a way that purely scientific, economic or political approaches are less likely to achieve.

“What more radical and comprehensive charter for sustainable development and environmental care do we have after all than the Beatitudes, than the call to generosity that permeates *Evangelii Gaudium*: the command to go the extra mile, to give to the least, to give our tunic as well as our cloak to the one who asks us,” he said.
March 11, 2015

Hispanics Lead U.S. Catholics on Climate Change

By Katie Rose Quandt
Commonweal

A 'Moral Duty' to Preserve the Planet

“A Christian who does not protect creation, who does not let it grow, is a Christian who does not care about the work of God.”

Pope Francis made this call to care for the earth in a homily early last month. In December, he made an even stronger appeal for environmental action. “There is a clear, definitive and ineluctable ethical imperative to act,” he wrote in a message for the U.N. Convention on Climate Change. “The consequences of environmental changes...remind us of the gravity of negligence and inaction.”

Francis, whose much-anticipated encyclical on the environment will be released before this year’s U.N. climate change conference in Paris, isn’t alone in viewing faith and environmental justice as inherently linked. In a study last November, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found that 73 percent of Hispanic Catholics in the United States are “very” or “somewhat” concerned about climate change, higher than any other religious/ethnic group in the study’s breakdown.

Such high levels of climate awareness do not extend to all American Catholics, however: Just 41 percent of white Catholics report climate change concern, lower than every religious group but Evangelical Christians. Is indifference consistent with church teaching? “The Catholic teaching on care for creation goes back to Genesis,” says Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, citing St. Francis and St. Thomas Aquinas, and the three most recent popes, as environmental advocates.

Misleh’s organization coordinates the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, a network of thirteen organizations [.pdf] that includes the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The coalition teaches that all seven principles [.pdf] of Catholic social teaching support and inform a mindset of climate concern and activism.
“Catholic perspectives are distinct from that of other major stakeholders in this debate,” the coalition states. “An authentically Catholic response to climate change must be about both the care of creation and protection of those most vulnerable to climate impacts.”

Perceived vulnerability to the impact of climate change may explain the level of concern expressed by Latinos. Close to half (43 percent) of Hispanic Catholics—higher than any other religious group—told PRRI they expect to experience personal, substantial harm from climate change. Only 13 percent of white Catholics said the same.

“Many Latinos work in construction jobs and agriculture, where air quality and heat are really big factors,” says Adrianna Quintero, executive director of Latino environmental advocacy group Voces Verdes. “When it comes to agriculture, they’re more exposed to pesticides and air pollutants…. You also have drought, which is a direct way that impacts whether or not they’re able to work.”

Studies show American Latinos are disproportionately exposed to air pollution and human-caused environmental damage. Hispanic children are 40 percent more likely to die from asthma than non-Hispanic, white children. And nonwhites breathe 38 percent higher levels of a pollutant linked to heart disease, low birth-weights, and asthma and decreased lung function in children.

In another poll, 83 percent of American Latinos told the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) they believe climate change is hurting low-income communities in Latin America.

Latinos are motivated by a “deep personal sense of our global interconnectedness,” Quintero has written, “not only to our family members who join us for dinner around the table every night, but for our extended network of cousins, aunts and grandparents whether they live here in the U.S. or abroad.” That could be why 86 percent of Latinos in the NRDC study cited a “moral duty” to preserve the planet for children and to respect ancestors’ legacy of care for the earth.

This climate concern translates into desire for action: 90 percent of Latinos told the NRDC the government should take action against climate change. And in another study, conducted by The New York Times last month, Hispanics showed higher levels of support for climate change action—such as greenhouse gas taxes or U.S.-funded initiatives in poorer countries—than non-Hispanics. The researchers suspect this support for action is partially driven by a “heightened level of perceived personal vulnerability to global warming.”

Latino Catholics are also more likely than any other religious group to say their congregation sponsors climate change-related activities, and that their clergy discuss the issue (white Catholics, unsurprisingly, hear the least about climate change in the pews). Those who hear climate change discussed frequently in sermons are 13 percent more likely to believe it is real and caused by human activity.

Quintero says when the NRDC uncovered high levels of Latino climate concern in its first poll on the topic, “It really confirmed what we suspected, which was that Latinos were a force to be reckoned with on environment.” She says it was clear the concern “went beyond just a fad. It’s something very culturally part of the Latino community.”
Will climate concern and action become a larger part of the wider church community? Pope Benedict XVI spoke frequently on climate change and environmental destruction, writing that “preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family.” When Pope Francis was asked about climate change last month, he said: “I don't know if it [human activity] is the only cause, but mostly, in great part, it is man who has slapped nature in the face. We have, in a sense, taken over nature.”

Statements like these are encouraging to activists like Misleh. “I have great hopes for the encyclical,” he says. “I think it’s going to move the needle.”

Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski spoke of the upcoming encyclical at a briefing on religion and climate change sponsored by the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE) in Washington, D.C., last month. He predicts the pope will discuss the “interrelatedness of the various social, economic, political, or environmental crises” faced by humans today.

The NRPE briefing aimed to educate and influence members of Congress. In January, the U.S. Senate voted down an amendment (fifty to forty-nine) acknowledging that “human activity significantly contributes to climate change,” thanks in part to a number of Catholic climate-denying officeholders.

“Bishops are not scientists,” Archbishop Wenski said at the briefing, turning climate deniers’ often-invoked “I’m not a scientist” plea of ignorance on its head. “But we are pastors—and in so far as climate change affects concrete human beings, it is a moral issue.”

His statement mirrors the sentiment of the USCCB, whose 2001 Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good states: “We make no independent judgment on the plausibility of ‘global warming.’ Rather, we accept the consensus findings of so many scientists and the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as a basis for continued research and prudent action.”

Both Misleh and Quintero hope to harness Latino climate concern into political action. Misleh’s Catholic Climate Covenant is working to “enfranchise the Hispanic Catholic population to influence legislators.” Quintero says the country’s changing demographics could make a Latino climate movement a powerful political force. “We need many voices. We need a multitude of voices talking about it from their own perspectives.”

She says the reality of lower-income, globally minded Latino climate activists belies the stereotype of the “Prius-driving, Whole Foods-shopping” environmentalist. “If we really look at environmentalism as a value—and I think this is where religion really comes in—if you look at the fact that protecting our surroundings will determine a lot of how our children will live, then you can really start to understand why this is such an important issue for the Latino community.

“It’s not a political issue for Latinos. It’s a values issue.”

https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/hispanics-lead-us-catholics-climate-change
Cardinal hints at main themes in Pope’s climate change encyclical

Leader of Catholic church will offer leaders hope, says official, and address causes of poverty and environmental degradation

By Ed King
RTCC

A senior Vatican Cardinal who helped craft Pope Francis’ expected encyclical on the environment has offered some clues on what it will contain.

It will, said Cardinal Peter Turkson, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “explore the relationship between care for creation, integral human development and concern for the poor.”

The Pope will seek to bring the “warmth of hope” to the wider debates on climate change and development, he said, while steering a path away from the “Herods” and “omens of destruction and death.”

Turkson, who was speaking at a conference in Ireland, added the next 10 months were “crucial” to determine the stability of the environment.

We’ve picked out some of his key comments below – you can read the full address here.

“The timing of the encyclical is significant: 2015 is a critical year for humanity. In July, nations will gather for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa. In September, the U.N. General Assembly should agree on a new set of sustainable development goals running until 2030.

“In December, the Climate Change Conference in Paris will receive the plans and commitments of each Government to slow or reduce global warming. The coming 10 months are crucial, then, for decisions about international development, human flourishing and care for the common home we call planet Earth.”

On science

“Compelled by the scientific evidence for climate change, we are called to care for humanity and to respect the grammar of nature as virtues in their own right. This is the second principle that underpins Pope Francis’ approach to integral ecology as the basis for authentic development.”
“In an aeroplane interview while returning from Korea last August, the Holy Father said that one of the challenges he faces in his encyclical on ecology is how to address the scientific debate about climate change and its origins.

“Is it the outcome of cyclical processes of nature, of human activities (anthropogenic), or perhaps both? What is not contested is that our planet is getting warmer. The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has undertaken the most comprehensive assessment of climate change.

“Our November 2014 Synthesis Report was as stark as it was challenging. In the words of Thomas Stocker, the co-chair of the IPCC Working Group I: “Our assessment finds that the atmosphere and oceans have warmed, the amount of snow and ice has diminished, sea level has risen and the concentration of carbon dioxide has increased to a level unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years.”

Challenging sceptics

“Yet even the compelling consensus of over 800 scientists of the IPCC will have its critics and its challengers. For Pope Francis, however, this is not the point. For the Christian, to care for God’s ongoing work of creation is a duty, irrespective of the causes of climate change.

“To care for creation, to develop and live an integral ecology as the basis for development and peace in the world, is a fundamental Christian duty. As Pope Francis put it in his morning homily at Santa Marta on 9 February, it is wrong and a distraction to contrast “green” and “Christian.”

“In fact, “a Christian who doesn’t safeguard creation, who doesn’t make it flourish, is a Christian who isn’t concerned with God’s work, that work born of God’s love for us.”

Addressing injustice

“So when Pope Francis says that destroying the environment is a grave sin; when he says that it is not large families that cause poverty but an economic culture that puts money and profit ahead of people; when he says that we cannot save the environment without also addressing the profound injustices in the distribution of the goods of the earth; when he says that this is “an economy that kills” – he is not making some political comment about the relative merits of capitalism and communism.

“He is rather restating ancient Biblical teaching. He is pointing to the fact that being a protector of creation, of the poor, of the dignity of every human person is a sine qua non of being Christian, of being fully human.

“He is pointing to the ominous signs in nature that suggest that humanity may now have tilled too much and kept too little, that our relationship with the Creator, with our neighbour, especially the poor, and with the environment has become fundamentally “un-kept”,}
and that we are now at serious risk of a concomitant human, environmental and relational degradation.”

Hope

“The wealth of the top 1% has grown 60% in the last twenty years, and it continued to grow through the global economic crisis. Despite the UN Framework Convention of Climate Change signed in Rio in 1992 and subsequent agreements, global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO2) continue their upward trend, almost 50 per cent above 1990 levels.

“The concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere has reached a level last seen 3 million years ago – when the planet was significantly warmer than it is today. Millions of hectares of forest are lost every year, many species are being driven closer to extinction, and renewable water resources are becoming scarcer.

“As we confront the threat of environmental catastrophe on a global scale, I am confident that a shaft of light will break through the heavy clouds and bring us what Pope Francis describes as the warmth of hope!”

These are a series of excerpts from a longer address made by Cardinal Turkson at the Catholic Irish Bishop’s conference on March 5.


March 14, 2015

Fracking will ruin sacred, preserved sites in the ‘American cradle of civilization’ - lawsuit

RT

A Navajo advocacy group has asked a federal judge to halt hydraulic fracking permits in the San Juan Basin of New Mexico, claiming that drilling threatens a historic UNESCO heritage site considered sacred by Navajo, Hopi and Pueblo peoples.

Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment and three other groups have sued the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and US Department of Interior, calling on a federal judge to vacate the 130 fracking permits issued by the BLM and enjoin fracking activity in the Mancos Shale of the San Juan Basin until the BLM adheres to the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, according to Courthouse News.

The 4,600-square-mile San Juan Basin of New Mexico's Four Corners region is home to Chaco Culture National Historical Park, which includes the Anasazi ruins and other archeological remains of structures that were among North America's largest around 1,000 years ago.
Chaco and the surrounding areas, known as the “American cradle of civilization,” are considered a [UNESCO World Heritage site](http://www.unesco.org). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization calls the area “remarkable for its monumental public and ceremonial buildings and its distinctive architecture – it has an ancient urban ceremonial centre that is unlike anything constructed before or since.”

Chaco is on top of the Mancos Shale, believed to harbor crude oil and natural gas supplies. The Diné – meaning 'Navajo' in their Athapaskan language – say the horizontal drilling and fracking could damage historic sites in the area, both inside and outside the national park, as well as contaminate the nearby groundwater.

The Diné – along with the San Juan Citizens Alliance, Wildearth Guardians, and the Natural Resources Defense Council – claim that BLM studies on fracking’s impact in the region have been shielded from the public. Without transparency, the drilling should not go on as planned, they said.

To unleash oil or natural gas from shale or other areas, the hydraulic fracturing - or fracking - process requires blasting large volumes of highly pressurized water, sand, and other chemicals into layers of rock. Once used, toxic fracking wastewater is then either stored in deep underground wells, disposed of in open pits for evaporation, sprayed into waste fields, or used over again.

Fracking sites have proliferated immensely across the US amid the current oil and gas boom in North America. Though the costs of fracking - including groundwater contamination, heightened earthquake activity, exacerbation of drought conditions, and a variety of health concerns for humans and the local environment - have given many Americans pause, as they must deal with the effects while government regulators allow industry to drill like mad.

The BLM’s [management plan](http://rt.com/usa/240581-fracking-anasazi-chaco-navajo/) for public lands in the Four Corners region triggered a wave of resistance, as 173,000 people urged Department of Interior - the parent agency to the BLM - to “protect these unique places from oil and gas development,” according to Earth Island Journal.

“The land in the Chaco Canyon area has lots of sacred places. The corporations don’t care. They come and go and tear up the places. They do their thing and away they go—and somebody else, somewhere else is getting rich off this land, not us,” Sarah Jane White, a Diné environmental activist, told DeSmogBlog in January.

“Fracking doesn’t benefit the Native American people.”

According to The Daily Times, the BLM's Farmington, New Mexico Field Office district manager Victoria Barr said her staff is expected to finalize the area’s resource management plan sometime later this year.

http://rt.com/usa/240581-fracking-anasazi-chaco-navajo/
FBOs disappointed by exclusion, yet still committed to DRR

Act Alliance

More than ten international faith based networks attending the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction have expressed their disappointment at the exclusion of a reference to the contribution of faith communities in times of disasters.

In a statement released in Sendai, Japan, Tuesday, the organisations said:

“We are disappointed that this reference has been deleted from the draft of the new framework. This has left many faith based organisations and local faith communities feeling excluded from an area of work that is very close to their hearts and to their calling of service to communities.”

In the initial zero draft of the new post-2015 disaster risk framework, reference had been made to the role of faith based organisations in the context of disaster risk reduction.

“No one can deny that in the wake of every disaster, people look to their faith for hope and encouragement; in fact, faith structures such as churches, mosques, temples and other places of worship are often the very first place people seek refuge,” said John Nduna, General Secretary of ACT Alliance.

ACT Alliance, and many other faith based groups are actively involved in humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction and in building resilience of communities and have many good examples and lessons learned to share with the world.

The joint statement further says: “From our own experience in this work around the globe including the Ebola crisis in West Africa, conflict in South Sudan and Central African Republic, flooding in Southeast Asia, and the Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, we bear witness to how faith in the most at-risk of communities helps prevent and reduce risks, contribute to resilience and inspire hope to rebuild better in a post-disaster context.”

“ACT Alliance is committed to play a role in the successful implementation of the new framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, particularly for communities at the local level. Together with the other international faith-based networks we call upon governments to recognize and affirm the unique role of Local Faith Communities and Faith-Based Organisations and to prioritize the engagement and collaboration with FBOs and LFCs in the implementation of the post-2015 framework on DRR,” Says John Nduna.

ACT Alliance approved a commitment to DRR during its General Assembly late 2014, which was submitted as an official input for the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan. See: http://www.wcdrr.org/preparatory/commitments/105
The statement has been signed by ACT Alliance, Tearfund, Islamic Relief, Soka Gakkai International, Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief, Humanitarian Forum of Indonesia and its members including Muslim Aid, Dompet Dhuafa, Yakkum among others.

http://www.actalliance.org/stories/fbos-committed-to-drr

March 18, 2015

SGI Joins FBOs in Events on Disaster Risk Reduction at WCDRR

Soka Gakkai International

From March 14-18, the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) was held in Sendai city in Miyagi Prefecture, Japan. As a side event, on March 15, a symposium titled "Community based DRR from a faith-based perspective – sharing best practices" was co-organized by ACT Alliance and SGI in cooperation with the Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief (JRPD). The symposium was held at Sendai Civic Auditorium.

In his opening speech, Reverend John Nduna, general secretary of ACT Alliance, stated that the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in disaster risk reduction (DRR) is not always recognized and that international frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) only have impact when they benefit the people at the grassroots level. Nobuyuki Asai, chair of the Soka Gakkai Youth Peace Conference, spoke on the capacity of FBOs to mobilize existing community networks and to protect the vulnerable in times of emergency.

Presentations were given by Soka Gakkai member Kimio Ohashi, a 71 year-old survivor of the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake, and Rachel Kyozira of the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), an ACT Alliance member.

Mr. Ohashi shared his experience of employing dialogue to build bonds of community and trust between people living in evacuation centers, temporary housing or the fledging communities of permanent housing built for those displaced by the disaster. Ms. Kyozira gave a talk titled "Realities of Resilience" about her work with faith communities in Ethiopia.

After the presentations there was also a Q & A session.

This was the second symposium on the role of FBOs in DRR organized by SGI and ACT Alliance. The first was at the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) held in June 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand.

On March 16, as an outcome document of the symposium, 13 FBOs issued a statement in which they called on governments to recognize the unique role of Local Faith Communities (LFCS) and FBOs and to prioritize the engagement and collaboration of both in the implementation of the post 2015 framework on DRR.
On March 18, Kimiaki Kawai, Program Director of Peace Affairs for SGI, gave a presentation at the WCDRR's IGNITE Stage on Soka Gakkai’s relief efforts in Tohoku following the Great East Japan Earthquake. He highlighted the ability of FBOs to utilize their existing networks of communication and their local facilities in disaster response. He emphasized that the strengths and resources of FBOs could complement those of other DRR stakeholders.

SGI also co-organized another side event at the WCDRR, a March 16 panel bringing together civil society representatives from China, South Korea and Japan titled "Strengthening Resilience in Northeast Asia through Cooperation for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Soka Gakkai Tohoku Youth Peace Conference co-organized a symposium on "The Power and Potential of Youth in Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery" on March 14. Tohoku Soka Gakkai members also organized an exhibition of images and stories of survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami titled "The Light of Humanity" from March 14-17.

[Adapted from reports from the SGI Office of Public Information (SGI-OPI); photos courtesy of Seikyo Shimbun and SGI-OPI]


March 19, 2015

4 easy ways to support Earth Hour

Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute

Dear Friend of SAFCEI,

We write to you with an appeal to support WWF’s upcoming Earth Hour initiative with your faith community.

This year, WWF is calling on its hundreds of millions of annual Earth Hour supporters in over 160 countries around the world to send out a clear message to global leaders: people across the world want action on climate change. We urge everyone in your community to register their support online at wwf.org.za/earthhour so that their voices can be counted, and noted ahead of the next major international climate conference in Paris at the end of the year.

Climate change is the biggest human rights issue of our time. In South Africa, particularly food, energy and water security are affected by climate change – the very foundations required to guarantee a stable society and thriving future for our growing population.

The campaign culminates on Saturday, 28 March 2014, 8.30pm when you are called upon to take part in the symbolic moment of unity by switching off your lights and celebrating in the true spirit of Earth Hour. The idea is not only to save energy during Earth Hour, but it is also a time to reflect on and renew commitments to protect Creation beyond the hour.
Faith communities have a powerful role to play

Please appeal to your faith leaders and congregation to join the movement to change climate change and to take tangible action to make a difference. Your support can help ensure a more responsible custodianship of the earth for the generations to come.

4 easy ways to get involved

1. **Encourage your congregation to join the movement against climate change by registering their personal details** on the Earth Hour website
2. **Communicate using the resources on the ‘Toolkit’ page** – add them to your community’s social media, website and newsletter using the available images. Display posters in your meeting place.
3. **Plan an Earth Hour event for your congregation and then register it on the ‘Act’ page**. Why not consider holding a short, candlelit Earth Hour gathering on Saturday evening to pray, reflect and share on the issue? Use the Greening Your Event Guide on the ‘Toolkit’ page
4. **Showcase the Earth Hour 2015 video in your community to help raise awareness** – view the video on Youtube or download it by inserting the URL (www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GxRlMm9qjY) into www.keepvid.com. For access to higher resolution video files, please send WWF an email.

Share your stories or photos with SAFCEI as well so that we can showcase them to inspire other faith communities. Send them to sarah@safcei.org.za

Wishing you a special Earth Hour!

The SAFCEI team

http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=ee6869aa29&e=a758405790

March 21, 2015

'Water man of India' Rajendra Singh bags top prize

By Roger Harrabin, BBC environment analyst

BBC

An award known as "the Nobel Prize for water" has been given to an Indian campaigner who has brought water to 1,000 villages.

The judges of the Stockholm Water Prize say his methods have also prevented floods, restored soil and rivers, and brought back wildlife.
The prize-winner, Rajendra Singh, is dubbed "the Water Man of India".

The judges say his technique is cheap, simple, and that his ideas should be followed worldwide.

Mr Singh uses a modern version of the ancient Indian technique of rainwater harvesting.

It involves building low-level banks of earth to hold back the flow of water in the wet season and allow water to seep into the ground for future use.

He first trained as a medic, but when he took up a post in a rural village in arid Rajasthan he was told the greatest need was not health care but drinking water.

Groundwater had been sucked dry by farmers, and as water disappeared, crops failed, rivers, forests and wildlife disappeared and people left for the towns.

Are we running out of fresh water?

- Our planet does contain over a billion trillion litres of water. But very little of that is safe to drink. Over 97% of water on Earth is salt water.
- Nearly two million people die from a lack of safe drinking water every year.
- In just 15 years time, half the world's population could be living in areas of high water stress - where there isn't enough water to go round.

"When we started our work, we were only looking at the drinking water crisis and how to solve that," Mr Singh said.

"Today our aim is higher. This is the century of exploitation, pollution and encroachment. To stop all this, to convert the war on water into peace, that is my life's goal."

The Stockholm International Water Institute, which presented the prize, said his lessons were essential as climate change alters weather patterns round the world.

Its director, Torgny Holmgren, said: "In a world where demand for freshwater is booming, we will face a severe water crisis within decades if we do not learn how to better take care of our water. Mr Singh is a beacon of hope."

In its citation, the judges say: "Today's water problems cannot be solved by science or technology alone. They are human problems of governance, policy, leadership, and social resilience.

"Rajendra Singh's life work has been in building social capacity to solve local water problems through participatory action, empowerment of women, linking indigenous know-how with modern scientific and technical approaches and upending traditional patterns of development and resource use."
The award was applauded by Katherine Pygott, a leading UK water engineer who has drawn on Mr Singh's work to help prevent flooding in the UK.


March 23, 2015

Pope: Future of humanity depends on protecting, sharing water

By Carol Glatz
National Catholic Reporter

Vatican City -- The future of humanity depends on safeguarding and sharing potable water around the world, Pope Francis said.

"I encourage, therefore, the international community to make sure the planet's water is adequately protected and no one is excluded or discriminated against" in the fair use of this resource, which is "the most essential element for life," he said Sunday after reciting the Angelus with visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square.

"The future of humanity depends on our ability to safeguard and share" clean water, the pope said, in marking World Water Day, an annual United Nations celebration to promote sustainable water management.

In his remarks before reciting the Angelus prayer, the pope said Catholics can offer people three things: the Gospel, the crucifix and the example of living out their faith.

In the Gospel, "we can encounter Jesus, listen to him and know him," he said, while the crucifix is the "sign of the love of Jesus, who gave himself for us."

Catholics should also translate their faith into "simple gestures of brotherly love" and charity in which the most important thing is to practice what one professes; one's faith and life, words and actions must be consistent.

About 50,000 free copies of a pocket-sized Gospel were distributed to those gathered in the square. The pope said he was offering people the gift so that they could carry it with them wherever they went and "read it often."

"The word of God is the light for our journey. It will do you good," he said, adding that the many volunteers handing out the books included hundreds of homeless people.

He said this, too, was a "beautiful gesture that is pleasing to Jesus: the poorest are those who give us the word of God."
Meanwhile, a Vatican spokesperson said the pope had cut back his schedule for the week in order to finish working on his encyclical on ecology, saying it was the stage of "final revision."

Passionist Fr. Ciro Benedettini said Monday the pope had no meetings or major events planned through Saturday except for the general audience Wednesday and morning Mass in the chapel of his residence.

During a news conference with journalists Jan. 15 onboard the papal plane from Sri Lanka to Manila, Francis had said he had sent a third draft of the encyclical to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Secretariat of State and the papal theologian for review "so that I would not say anything 'foolish.'"

He said he received a thick packet of their responses and that he planned to take an entire week in March "to complete it" with the hopes of finishing it by the end of the month.

Then if the translations go smoothly, he said, "it can come out in June or July," enough time to "make a contribution" to the United Nations Climate Change Conference meeting in Paris Nov. 30 through Dec. 11.

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March 23, 2015

Pope puts climate heat on GOP

By Tom Krattenmaker
USA Today

With Catholic advances in Republican Party hierarchy, will papal views hold sway?

It comes as bad news to many that Pope Francis' tenure at the Vatican might be short. But there are probably some Catholics in this country who gave a silent cheer when Francis intimated recently that "the Lord has placed me here for a short time" — especially the surprisingly numerous Catholics who are leaders in the Republican Party.

Francis had already antagonized monied interests in the GOP with his populist admonitions against economic inequality and the excesses of capitalism. Now, in the run-up to this summer's greatly anticipated encyclical on climate change, the pontiff is making things even more awkward for Catholic Republicans.

If you're a progressive and you like a little schadenfreude with your politics, you're probably enjoying the obvious squirming that many high-profile Republicans are doing when the climate
issue comes up. Outright denial seems to have been replaced by the currently favored "I'm not a scientist" talking point, which seems at best a stalling tactic.

Francis is not a scientist either, but that has not stopped him from leaning on something very close to scientific consensus and speaking confidently about global warming as a reality with dire moral implications — especially for the poor and vulnerable who are at the heart of Catholic social teaching.

Pulls no punches

"A Christian who does not protect creation," Francis says, "is a Christian who does not care about the work of God."

The relationship between the GOP and Vatican looked a lot different when it was mainly Protestants playing lead roles in the Republican Party, and when popes were placing more emphasis on things, such as the dangers of secularization and sex, or back in the Ronald Reagan years, the evils of communism.

But a funny thing happened on the way to 2015. Francis became pope. And Catholics came to greater prominence in the Republican Party. There are the presidential prospects — Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Bobby Jindal, Chris Christie and Rick Santorum. In Congress, there's House Speaker John Boehner and other influential Catholic Republicans such as Rep. Paul Ryan.

Doesn't Francis, with his wild popularity and liberal-sounding rhetoric, have these Catholic conservatives in a bind?

Yes. And optimists can savor the possibility of something better than that — a breakthrough on this crucial issue.

Reports are circulating that some Republicans in Congress are looking for a lifeline on the issue. Who better than the widely respected pope to provide one?

There are reasons for skepticism, too. As Catholic Democratic leaders have shown for decades, U.S. politicians can always find a way to tune out their least favorite papal exhortations and church teachings. Consider the liberal Catholic giants of recent decades, such as Sen. Edward Kennedy and New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, and high-ranking Democrats of today, such as House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi — all committed to the legal availability of abortion despite the church's hard line against it.

Boehner's take on pope

Boehner, for one, seems to be following a similar tack when it comes to Francis and the climate. Sure, the House speaker has waxed positive and enthusiastic about the pontiff. Boehner has even invited Francis to address Congress. But he has yet to signal any change of heart or strategy on climate.
In January, several weeks after the news that Francis would issue his environment encyclical, Boehner pulled out the standard "job killer" line in response to the latest White House action against carbon emissions. As to the reality of human-caused climate change, Boehner said he would leave that to the scientists to debate and resolve, as if they hadn't already.

Also sobering, polling data show the climate issue occupies relatively low status on Americans' lists of concerns, even though a majority accept that something is happening with the climate.

That's where the pontiff's exhortation can make the biggest difference. If the upcoming encyclical is transformative the way many hope, public opinion will swing, perhaps dramatically. Perhaps so much so that the House speaker and his GOP colleagues will realize that addressing climate is an imperative they can neither tune out nor wait out, regardless of how long Francis remains in the Vatican.

Tom Krattenmaker is a writer specializing in religion in public life, a member of USA TODAY's Board of Contributors and communications director at Yale Divinity School. His latest book is The Evangelicals You Don't Know.

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http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/03/22/pope-climate-change-gop-column/25192839/

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March 24, 2015

Climate denial is immoral, says head of US Episcopal church

Climate change is a moral challenge threatening the rights of the world’s poorest people and those who deny it are not using God’s gift of knowledge, says presiding bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori

By Suzanne Goldenberg
The Guardian

The highest ranking woman in the Anglican communion has said climate denial is a “blind” and immoral position which rejects God’s gift of knowledge.

Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop of the Episcopal church and one of the most powerful women in Christianity, said that climate change was a moral imperative akin to that of the civil rights movement. She said it was already a threat to the livelihoods and survival of people in the developing world.

“It is in that sense much like the civil rights movement in this country where we are attending to the rights of all people and the rights of the earth to continue to be a flourishing place,” Bishop
Jefferts Schori said in an interview with the Guardian. “It is certainly a moral issue in terms of the impacts on the poorest and most vulnerable around the world already.”

In the same context, Jefferts Schori attached moral implications to climate denial, suggesting those who reject the underlying science of climate change were turning their backs on God’s gift of knowledge.

“Episcopalians understand the life of the mind is a gift of God and to deny the best of current knowledge is not using the gifts God has given you,” she said. “In that sense, yes, it could be understood as a moral issue.”

She went on: “I think it is a very blind position. I think it is a refusal to use the best of human knowledge, which is ultimately a gift of God.”

The sense of urgency around the issue has been deepened by Pope Francis’ forceful statements on global warming, which he is expected to amplify in a papal encyclical in June and during an address to the US Congress in September.

The Episcopalian church will host a webcast on 24 March to kick off a month-long action campaign designed to encourage church members to reduce their own carbon footprints and lobby government and international corporations to fight climate change.

An oceanographer before she was ordained at the age of 40, Bishop Jefferts Schori said she hoped to use her visibility as a church leader to help drive action on climate change.

As presiding bishop, she oversees 2.5m members of the Episcopal church in 17 countries, and is arguably one of the most prominent women in Christianity. The two largest denominations in the US, Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists, do not ordain women.

“I really hope to motivate average Episcopalians to see the severity of this issue, the morality of this issue,” she said. “Turning the ship in another direction requires the consolidated efforts of many people who are moving in the same direction.”

She acknowledged that the challenge was deepened by the strain of climate denial in American politics, and by continued resistance to science in American classrooms.

“It’s hard work when you have a climate denier who will not see the reality of scientific truth,” she said.

However, she, like a number of church leaders, said they had seen an uptick in climate activism in recent months, spurred by the pope’s comments last January, and the conjunction later this year of United Nations conferences on development and climate change.

Evangelical churches – once seen as a conservative force – were now taking up the climate cause, largely because of growing awareness of its threat to the poor.
“One of the significant changes in particular has been the growing awareness and activism among the evangelical community who at least somewhat in the more distant past refused to encounter this issue, refused to deal with it,” Jeffers Schori said. “The major evangelical groups in this country have been much more forward in addressing this issue because they understand that it impacts the poor.”

A number of denominations have also joined the growing fossil fuel divestment movement which is encouraging organisations to move their investments out of coal, oil and gas companies. The United Methodist church, the third largest denomination, dumped coal companies from its pension fund.

The Unitarian church and the United church of Christ have also voted to divest, according to Reverent Fletcher Harper of Green Faith. And the World Council of Churches has pledged not to invest in fossil fuels. A number of individual congregations have also divested from fossil fuels.

The Guardian launched a campaign on Monday to encourage the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust to divest from fossil fuels.

The Episcopal church has also come under pressure to withdraw its fossil fuel holdings. A number of diocese are pressing for divestment, and will bring the issue to a vote at the church’s annual convention this summer.

Jefferts Schori opposes fossil fuel divestment. “If you divest you lose any direct ability to influence the course of a corporation’s behavior,” she said. “I think most pragmatists realise that we can’t close the spigot on the oil wells and close the coal mines immediately without some other energy source to shift to.”


March 26, 2015


Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee Backs a New Report which Describes Animal Experiments as Morally ‘Unthinkable’

Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics

More than a hundred and fifty academics, intellectuals, and writers, including Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee, have backed a new report calling for the de-normalisation of animal experimentation. Titled ‘Normalising the Unthinkable’, the report is the result of a working party of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics.
Other signatories to the report include the Rt Revd John Pritchard, former Bishop of Oxford, Professor Keith Ward of Oxford University, Professor Stanley Hauerwas of Duke Divinity School, and Professor Conor Gearty of the London School of Economics.

The report finds that ‘The deliberate and routine abuse of innocent, sentient animals involving harm, pain, suffering, stressful confinement, manipulation, trade, and death should be unthinkable. Yet animal experimentation is just that: the ‘normalisation of the unthinkable’. ‘It is estimated that 115.3 million animals are used in experiments worldwide per annum. In terms of harm, pain, suffering, and death, this constitutes one of the major moral issues of our time.’

Comprised of 20 leading ethicists and scientists, the working party concluded that animal experiments are both morally and scientifically flawed. The report of more than 50,000 words is probably the most comprehensive critique of animal experiments ever published.

Commissioned by the BUAV and Cruelty Free International as an independent ethical review, members of the working party are keen to point out that the BUAV in no way influenced its conclusions.

‘The moral arguments in favour of animal testing really don’t hold water’ says Professor Andrew Linzey, co-editor of the report and a theologian at Oxford University. ‘We have looked at the central arguments in official reports and found them wanting. If any of them were morally valid, they would also justify experiments on human beings.’

The report concludes that the ‘normalisation’ of animal experiments:

- flies in the face of what is now known about the extent and range of how animals can be harmed. The issue of the complexity of animal awareness, especially animal sentence (the capacity to experience pain and pleasure), cannot be ignored. Unlike our forebears, we now know, as reasonably as we can know of humans, that animals (notably, mammals, birds, and reptiles) experience not only pain, but also shock, fear, foreboding, trauma, anxiety, stress, distress, anticipation, and terror.

- is based on the discredited idea that animals are just tools for human use, means to human ends, fungible items, and commodities who can be treated and dispensed with as humans think fit.

- is challenged by new moral thinking which holds that sentient beings are not just things, objects, machines, or tools, but have value in themselves and deserve respect.

- is augmented by a range of regulations and controls, which in reality do very little to protect animals and indeed often do the reverse.

- is justified by the oft-repeated assertion that human interest requires such experiments, whereas it has to be questioned whether humans are ever benefited by the abuse of animals.
BUAV and Cruelty Free International CEO, Michelle Thew, said: “We greatly welcome this new report, which should spur on new ethical thinking about animals and question some of the lazy assumptions about how animal research benefits humans. This independent report is a milestone in ethical thinking about animals and puts the ethics of animal research back on the agenda.”

Academics are invited to debate the report at a special Summer School on the Ethics of Using Animals in Research at Oxford on 26-29 July 2015. Details about the Summer School can be found here.

The full report can be found here.

The executive summary can be found here.

The full list of signatories can be found here.

ENDS

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Notes to editors

- The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, founded in 2006 by its director Professor Andrew Linzey, is an independent Centre with the aim of pioneering ethical perspectives on animals through academic research, teaching and publication. The Centre has more than 90 Fellows drawn from a variety of academic disciplines from throughout the world. See www.oxfordanimalethics.com.

- The Centre is an independent think tank, and is not under the aegis, control, or sanction of the University of Oxford.
- Founded in 1898, the BUAV is the world’s leading organisation working to create a world where nobody wants or believes we need to experiment on animals.
- Established by the BUAV, Cruelty Free International is the leading organisation working to end animal testing for consumer products worldwide.


March 26, 2015

Papal ecology: Protecting all God's creatures, respecting God's plan

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service
VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The Catholic Church supports the efforts of scientists to study the causes and effects of climate change and insists governments and businesses must get serious about specific commitments for protecting the environment.

But Pope Francis, like his predecessors, does not pretend to have a technical solution to the problem. However, he does feel a responsibility to remind Christians of their religious obligation to safeguard creation, beginning with human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God.

Clearing his calendar for a week in late March, Pope Francis rolled up his sleeves to put the final touches on an encyclical letter about the environment; building on what he and his predecessors have said, the document -- planned for publication early in the summer -- is expected to present ecology as the ultimate pro-life, pro-poor, pro-family issue.

For Pope Francis, like Pope Benedict XVI, safeguarding creation is not simply about protecting plants and animals, or just about ensuring the air, water and land will support human life for generations to come. Those things are part of the task.

"We need to see -- with the eyes of faith -- the beauty of God's saving plan, the link between the natural environment and the dignity of the human person," Pope Francis wrote in a speech prepared for young people in the Philippines in January.

Christianity teaches that God created the world and everything in it with a certain order and proclaimed it good. As stewards of God's creation, Pope Francis has said, people have an absolute obligation to respect the natural order.

Defending marriage as the lifelong union of a man and a woman, Pope Francis told a conference in November, "the crisis of the family has produced a human ecological crisis, for social environments, like natural environments, need protection."

"Human ecology" was a phrase often used by retired Pope Benedict XVI, who was known for "green" initiatives, including installing solar panels at the Vatican. He taught that "the book of nature is one and indivisible; it includes not only the environment but also individual, family and social ethics. Our duties toward the environment flow from our duties toward the person, considered both individually and in relation to others."

In his 2009 encyclical, "Caritas in Veritate," Pope Benedict wrote that the church "must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction. There is need for what might be called a human ecology, correctly understood."

The "decisive issue," he wrote, "is the overall moral tenor of society. If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology."
Echoes of Pope Benedict's thought can be found in Pope Francis' frequent denunciations of the "throwaway culture." He sees people increasingly at ease throwing away not just plastic and paper, but wasting food at a time when so many people are starving. Even more seriously, he has said, people have a similar "throwaway" attitude when it comes to people they don't find useful - including the unborn, the sick and the elderly.

Meeting with U.N. officials in May 2014, Pope Francis insisted the defense of the family, the defense of the poor and protecting the environment are part of the same agenda of ensuring the survival and thriving of humanity.

The international community, he said, must address "the structural causes of poverty and hunger, attain more substantial results in protecting the environment, ensure dignified and productive labor for all and provide appropriate protection for the family, which is an essential element in sustainable human and social development."

As often happens when things go wrong, Pope Francis has said, the poor pay the highest price for the destruction of the environment: the seas and rivers no longer provide fish; landslides send their makeshift homes tumbling down hillsides; the deserts expand, robbing sustenance farmers of even a meager diet.

Flying from Sri Lanka to the Philippines in January, Pope Francis told reporters accompanying him that Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and a team from his office had prepared drafts of the ecology document.

During an early March visit to Ireland, Cardinal Turkson spoke about the principles underlying the pope's upcoming letter, insisting "this is not some narrow agenda for the greening of the church or the world. It is a vision of care and protection that embraces the human person and the human environment in all possible dimensions."

All people are called to be "protectors" of the environment and of one another, especially the poor, the cardinal said. The responsibility and obligation of care is both a matter of justice and a matter of faith; it is the natural result of being in a right relationship with God, with others and with the earth.

"When Pope Francis says that destroying the environment is a grave sin; when he says that it is not large families that cause poverty but an economic culture that puts money and profit ahead of people; when he says that we cannot save the environment without also addressing the profound injustices in the distribution of the goods of the earth; when he says that this is 'an economy that kills' -- he is not making some political comment about the relative merits of capitalism and communism," Cardinal Turkson said. "He is rather restating ancient biblical teaching."

At the heart of the "integral ecology" Pope Francis is calling for, he said, "is the call to dialogue and a new solidarity, a changing of human hearts in which the good of the human person, and not the pursuit of profit, is the key value that directs our search for the global, the universal common good."
March 31, 2015

Ash Wednesday Declaration bears fruit on Good Friday

Operation Noah

Twenty Anglican bishops have just released a statement entitled The World is our Host for Good Friday, which calls Churches to urgent prayer and action for climate justice and ‘sets a new agenda on climate change for the 85 million-strong Anglican Communion.’ Operation Noah welcomes this strong and positive statement, with its clear emphasis on the need for practical and prayerful action by Christians everywhere.

The Bishops met in South Africa in February, hosted by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, to plan their report. Their statement notes the scientific basis for action and urges the Church to urgently find its collective moral voice. They note that, ‘God committed the care of creation to us, God’s children but we have been care-less. Therefore climate justice for us as Christians demands a faith response.’

Revd Chris Halliwell, co vice-chair of Operation Noah, says, ‘The release of this statement on Good Friday 2015 reinforces an earlier call to Christians issued by Operation Noah in 2012 under the title Climate change and the purposes of God: a call to the Church, also known as the Ash Wednesday Declaration. The Declaration encourages Christians to engage prayerfully and practically with some of the key issues of climate change, including a call to seek justice and to act with hope.’

‘Three years ago, church leaders from all the major Christian denominations in the United Kingdom personally supported the Ash Wednesday Declaration. This week, in The World Is Our Host, these twenty Anglican bishops have brought timely and personal reminders that climate change is an issue of global justice that demands practical and prayerful Christian responses.’

‘The Good Friday and Easter narrative unites Christians everywhere in the Lord Jesus who embraces the tragedy, pain and suffering of the whole of creation and brings hope, transformation and reconciliation to all through the power and love of the resurrection. It is with a deep conviction of the hope that Christ sets before us that Christians are empowered to engage with the pain of the present.’

Given the crucial climate talks in Paris this December, Operation Noah longs for a powerful, hope-filled agreement to result. We trust that the collective prayers and actions of people all around the world will bring pressure on world leaders and will result in a climate agreement that protects all our futures.
March 31, 2015

The Greening of Pope Francis

By Charles J. Reid, Jr.
The Huffington Post

Pope Francis is poised, within the next two or three months, to announce one of the signature documents of his papacy, an encyclical on climate change. And we can hope and pray that it will be "world-changing" in the very best sense of that expression.

If he sticks to the schedule he has publicly announced, he should, at this very moment, be putting the finishing touches on the final version. It will then be forwarded to translation teams that will prepare official texts in a number of different languages for publication in June or July.

The encyclical has yet to appear, but we can still surmise some of its main themes in light of Pope Francis’ own statements on the environment. First, it seems that the Pope is not a newcomer to environmental concerns. He has said that events in Latin America years ago forced him to confront the catastrophe of environmental degradation. Bishops in Brazil, he has said, first explained to him the deforestation of the Amazonian rain forest. Deeply moved by this tragedy, Pope Francis now sees the rain forest as "one of the world's lungs." For a man who is missing part of a lung himself, this is a meaningful metaphor. He knows, more than most, how essential a lung is to life.

The Pope is surely right to warn the world about the on-going loss of the rain forest. National Geographic estimates that in the last forty years around 20 percent of the rain forest has been cut and the land cleared for other uses. This is a disaster both regionally and globally. Regionally, natural habitat for animals and plants is wiped out, causing a loss of biodiversity. But globally, the loss of forest canopy accelerates the process of climate change. The Pope knows this and means to do something about it.

But Pope Francis has hinted that his thoughts now go well beyond a concern with deforestation, as important as that is, and embraces something more profound. In a homily preached in February, he connected environmentalism with the Christian faith. God made the world and all that is in it out of an act of love. If creation is an act of love, the proper way for Christians to reciprocate is to tend to the world. "A Christian who does not protect Creation, who does not let it grow, is a Christian who does not care about the work of God, that work that was born from the love of God for us."
Taken seriously, what the Pope is saying is that environmentalism is not an option for the Christian, but a requirement of heart and mind and conscience. It is a primary demand of the Christian faith. The environment, Pope Francis emphasizes, is not an issue that belongs to a single party or faction. It is not something that can be neatly labeled "the greens." No, he has said, it belongs to the world and is the responsibility of every Christian.

Pope Francis has also made it clear that he takes seriously the science of human-induced climate change. To members of the scientific community, to the world's knowledge classes, this may not come as big news. They may be tempted to shrug and say, "well, everybody knows that."

Except that is not the case. In the United States, the dominant voices of one of two major political parties -- the Republicans -- are on record as expressing their doubts about human-caused climate change.

John Boehner, the Republican Speaker of the House and a professed Catholic, has publicly declared that he is agnostic on the subject of climate change, which he considers a debatable topic. Ted Cruz, the colorful Texas Senator running for President, has theatrically denounced climate change as deceitful and false and compared climate scientists to flat-earthers. In saying these things, Republican politicians are in lockstep with their fundamentalist Christian base, who reject the science of climate change out of hand.

It is significant, therefore, and of benefit to the health of the planet, that the leader of the world's largest Christian movement accepts human-induced climate change as scientifically established and will issue a call to action on that basis. And that summons to act will take into account, first of all, the threat climate change poses to humanity. The Pope has talked to farmers displaced from their fields by flood or drought, and he has visited typhoon victims in the Philippines and elsewhere. He knows first-hand -- he has toured the devastation -- the impact climate change is having on coastal communities. And he knows that human-induced climate change is an affront to God's loving gift of Creation.

The summons to act will likely have yet another dimension, and that is economic. For Pope Francis, most of the ailments of the contemporary human condition are traceable back to the inhumane uses of capital. We have become a throwaway society. We discard unwanted people, whether they be convicts in prison, or the elderly, or the poor, or the handicapped, or the infirm. Those who are unable for whatever reason to serve the interests of capital have no place in the modern dispensation.

My guess is that Pope Francis is prepared to extend this line of reasoning to the degradation of the planet. Runaway capital is not only destroying individual lives, but is jeopardizing the health and well-being of all of humanity.

And Pope Francis is prepared to go "big," as they say. He has indicated that he will invite leaders of other religious faith to join him in meetings. He will not issue the encyclical as part of a joint declaration with other faiths, he has made that clear. But he hopes to form a world-wide network of believers, Christian and non-Christian alike, dedicated to a greener earth. He is even making
plans to present his case to the United Nations. I can hardly wait. For Pope Francis' planned encyclical may be one of those rare papal documents that shift the public debate for generations.


April 2015

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute Newsletter

http://us6.campaign-archive2.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=e0e1f9c015&e=a758405790

April 2015

Green Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=59&key=d733bd42629aa3b5e5c5c057930ecd99&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

April 2, 2015

Catholics prep for Pope Francis to tackle climate in upcoming encyclical.

Will Pope Francis' encyclical on global climate change find acceptance in his diverse flock?

By Marianne Lavelle
The Daily Climate

ARLINGTON, Va.—Dan Misleh, director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, found himself facing a skeptic recently after he outlined the coalition's preparations for Pope Francis' upcoming encyclical on global warming.

The woman didn't doubt the science. She just wasn't sure of the bishops.

Why wouldn't U.S. bishops record messages on climate change to be played in all churches, just as they often do for annual Lenten fundraising drives, she asked. Why not distribute cards in the pews, urging parishioners to sign pledges to care for creation and the poor, through personal action and advocacy on global warming?

"So what you're asking for," Misleh deadpanned, "are miracles?"
Actually, Misleh expects Pope Francis' message on climate change—anticipated in June or July—to resonate far beyond social justice-oriented Catholics like the ones in his audience that day at an annual symposium by the Peace and Justice Commission of the Diocese of Arlington, Va., in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

The climate coalition Misleh leads includes mainstream voices like Catholic Charities USA, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, and the church leadership itself through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, as well as progressive religious groups. The Catholic Climate Covenant already is laying the groundwork for sermon outlines and news conferences and events in the wake of the pope's encyclical, "to keep it in the public eye for as long as we can," Misleh said.

A papal encyclical is meant to provide spiritual guidance to the world's 1.1 billion Roman Catholics, but among advocates of climate action hopes are high that this one will resonate far beyond the church. They are hoping the pope's moral authority can help break the intractable global political gridlock over reducing fossil fuel emissions.

That may be a lot to ask of a message designed to find acceptance in a huge and diverse religious flock. But many have faith that this particular pope—who is timing the letter to influence this year's crucial climate treaty talks in Paris—has the leadership skills to deliver.

"Arguably, Pope Francis is one of the most interesting moral voices on the planet," said Shaun Casey, the special representative on religion and global affairs at the U.S. Department of State, in an interview. "People are listening to him who never paid attention to a Roman Catholic pope, because of his charisma and because of his courage.

"Here you have the leading voice in the largest Christian tradition issuing an explicit call to engagement," Casey said. "I think that's going to have a galvanizing effect on global politics. You cannot ignore a moral issue when a pope of Pope Francis' stature focuses on that. I think it's going to be huge."

**Science and faith**

Among those eagerly awaiting the pope's message is Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a pioneering atmospheric physicist at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, UC San Diego. Ramanathan, who discovered the super-greenhouse effect of chlorofluorocarbons in 1975, co-authored an essay in Science last fall calling for religious leadership on climate change.

"Humanity is at a crossroads," the essay said. "Natural and social scientists have done their part in documenting the irreversible environmental damage we have inflicted, and in spelling out specific mitigation actions. The transformational step may well be a massive mobilization of public opinion by the Vatican and other religions for collective action to safeguard the well-being of both humanity and the environment."

In a recent interview, Ramanathan said that he believed religious leaders can provide insight on climate change that neither scientists nor national leaders could command. "Climate change has
become sort of a moral and ethical issue," said Ramanathan in a recent interview. "We are asking people to change their behavior. I think that religious leaders have much more authority to speak about that than scientists or political leaders."

Although Ramanathan said he has no idea what Pope Francis will say on global warming, he is closer to the process than most, as a member of a little-known but prestigious group of scientists, the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences. Members of the non-sectarian Academy of 80 scientists, which includes several Nobel laureates, receive lifetime appointments from the Vatican, but do not take direction from the church. Their mission is to promote progress in science, and to stimulate an interdisciplinary approach.

Ramanathan, who was appointed to his post by Pope John Paul II, took the task to heart last year and convened what he said was an unprecedented joint meeting of both the Academy's natural and social scientists, as well as philosophers and theologians, to focus on sustainable development, climate change and economic justice.

Participants in the four-day workshop in May 2014 agreed on a statement pointing out the disruption caused by fossil fuel use at the heart of the global energy system, and calling for cooperative, collective action to find a more sustainable engine of development.

At the end of the meeting, Ramanathan said they had an opportunity to brief Pope Francis, a meeting he expected would be short in any case. But because of his busy schedule that day, the pope actually met the group in the parking lot. They were allowed to say two sentences—the ultimate “elevator” speech.

“I cheated. I gave three sentences," Ramanathan recalls. "I said this entire gathering is concerned about climate change, and there are 3 billion poor people who had little to do with climate pollution who will suffer its worst effects. Because of that, I said we would like to ask people to be good stewards of the planet."

Pope Francis is expected to build on the statements his predecessors made on the environment, especially Pope John Paul II's plea in his 1990 World Day of Peace speech that Catholics regard the natural world as God's creation: "We cannot continue to use the goods of the Earth as we have in the past," he said. Pope Benedict, who had solar panels put on the Vatican, said in 2010, "If we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us."

Walter Grazer, who served as the director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' environmental justice program from 1993 to 2007, said it is important to see the pope's upcoming statement in the context of this history. Previous papal teachings on the environment, as well as many statements by the U.S. bishops on climate change, draw on the creation stories of the Catholic tradition, in which humans are stewards of the world of peace and harmony created by God.

"It's both in our scripture, and in our theology; Pope Francis is not going to be coming from outer space," Grazer said. "He has got such a fabulous way of cutting through all the jargon. "He will
have a way of saying it that I think will be unique, but he's going to be following up on these themes from Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict."

Vatican-watchers see signals that Pope Francis plans to offer the strongest papal statement on the environment yet. In a homily he offered last November on All Saints' Day, Pope Francis gave a possible preview of his encyclical when he decried environmental destruction and the culture of waste.

"We are capable of devastating the Earth far better than the angels," he said. "And this is exactly what we are doing, this is what we do: we destroy creation, we devastate cultures, we devastate values, we ravage hope."

**How far will the pope go**

The pope must steer clear of pronouncements that are seen as overtly political, or he will undercut the support he has so far maintained among conservatives in the church.

In a speech delivered last month at Saint Patrick’s Pontifical University, in Maynooth, Ireland, a Vatican official said Pope Francis’ agenda is not “greening the Church or the world.”

“It is a vision of care and protection that embraces the human person and the human environment in all possible dimensions,” said Cardinal Peter Turkson, who gave the speech and helped Pope Francis with the first draft of his encyclical.

Cardinal Turkson repeatedly states in the speech that the pope’s foray into environmental matters is biblically – not politically – rooted.

Samuel Gregg, research director of the conservative Michigan-based Catholic think tank, the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, said he doubts that the pope will weigh in on the science of climate change or on any particular political course of action.

"Individual Catholics—lay people, as well as bishops—have a variety of views on the science of climate change, and as citizens, they're quite entitled to hold those views," he said. "It's not the church's responsibility, nor does it have the authority to say that Catholics must support this treaty, that treaty, or any treaty. It doesn't fall into the area of faith and morals. And this is often a distinction not understood outside the Catholic Church, or even by a good number of Catholics themselves."

The Acton Institute counts young clerics and religious people from the developing world among attendees at its annual seminars on the virtues of unfettered free markets. (A sampling of upcoming Acton University courses: "The Moral Case for Economic Growth," "The Invisible Hand from Adam to Adam Smith," and "The Spiritual Dangers of Doing Good.")

Kishore Jayabalan, director of Acton's Rome office, already has laid the groundwork for courteous disagreement with Francis. "It is one kind of problem if a Catholic disagrees with
papal teaching on the Trinity or abortion; that Catholic’s eternal soul would be considered at risk," he wrote in a recent blog.

"It is an altogether different kind of problem if a Catholic disagrees with the pope on his diplomatic efforts or environmental views… The Church wisely respects differences of opinion on such matters."

Prepared for opposition

Catholics who believe the church has an important role to play on climate change are prepared for opposition to the pope's message.

"Some people are going to gloat: 'The Pope has finally joined the Democratic party,'" Misleh said at the Arlington symposium earlier this year. "Others are going to grumble. They're going to attack the pope: 'He's divisive. He's from Argentina. What do you expect?' Or they're going to try to minimize the importance of an encyclical letter, which is really hard to do if you know what an encyclical letter is."

"I hope a lot more people will say, 'Wow, I didn't even know the church cared about this issue.'" Misleh said.

http://www.dailyclimate.org/tdc-newsroom/2015/03/pope-encyclical-climate-change-green-religion

April 2, 2015

San Francisco Bay Area Refinery Corridor Healing Walks

Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN International) Blog

In the San Francisco Bay Area of California, the Chevron refinery in Richmond is a familiar sight and one that is a constant reminder of the negative health effects that has plagued the community as a result of its presence. Residents living near refineries experience a myriad of health issues ranging from asthma, cancer and various auto immune and respiratory diseases. Unfortunately, this refinery is only one of five in the Bay Area and there is a proposal for a WesPac oil terminal in Pittsburg. In addition to the health risks associated with living near a refinery the people living there are also in close proximity to rail lines that carry crude oil through their communities. These trains travel past schools, community centers, shopping areas and playgrounds. The trains carry potentially explosive crude oil and have a blast radius of one mile, meaning they are continuously threatening the health and livelihoods of the community.

A serious fire at the Chevron refinery in Richmond on August 8, 2012 hospitalized 15,000 people, then a little over two years later a train derailment occurred on December 3, 2014 near an elementary school in the same town. Although the train had not been carrying any crude oil, it is
an example of the grave outcomes that could occur as a result of careless planning and an example of how some communities are turned into sacrifice zones. In response, the community has risen with many successful resistance efforts including in January of 2014, a series of healing walks along the San Francisco Bay Area refinery corridor, which were inspired by the many healing walks and runs which included the Tar Sands Healing Walks in Alberta, Canada, the Longest Walks, and the Peace & Dignity Journeys. The walks were held to bring attention and awareness to the health and environmental impacts of the fossil fuel industry. These walks are rooted in old resistance tactics that Indigenous people have used over the years to protest the taking and polluting of their lands. The main organizer of the walks is long time activist, Pennie Opal Plant of Idle No More San Francisco and Movement Rights.

Idle No More began in Saskatchewan as a small series of teach-ins that would help people protest bills that would strip away at native cultures and has now become one of the largest indigenous mass movements in Canadian history. This movement spread around the world from the Americas to Australia, Europe, Asia and Africa as groups in solidarity began to conduct their own Idle No More type actions in December 2012. A group of Native America grandmothers, mothers, fathers and grandfathers formally created Idle No More San Francisco Bay. They are one of the most active groups in the movement and are comprised of allies from many different backgrounds. Movement Rights is an organization that works to help local communities exercise their legal rights’ over corporations that threaten the future of the residents’ ability to live in the community in a sustainable and healthy manner.

The two organizations inspired people to fight and protect their land while also empowering communities to exercise their legal rights’ over corporate entities. Last year, front-line activists living along the corridor joined them and created the Bay Area Refinery Corridor Coalition (BARCC) and together they are working to host their second annual Connect the Dots: Refinery Corridor Healing Walks. The 2015 walks are held in a four part series, once a month from April through July, they are as follows:

Saturday, April 18th – Pittsburg to Martinez

Sunday, May 17th – Martinez to Benicia

Saturday, June 20th – Benicia to Rodeo

Sunday, July 19th – Rodeo to Richmond

The Walks begin and end with prayers for the water which are conducted by Native American women, and are led by Native American elders and others in prayer following a sacred staff. Walkers stop at the refineries and toxic sites along the way to pray for the land, water and air, as well as creatures living near the refineries and those yet to be born. Support vehicles follow the walkers with water and medics. Participants are asked to sign an agreement to be nonviolent and walkers are encouraged to envision a just transition to a clean and safe energy future and an economy that supports everyone. They are then invited to write or draw these ideas on muslin squares which are sewn together to create a quilt.
To learn more about the Healing Walks and participate in them, please see [http://www.refineryhealingwalks.com/walk1.html](http://www.refineryhealingwalks.com/walk1.html)

The Women’s Earth and Climate Action International’s (WECAN) is honored to have Pennie Opal Plant on our USA Initiative Steering Committee as we continue to support frontline communities. To read more about WECAN’s work to mobilize efforts in the USA please see [http://wecaninternational.org/north-american-regional-convening](http://wecaninternational.org/north-american-regional-convening)


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**April 4, 2015**

What the climate movement must learn from religion

By George Marshall
The Guardian

When preaching to the unconverted, activists need to offer the road to Damascus, not guilt and blame

Last September 40,000 people attended London’s largest ever climate march. This was a big achievement for an issue that struggles to catch people’s attention. After all, as psychologists point out, it is notoriously hard to mobilise people around issues that are invisible, uncertain, set in the future and require them to make sacrifices.

Or is it? This Easter, more than 2 million people will attend church in Britain to celebrate the Christian resurrection. They will agree to constrain their most primal drives in return for long-term rewards that are not just uncertain but fundamentally unknowable.

Put this way it seems obvious that the climate movement might learn some important lessons from religions – the world’s oldest and, in many countries, fastest growing movements. But to say so is anathema and contravenes two rigidly policed boundaries: one between science and faith, and the other between liberal environmentalism and conservative religions. Climate scientists are particularly keen to keep well away from the language of belief. Australia’s chief scientist, Ian Chubb, complains: “I am asked every day ‘do you believe in climate change?’ But it’s not a belief. It’s an understanding and interpretation of the evidence.”

Evidence, though, comes in many forms. Social research shows clearly that the scientific data of climate change has proven unable to galvanise action. Cognitive psychology, supported in recent years by brain neuro-imaging, provides plentiful evidence that our analytic reasoning may accept the data but that we are only compelled to act by emotional triggers based on our values and core identity.
“Belief” is a poisoned word, mocked by sceptical pundits like Nigel Lawson who calls climate change a “new religion”. Comparing empirical science with spiritual revelation is absurd and denigrates both sides. Climate change is not a belief. But it is a conviction: a condition of strongly held opinion, attained through a process of evaluation, leading to a commitment. We know virtually nothing about how people achieve their climate conviction because scientists and activists always assume that it is absorbed, as though through osmosis, by reading a book or watching a documentary. If Christianity were promoted like climate change, all it would need would be a few Gideon’s Bibles and a website.

However, religions understand the process of conviction very well. They have to. The world’s great religions are the winners from thousands of competing religions that managed to find the formulae for moving, exciting and persuading people.

Few have continued the experiments more consistently than the evangelical preachers who compete every day in the cultural marketplace for new converts and donors. Among them is Joel Hunter, the charismatic pastor of Northland church, the 30th largest “megachurch” in the USA.

Hunter preaches often, over the objections of his conservative church members, that climate change is a threat to God’s creation, which he shares with them as a personal “epiphany”. Hunter is an exceptionally skilled social organiser – having built his own congregation to over 15,000 – and enthusiastically accepted my invitation to draw out some key lessons for the climate movement.

For Hunter conviction needs to be carefully nurtured. The creation of a supportive community is essential. Only with this can people openly express their doubts and be offered help to “walk through it together”. He then brings people to a moment of choice and invites them to make a public commitment. In evangelical crusades people are called upon to step forward to accept a change in their life – what Billy Graham called the “altar call”. Finally, Hunter says, demonstrating this commitment to the unconvinced should then become a central part of people’s activism.

John Houghton is the founding co-chair of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and a Methodist lay preacher. In 2002 he created an “altar call” for US evangelical leaders – many of them deeply sceptical about climate change – following a week of scientific study and prayer at Oxford University. Among those attending was Richard Cizik, then the lead political spokesperson for the National Association of Evangelicals, and one of the most powerful figures in the Christian right. To the horror of his colleagues, when Cizik returned he began talking about his “road to Damascus conversion to climate change” all over the US media. Like Houghton, Professor Brian Hoskins, the director of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change, argues that scientific information needs this transformative moment. “Often what we do is provide the landscape in which Saint Paul can have his moment. We are creating the ether in which people can have that illumination.”

Illumination? Conversion? Witness? Epiphany? These words never appear in the discussions of how we might engage people with climate change. Campaigners adopt some of the components – attending a march is a form of public commitment – but without understanding the entire
package. Our websites and blogs proliferate, but we invest little in building a real-life community. We talk incessantly with each other but avoid looking beyond our own tribe.

Because environmentalists do not recognise conviction, we do not recognise despair or grief. We have contempt for doubt and no one is ever at hand to “walk through it together”. We expect people to deal with their hopes and fears in isolation, constrained by a socially policed silence and given no encouragement other than a few energy-saving consumer choices and the odd petition. Nor is there any discussion of forgiveness for ourselves or our forebears. As Hunter pointed out to me, we give people a heavy moral load of guilt, responsibility and blame, but no way out. The critics are right in this regard – if climate change really were a religion, it would be a wretched one, offering guilt, blame and fear but with no recourse to salvation or forgiveness.

Our understanding of climate change is built on scientific evidence, not faith. The faith displayed in the churches, mosques, and temples on every street is built on a deep understanding of human drives and emotions. Only when we put these different parts of our psyche together can we achieve change; to say to anyone who will listen: “I’ve heard the science, I’ve weighed up the evidence. Now I’m convinced. Join me.”

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/04/climate-change-campaigners-evangelism-religion-activism

April 8, 2015

The Church Should Lead, Not Follow on Climate Justice

By Tim DeChristopher
EcoWatch

Recently, there has been a growing discussion of climate change as a moral issue, both in academia and in religious communities. This past fall I spoke at three religion and climate change conferences in as many months, including a conference at Harvard Divinity School, “Spiritual and Sustainable: Religion Responds to Climate Change,” and in June 2015 I will join many global thinkers at a process theology conference on climate change in Claremont, California.

The highly anticipated encyclical from Pope Francis on climate change will undoubtedly contribute and bring attention to this discourse. Frequently, however, the acknowledgment that climate change is a moral issue on which religious people should engage is the end of the conversation. There has not been nearly enough discussion about what it means to engage with this moral challenge. We have not yet answered how and where we should be taking our stand in response to climate change. I argue that when religious people answer the call of the climate crisis, we must bring real moral leadership to the climate justice movement.
The first kind of engagement with the climate crisis is usually a change in consumer behavior, reducing one’s personal carbon footprint. In our consumer-focused society, it is not surprising that the first obvious role to which we turn is that of a consumer. We see thousands of advertisements a day that remind us we are consumers. So when we seek to make an impact, we immediately think of our power as consumers. After first changing our personal carbon footprints, we then turn to our collective consumption and try to impact our organizational carbon footprint. In the build up to the pope’s encyclical, I’ve already heard some talk about getting Catholic churches to weatherize their buildings and put solar panels on their roofs.

This is useful and important work, but, as the history of the climate movement demonstrates, this obsession over consumer behavior has limited benefit and tends to reinforce the mindset that created the problem in the first place. We got to this point of environmental crisis by “buying” into the notion that our value as people lies in our role as consumers. Furthermore, this focus on consumer activism naturally becomes a rich person’s movement. The mantra of “vote with your dollars” means that those without many votes (dollars) don’t matter very much.

Part of the role of the church is to remind us that we are more than consumers. Like many organizations, churches can bring to life our role as citizens, community members and family members. In addition, churches are uniquely suited to develop our identities as children of God, pieces of an interdependent web of existence, or bearers of divine sparks of creativity. Connecting with these nonconsumer ways of being in the world is an adequate definition of empowerment, which is the basis of any social movement. A movement empowered by the elevation of these nonconsumer identities is a necessity for the revolutionary change that the climate crisis demands of our energy, political and social systems.

Thus far, religious communities have primarily engaged with climate activism by getting behind the climate movement. When 350.org launches a divestment campaign, churches and denominations get on board to divest their endowments. When Bill McKibben asks clergy to participate in civil disobedience, they show up with their collars on. But waiting to be told what to do is not moral leadership. As a veteran of the climate movement, I suggest that we don’t need religious communities merely to join the climate movement. We need religious communities to lead, challenge and deepen the climate movement.

The first imperative of moral leadership in the climate movement is to speak the hard truths about the nature of our challenge. Implicit in the idea of climate justice is the goal of keeping most fossil fuel reserves in the ground. There may be a way to do that while still ensuring the profits of the corporations that expect to extract those fossil fuels, and certain misguided initiatives like the United States Climate Action Partnership have pursued that agenda. But what separates the climate justice movement from other climate-related players is the mission of keeping those fossil fuels in the ground without guaranteeing future profits to the corporations who have already profited from exploitation.

This means that our agenda in the climate justice movement involves costing the richest and most politically powerful corporations in the world trillions of dollars in lost future profits. Keeping those fossil fuels in the ground also means costing some of the individuals at the top of that industry, like the Koch brothers, billions of dollars in expected profits. It is worth
remembering that because of its structural nature, this is an industry that has killed for profit throughout its history. In my home state of West Virginia, which has been extracting fossil fuels longer than anywhere else in this country, coal has cost countless lives and has left the state as the least livable in the nation. As the impacts of climate change are increasingly felt, fossil fuels cost more lives around the world every year.

Not only has the fossil fuel industry continued trading human lives for profit, but, since it is difficult to convince free people to poison their own water sources or blow up their own backyards, it has increasingly killed democracy in order to keep killing people for profit. The exploits of the Koch brothers in this area are well known, and we as a nation have normalized the way that oil companies leverage our government to launch wars and overthrow governments that are not conducive to extraction. In Colorado, where citizens launched a ballot initiative to give local municipalities a say about fracking in their towns, Anadarko and other fracking firms pledged $50 million to fight the push for local democracy. From Nigeria to Ecuador, the oil industry has proven itself willing to assassinate activists who stand in the way of exploitation.

In short, the fossil fuel industry has made it quite clear that they will not relinquish those trillions in future profits without an intense fight. To be at all serious about climate justice means being willing to engage in a real struggle that will inevitably demand real sacrifices. Moral leadership in this movement requires admitting the truth that if we are at all successful in undermining the future profits of the fossil fuel industry, there will be a backlash that will likely cost some of us our lives. Regardless of what roles we play in the movement or what tactics we use, if we are to be truly effective, we will be drawing a target on our backs at which the fossil fuel industry will take aim. If we intend to take a stand against that kind of structural evil, we will have to be standing on solid rock.

Compounding this challenge of getting in the way of the profits of the richest and most ruthless corporations is the fact that we need to do so during a time of corporate ascendancy, when both parties of the United States government are beholden to corporations. As Naomi Klein argues so forcefully in her 2014 book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, the ideological victory of free-market fundamentalism is our major obstacle to making the changes that are necessary to address the climate crisis. Part of the reason that mainstream climate organizations have embraced false solutions is that adequate climate solutions are politically unfeasible in our current system of corporate rule. The work of revolutionizing our energy economy must also involve ending corporate personhood and creating a democracy in the process. If we are going to take a stand for that kind of revolutionary change, we will have to be standing on solid rock.

In addition, we are no longer tackling this challenge from the position we were in in 1992, when we had the opportunity to make a smooth transition to an ideal, healthy world. We are doing this work in 2015, after decades of emissions increases, despite the warnings. This means that, even if we are as successful as possible at reducing emissions, we will still face massive impacts and hardships on a scale likely to be catastrophic to our global civilization. If history is any guide for these times of desperation, those in power will probably use desperate measures to hold on to their power by scapegoating certain classes of people and by pitting us against one another. I am convinced that our greatest vulnerabilities to climate change are not physical conditions like low-
lying cities, but rather our social divisions—classism, racism, and sexism. These divisions make us vulnerable to responding to crisis with fear and hatred rather than solidarity, with competition rather than cooperation. These are the scenarios that turn hardship to horror. This means that even as we revolutionize our energy, economic, and political systems, we must do so in a way that also dismantles classism, white supremacy, patriarchy, xenophobia, and other social evils. If we are going to stand against that kind of structural evil, we will have to be standing on solid rock.

These necessary goals are so bold as to seem unreasonable. As has been the case in every social movement that has struggled for fundamental change, there will undoubtedly be setbacks and points at which there can be no reasonable expectation of success. The movements that persevere are those which find a form of hope, a reason to continue the struggle, even in those dark times. The conventional wisdom of the climate movement is that optimism is the only form of hope, for without optimism people will have no reason to continue the struggle. But optimism is a silly and fragile kind of hope. This is the most important point around which religious leaders must not follow the movement, but must provide moral leadership. I believe that a major reason why religious communities have played an important role in so many social movements is that in those moments of despair, when optimism is ridiculous, religious people base their hope on faith and continue the struggle. In those dark moments we continue to struggle for justice, because that is what it means to be faithful to the people we love, to be faithful to the world we love, and to be faithful to a God who loves the world.

Reconnecting and reaffirming those loves is the critical work of moral leadership in this movement. As much as we need to fully recognize the harsh truth of the nature of our challenge, we must just as fully affirm with gratitude the goodness and beauty that we love in the world, in God, and in each other. Our faithfulness to this love becomes the bedrock of a more resilient kind of hope, a hope that doesn’t bend to the winds of political feasibility. As Katy Allen, a rabbi and chaplain at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, said at the recent HDS conference, “There’s never a time when it’s too late to redefine your hope.”

As religious leaders, we are not called to be optimistic; we are called to be faithful to our love. We are called to the climate movement, not merely to add respectability with our signatures on a petition. We are called not just to provide photo ops with collars out front. As people of faith, we are called to be the rock of the climate justice movement, the solid rock of hope that remains strong on the darkest days. Let us pray we are up to the challenge.

Tim DeChristopher’s article was originally published in Harvard Divinity Bulletin, Winter/Spring 2015 issue. DeChristopher is a second-year master of divinity student at Harvard Divinity School, studying for Unitarian Universalist ministry. The story of his 2008 act of civil disobedience disrupting a Bureau of Land Management oil and gas auction is chronicled in the film Bidder70.

https://ecowatch.com/2015/04/08/tim-dechrisopher-climate-change/
April 11, 2015

Anticipating Pope Francis’ Forthcoming Encyclical on the Human-Earth Relationship

By Jame Schaefer
Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale

Momentum is building for the first encyclical dedicated to ecological and planetary problems caused by human activities. Forthcoming this summer from Pope Francis, speculation is ongoing about what he will write. According to Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace who prepared a first draft of the encyclical, it will focus on “human ecology” and “explore the relationship between care for creation, integral human development and concern for the poor.” The cardinal underscored the importance of Pope Francis’ encyclical in light of events that are occurring this year—the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July, the United Nations’ General Assembly consideration of goals for sustainable development in September in New York City, and the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change in December in Paris. Apparently Pope Francis intends to influence these proceedings.

Read full essay: http://fore.yale.edu/files/Schaefer--Anticipating_Francis_Encyclical.pdf

April 15, 2015

Pope Francis throws the weight of his office behind tackling climate change

By David Gibson
Religion News Service

NEW YORK (RNS) The Vatican is set to host a major conference on climate change this month that will feature leading researchers on global warming and an opening address by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The meeting, which the Vatican detailed on its website late Tuesday (April 14), is another sign of Pope Francis’ “green agenda” and another potential red flag for conservatives who are already alarmed over an expected papal teaching document on the environment that is scheduled for release this summer.

The one-day summit on April 28 will also include participants from major world religions and aims to “elevate the debate on the moral dimensions of protecting the environment in advance of the papal encyclical,” as the papal document is known.

Another goal, says a statement on a Vatican website, is to highlight “the intrinsic connection between respect for the environment and respect for people — especially the poor, the excluded, victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, children, and future generations.”
In addition to the keynote speech by Ban, participants will hear from Jeffrey Sachs, a prominent American economist and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. Church sources said that leading scientists in the climate change field will also take part.

Cardinal Peter Turkson is leading the drafting process of Francis’ encyclical on the environment, which is expected to come out in June or July. 

Also addressing the conference will be Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, a top Vatican official who is leading the drafting process of Francis’ encyclical on the environment, which is expected to come out in June or July.

An encyclical is one of the most authoritative documents a pope can issue, and church sources say this one has been the focus of intense lobbying by Catholics, especially American conservatives who believe that climate change is being overhyped or that human activity is not a factor and that remedies may do more harm than good.

Others simply believe that Francis — who signaled that environmental protection would be a hallmark of his papacy when he took the name of the unofficial patron saint of ecology, Francis of Assisi — should not be weighing in on issues that touch on technical and scientific matters that some contend are still debatable.

Francis “is an ideologue and a meddlesome egoist,” Maureen Mullarkey wrote in an especially trenchant column at the conservative journal First Things about what she called the pope’s “premature, intemperate policy endorsements” on the environment.

Other Catholic conservatives have delivered similar critiques, while some, such as author George Weigel and Princeton political philosopher Robert George, have sought to downplay the import of any statements the pope might make on the environment.

The Vatican’s Council for Justice and Peace, which is led by Turkson and is spearheading the drafting of the encyclical, has been a special focus of lobbying by climate change skeptics who hope to influence the final version, church sources say.

Liberals and environmentalists, as well as the Obama administration, have embraced the pontiff’s “green” agenda and are hoping Francis will give support to their side.

Francis himself does not appear to have heeded the critics so far.

Though his two immediate predecessors, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and St. John Paul II, also spoke out strongly on the Christian duty to protect the environment, Francis has done so more frequently and forcefully, and at a time when climate change has become a hot-button political issue.

“(I)t is man who has slapped nature in the face,” Francis told reporters in January. “We have in a sense taken over nature,” he said, adding that he believed global warming is “mostly” the result...
of human activity. In February, he said “a Christian who does not protect creation … is a Christian who does not care about the work of God.”

Francis has also expressed disappointment in the last round of international negotiations to reduce greenhouse gases, calling them “nothing much.” He has said he wants his encyclical to come out in time to influence the next round, set for Paris in November.

This month’s Vatican summit on the environment appears to be another effort to try to press the pope’s agenda, and it’s a topic that’s likely to remain on the front burner as Francis prepares to make his first U.S. visit in September, which will include an address to the U.N. General Assembly in New York.


April 15, 2015

Panel contemplates why the papal encyclical on the environment will matter

By Jamie Manson
National Catholic Reporter

New Haven, Conn. - As anticipation builds in progressive Catholic circles about the forthcoming papal encyclical on the environment, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, co-directors of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, are busy contemplating its potential impact on stakeholders outside of the Catholic church, including environmental scientists, lawmakers, and leaders of world religions.

To explore the possibilities, Tucker and Grim gathered a panel of experts across various disciplines to discuss "Pope Francis and the Environment: Why his new climate encyclical matters" last week at Yale University.

"This encyclical is by no means the first word the Catholic church has spoken on the environment," Teresa Berger, professor of Catholic theology at Yale Divinity School, reminded the audience in her introductory statement. "But it has not been spoken of before in an encyclical."

The church's previous teachings seem to have borne some fruit in the consciences of Catholics in the United States. Peter Crane, dean of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, said that 70 percent of U.S. Catholics believe that global warming is happening versus 57 percent of non-Catholic Christians. Catholics also express higher support for climate change policies than other Christians.
Crane also noted that the timing of the encyclical is of crucial significance to the global discussion of the environmental crisis. It will appear just months before the pope addresses the United Nations during his visit to the U.S. in late September and, even more importantly, before a U.N. climate change conference, to be held in early December in Paris.

Crane said the encyclical does not come in isolation, but is part of a process of putting the pieces back together after the 2009 U.N. climate conference in Copenhagen "did not live up to what we hoped it might."

The encyclical, he said, will "give new prominence to the ethical and moral dimensions of environmental degradation," moving it beyond the usual focus on science, technology and economics.

Speaking to the ethical dimensions of the forthcoming document, Margaret Farley, Gilbert L. Stark Professor Emerita of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School, told the audience that encyclicals do not necessarily teach absolute doctrine, but rather offer an articulation of religious and moral understandings and aim to clarify religious beliefs and ethical issues.

While not every reader may want to act in accordance with the encyclical's teaching, Farley said, "attention will be paid to what is offered. Dialogue may ensue. New experiences of moral claims will awaken within us." It also has the potential to be a significant contribution to the church's 125-year-old tradition of Catholic social teaching, she said.

The encyclical may even impact the way in which the hierarchy views the environmental degradation caused by overpopulation, as well as "women's burdens which escalate with the devastation of resources of water and food."

Though Farley refrained from saying that a change in the Catholic church's teaching on contraception would be key to addressing overpopulation, she did note that the encyclical could go a long way to understanding and remediying these kinds of challenges facing women and families.

"If it fails to do so, the crisis before us may only increase," she concluded.

More than two-thirds of the world's population lives in Asia, which is where Tucker has spent much of her career as an expert in world religions and ecology. She said watching the rapid changes in industrial development in China and India over the past 40 years has motivated her passion for environmental justice.

"There are over 2 billion people yearning for the fruits of modernization, but the cost has been immense: pollution of water, air and soil," she said. "The health of our planet is gravely stressed, especially our ecosystems."

Tucker said she believes the encyclical "will awaken an even broader religious response among world's traditions," including Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Confucianism.
Pope Francis, she said, will "urge leaders to join him in speaking out about the human suffering being caused by climate change, especially for the poor. This will encourage religious leaders to address these issues in the language of their own traditions."

In places like the Himalayas, religious leaders are already taking significant action to address climate change, said Dekila Chungyalpa, a visiting fellow at the School of Forestry and Environmental Science.

Seven major rivers are sourced from the Himalayas, including the Ganges, Indus, Yangtze and Yellow. As a result, its inhabitants are keenly aware of the impact that climate change is already having on flooding, wildlife, and tree-line shifting.

Unlike in the U.S., where there is still significant doubt and disbelief about climate change, Chungyalpa says that in the Himalayas, there is "too much awareness."

"In most places I've worked around the world, people believe it is climate change that is causing these problems," she said.

This often leads to what she called "a state of paralysis" because people do not know who should be responsible for the crisis. In order to empower communities, Chungyalpa has been educating Buddhist monks and nuns in monasteries throughout the Himalayas with information about global warming and environmental science.

Some of these monasteries have 5,000 monks and nuns, which creates a massive carbon footprint, she said.

As a result of Chungyalpa's project, 55 monasteries are now participating in this "eco-monastic" movement. And their moral leadership, she said, has had a ripple effect: When monasteries in Nepal decided to put solar panels on top of their temples, neighboring shops and restaurants did the same.

The encyclical, she said, is important because it widens the community of support around fighting climate change. This is a "moment of convergence" among religious leaders, she noted: "We're seeing a chorus of voices coming together around the world."

One place we haven't seen voices come together to confront climate change is in the U.S. Congress. Douglas Kysar, a law professor at Yale Law School, said he hopes Pope Francis' encyclical will help our elected officials seriously consider our obligation to planetary stewardship, particularly the pope's idea of an "integral economy that encompasses the concerns of economic justice, true human development, and global solidarity."

Policies meant to address climate change have failed, Kysar said, because "the process has been held hostage by this country, which has found its own political process held hostage by economic interests."
An economic system centered on the value of money "needs to plunder nature," Kysar told the audience. The current system, he said, "destroys creation and ravages hope."

For the struggle against global warming to be effective, therefore, we need both a transformed economic system and a transformation of human consciousness.

"This encyclical will hope to diagnose and minister to those underlying pathologies," Kysar concluded. "So that if we do indeed heal the planet, we may also have a humanity worthy of inheriting it."

*The full video of the panel discussion is available on the website of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.*

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**April 27, 2015**

Pope Francis Steps Up Campaign on Climate Change, to Conservatives’ Alarm

By Coral Davenport and Laurie Goodstein
New York Times

WASHINGTON — Since his first homily in 2013, [Pope Francis](http://www.vatican.va) has preached about the need to protect the earth and all of creation as part of a broad message on the environment. It has caused little controversy so far.

But now, as Francis prepares to deliver what is likely to be a highly influential encyclical this summer on environmental degradation and the effects of human-caused [climate change](http://climatechange.nationalgeographic.com) on the poor, he is alarming some conservatives in the United States who are loath to see the Catholic Church reposition itself as a mighty voice in a cause they do not believe in.

As part of the effort for the encyclical, top [Vatican](http://www.vatican.va) officials will hold a summit meeting Tuesday to build momentum for a campaign by Francis to urge world leaders to enact a sweeping United Nations [climate change](http://climatechange.nationalgeographic.com) accord in Paris in December. The accord would for the first time commit every nation to enact tough new laws to cut the emissions that cause global warming.

The [Vatican](http://www.vatican.va) summit meeting will focus on the links between poverty, economic development and climate change, with speeches and panel discussions by climate scientists and religious leaders, and economists like Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia. The United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, who is leading efforts to forge the Paris accord, will deliver the opening address.
Vatican officials, who have spent more than a year helping Francis prepare his message, have convened several meetings already on the topic. Last month, they met with the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Gina McCarthy.

In the United States, the encyclical will be accompanied by a 12-week campaign, now being prepared with the participation of some Catholic bishops, to raise the issue of climate change and environmental stewardship in sermons, homilies, news media interviews and letters to newspaper editors, said Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant in Washington.

But the effort is already angering a number of American conservatives, among them members of the Heartland Institute, a libertarian group partly funded by the Charles G. Koch Foundation, run by the billionaire industrialist Koch brothers, who oppose climate policy.

“The Holy Father is being misled by ‘experts’ at the United Nations who have proven unworthy of his trust,” Joseph Bast, the president of the Heartland Institute, said in a statement. “Though Pope Francis’ heart is surely in the right place, he would do his flock and the world a disservice by putting his moral authority behind the United Nations’ unscientific agenda on the climate.”

The institute plans to hold a news conference and panel event in Rome on Tuesday in protest of the Vatican summit meeting.

But climate policy advocates see a scheduled address by the pope to Congress in September as a potent moment — about 30 percent of members of Congress are Catholics, more than belong to any other religion, according to a study published this year by the Pew Research Center.

Speaker John A. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, invited the pope to speak to Congress, but some Catholics say that Mr. Boehner should prepare for some uncomfortable moments. Mr. Boehner, who is Catholic, has often criticized the Obama administration for what he calls its “job killing” environmental agenda.

“I think Boehner was out of his mind to invite the pope to speak to Congress,” said the Rev. Thomas Reese, an analyst at the National Catholic Reporter. “Can you imagine what the Republicans will do when he says, ‘You’ve got to do something about global warming’?”

In addition, a number of Catholics — including Jeb Bush, Marco Rubio, Bobby Jindal, Chris Christie and Rick Santorum — are gearing up to compete for the Republican presidential nomination, and most of them question the science of human-caused climate change.

Several conservative Catholic intellectuals who expect the pope’s message to bolster the vast majority of scientists who hold that climate change is induced by human activity, including Robert P. George, a Princeton law professor, have published articles reminding Catholics that papal pronouncements on science are not necessarily sound or binding.

Maureen Mullarkey, a painter and writer, said in the conservative journal First Things that “Francis sullies his office by using demagogic formulations to bully the populace into reflexive climate action with no more substantive guide than theologized propaganda.”
Timothy E. Wirth, vice chairman of the United Nations Foundation, said: “We’ve never seen a pope do anything like this. No single individual has as much global sway as he does. What he is doing will resonate in the government of any country that has a leading Catholic constituency.”

Francis, however, is not the first pope to push an environmental message. His predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, called the “green pope” by some, wrote about the environment and the impact of climate change in documents that have been collected in a book, “The Environment.” But Catholic and climate policy experts acknowledge that those works had little substantive impact on global warming policy.

Francis’ policy moves on climate change, particularly his use of the encyclical, go far beyond what has come before. Catholics point to other papal encyclicals that have had public policy impacts: Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical on labor and workers’ rights is believed to have spurred the workers’ rights movement and led to the creation of labor unions.

“I think this moves the needle,” said Charles J. Reid Jr., a professor at the University of St. Thomas School of Law. “Benedict was an ivory-tower academic. He wrote books and hoped they would persuade by reason. But Pope Francis knows how to sell his ideas. He is engaged in the marketplace.”

Francis, who chose the name of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment, has had far more influence on the church and public. Born in Argentina, Francis draws cheering crowds from around the world and millions of followers to his social media accounts. He has been embraced for his humility, antipoverty agenda, progressive statements on social issues and efforts to reform the Vatican bureaucracy.

This month he said in a Twitter post: “We need to care for the earth so that it may continue, as God willed, to be a source of life for the entire human family.”

The pope’s influence on the Paris climate accord may be strongest in Latin America. In past years, Latin American countries have resisted efforts to enact climate policy, arguing that developing economies should not have to cut emissions while developed economies continue to pollute.

But over the past year, some Latin American governments have signaled a willingness to step forward on climate policy, and this year Mexico became one of the first nations to submit a plan ahead of the Paris talks.

“This pope is more than just a church leader — he is a political leader, particularly in Latin America,” said Romina Picolotti, president of the Center for Human Rights and Environment in Argentina. “Youth in Latin America are really following him closely.”

April 27, 2015

Pope Francis poised to weigh in on climate change with major document

By Michelle Boorstein
Washington Post

The largely secular climate movement is about to get what some predict will be a historic boost from an intriguing source: Pope Francis.

Francis is putting the final touches on what may be the most authoritative papal teaching ever on the environment, a topic bound up with economics, global development and politics and thus very controversial. Even though no one outside Francis’s inner circle has seen the document — called an encyclical — it’s already being lambasted by some religious and political conservatives and held up by environmentalists as a potential turning point in their movement.

The encyclical is expected to be published in early summer and, church historians say, represents the first time in memory that such an important papal writing is being timed by a pope to influence a civil process — in this case, a major U.N. summit in December on climate change.

Based on remarks and writings by the pope and his close advisers, most pope-watchers think Francis will raise urgent concerns about global warming and highlight human impact on climate change. More broadly, they expect Francis to frame with new emphasis the Earth’s health as a core Catholic social justice concern, up there with topics such as poverty and abortion.

Global inequality and the destruction of the environment “are the greatest threats we face as a human family today,” Cardinal Peter Turkson, a Vatican official who helped write the first draft of the encyclical, said in a March lecture seen as a preview of the document. The pope, Turkson said, “is not making some political comment about the relative merits of capitalism and communism. . . . he is pointing to the ominous signs in nature that suggest that humanity may now have tilled too much and kept too little.”

After decades of secular campaigns that failed to move the needle significantly, environmentalists are optimistic about the potential of having religious groups more fully on board in combatting global warming. They have spent years courting skeptical evangelicals, many of whom have begun using the term “creation care.” The recent film “Noah” was seen by many as bringing environmental religion to the big screen, but nothing has been as sweeping as a papal encyclical.

“This has the outreach potential that nothing else has had,” said Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, one of the biggest in a cluster of new groups aimed at connecting faith communities with environmental concerns.

The environmental movement, Tucker said, has been until now largely focused on finding secular solutions in law, science and politics — not ethics and religion. “This is a new moment, when scientists, lawyers and policy people are saying: We need this moral transformation.”
Environmentalism and global warming are not new topics for the Catholic Church. Church leaders — including Pope Benedict — in the last couple decades have been slowly connecting the environmental, moral and economic costs of globalization. However, these connections have never been put forth fully in an encyclical, considered uniquely authoritative in Catholicism.

But it remains to be seen how Francis will link the environment to ethics and theology. That’s where controversy may ensue.

Theologians say he’s likely to place environmental issues into a broader framework he and Benedict have been calling integral ecology, the idea that God wrote a plan for how all living things fit together, a plan that calls for not only less waste, pollution and income disparity but for traditional marriage and sexual mores.

But will Francis vaguely mention sex and family as part of the “integral ecology” or hit it explicitly, as Benedict did? How strongly will he make the case that humans are causing global warming - a case that many Republicans and many conservative Christians don’t buy, think is dangerous to the free market and don’t think a priest - even a pope - is qualified to make? And will he break new theological ground in how he frames care for the environment - describing it not only as a means of helping man (who Genesis says God meant to have “dominion” over other living things) but with value independent of humans?

These are sweeping, controversial questions. And because Francis is a figure not only for Catholics his answers have the potential to impact development and politics way outside the Catholic community.

Also unknown is how, specifically, Francis will urge his church to respond. Will bishops be expected to prioritize the topic in their investments, political efforts, sermons?

Indeed, Catholicism has a big stake in this encyclical. Such documents are considered among the most authoritative teachings of the church, but in recent decades Catholics regularly blow off their mandates on topics like contraception and divorce. Francis’s writing will push the question: How much influence can even this pope have on modern behavior — Catholic and otherwise?

Skeptics have been speaking out for months on both theological and scientific fronts.

Among the most prominent U.S. Christian conservatives is Princeton University Professor Robert George, a Catholic who wrote in the well-respected Christian conservative journal First Things that Catholics are required to follow the pope’s general message on morals — in this case, to care for the environment — but not when he wanders into areas such as scientific fact.

“The Pope has no special knowledge, insight or teaching authority pertaining to matters of empirical fact of the sort investigated by, for example, physicists and biologists..” George wrote in a widely cited article earlier this year. “Pope Francis does not know whether, or to what extent, the climate changes (in various directions) of the past several decades are anthropogenic – and God is not going to tell him.”
Maureen Mullarkey, another First Things writer, put it more bluntly: “He is an ideologue and a meddlesome egoist,” she said, citing Francis’s involvement in the Middle East and US-Cuba relations. “Megalomania sends him galloping into geopolitical – and now meteorological – thickets.”

While polls show significant concern about global climate change in most countries, researchers have found that a country’s level of religiosity has almost no relationship to environmental views.

That’s not as true for more traditional believers, particularly evangelical Christians, who have long been wary of environmentalism, which they worry is Earth-worship that has gone overboard and become essentially its own religion.

Christiana Peppard, a theologian who focuses on environmental ethics at Fordham University, predicted Francis may break ground in potentially two areas.

He will frame environmental concerns other popes have voiced in recent decades in an extremely focused way: how they impact the poor. This could include references to the ways in which woes like poor water quality and weather disasters disproportionately harm the world’s poor. And, Peppard predicted, he may take existing church teaching on the environment, which has always been focused on “effects on the human and the dignity of the human” and possibly posit that the environment “is a gift from God, and that humans have duties to creation as such, not just in light of human concerns.”

These are the areas that have the potential for controversy – how strongly he links human behavior to climate change and whether he sets forth an idea of creation that doesn’t have humans alone at the center.

Chad Pecknold, a theologian at Catholic University, predicted Francis will do neither, particularly the former.

“The moment he would make a strong scientific claim about humans’ role, those Catholics who would dissent from that view would have a claim within the tradition to say the pope has overstepped his bounds,” which would squander a chance to broaden how believers think about the environment, Pecknold said.

He believes Francis will characterize “the human role” in global warming in Biblical terms: That our disconnect with the environment began with Adam and Eve, and the “turning away from our dependence on the order of Creation.” That turning away would include divorce, gay marriage, “and most especially abortion and euthanasia as evidence of a ‘throwaway culture,’” Pecknold said, using a term Francis often says about everything from treatment of the elderly to addicts.

However given Turkson’s and Francis’s previous comments about the human impact on climate change, it seems likely the pope will prescribe both policy and spiritual remedies.
U.S. politics-watchers are anxious to see how top Catholic Republicans from House Speaker John Boehner to potential presidential contenders including Jeb Bush, Rick Santorum and Marco Rubio respond to the encyclical, which will be typically Catholic if it emphasizes as expected major limits to the free market.

Robert Nelson, a University of Maryland economist who focuses on environmentalism and religion, predicted the encyclical “will go over well everywhere except with Republicans.” However, he said, a group that often talks about ethics being too absent from public life could find themselves tempted by a pope putting care for creation back into a traditional framework.

Anthony Annett is a climate change advisor and Catholic writer brought on to the prominent Earth Institute at Columbia University to help bridge the gap between environmentalists and religious communities. Considering Francis chose to name his papacy after the patron saint of animals and the environment and is the most retweeted person on the planet, expectations among environmentalists are soaring.

“I’ve never seen such buzz about a papal document in my life,” he said. “There are a lot of expectations about a document no one has actually seen. And with Francis, expect the unexpected.”

Michelle Boorstein is the Post’s religion reporter, where she reports on the busy marketplace of American religion.


April 28, 2015

Vatican presses politicians on climate change

By Roger Harrabin, BBC environment analyst

BBC

The Vatican Science Academy has challenged politicians to end their "infatuation" with a form of economic growth that is ruining the Earth.

The academy said that nations were measuring their wealth by GDP (Gross Domestic Product), taking no account of the harm caused by business practises.

It urged countries to act as stewards of God’s creation.

The statements are likely to influence the Pope's coming Encyclical on climate change.
An Cambridge Economics professor, Partha Dasgupta, told the academy's climate conference in St Peter's Basilica: "GDP is a disgraceful index because it does not count depreciation of our assets - including damage to Mother Nature, the most fundamental asset we have."

Cardinal Peter Turkson, who helped write the coming Encyclical - an official statement - said: "For humans to degrade the integrity of the Earth by constant changes in its climate; by stripping its natural forests; to contaminate Earth's water, land and air with poisonous substances - all of these are sins.

"There is an all-embracing imperative to protect our garden, our hope. We must move away from our unthinking infatuation with GDP."

**Uncertainties**

The academy heard speech after speech urging the moral case for protecting the climate for future generations.

Meanwhile, a small group funded by a US climate contrarian body in Chicago has been in Rome rallying against the Vatican's climate drive. One of the participants, Christopher Monckton, said the Pope "should listen to both sides of the scientific argument... not only people of one, narrow, poisonous political and scientific viewpoint".

Inside the conference itself, the astronomer Lord Rees, former President of the UK's Royal Society, was putting just such a balanced view.

He acknowledged uncertainties over climate science, especially over how water vapour and clouds would react to warming.

He said some people were willing to bet on a low level of warming, mitigated later in the century by new technologies more affordable in a richer economy. But, he said, the risks of triggering an irreversible catastrophe lasting thousands of years was too great.

"It would be shameful if our inheritance was a depleted and hazardous world," he said.

The Church is hoping to make an impact in a year of key UN meetings on Sustainable Development Goals, development finance and climate.

The Encyclical is expected to describe action to cut emissions as "a moral and religious imperative, highlighting the intrinsic connection between respect for the environment and respect for people - especially the poor, children, and future generations".

The Pope is hoping to build agreement among all religions on the moral obligation to protect the environment.

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, who heads the Academy, said the Encyclical would not be the highest level of proclamation from the Pope, which is reserved for issues of Faith.
But he said it was important for all the world's 1.2 billion Catholics to take it seriously. If any Catholic wanted to ignore it they would need "very good reasons - based not on personal or political opinion, but on science".

For some Catholics, this may prove an unwelcome Papal intervention into a highly politicised subject.

But the aid agency Cafod said its poll with YouGov showed the vast majority (70%) of Catholics say their community will heed the message of the Pope on climate change.

Whether it will prove persuasive for American Republican lawmakers - around a third of whom are Catholic - is yet to be seen.


April 30, 2015

Should the Thirty Meter Telescope Be Built?

PBS Hawaii

Construction of a Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea has been brought to a temporary halt as protests over building the 18-story high telescope stretch across the globe. Plans to build the $1.4 billion telescope have been seven years in the making, but opposition only gained momentum recently amid growing concern over further astronomy-related development on land Native Hawaiians consider sacred. Malia Mattoch moderates the discussion.

Tonight’s panelists include (In alphabetical order):

Paul Coleman, Astrophysicist, Institute for Astronomy, University of Hawaii-Manoa

Richard Ha, Hawaii Island Farmer and Businessman

Jon Osorio, Board President, KAHEA, a Hawaiian-Environmental Alliance

Kealoha Pisciotta, President, Mauna Kea Anaina Hou

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April 30, 2015

Pope Francis has given the climate movement just what it needed — faith

By Chris Mooney
Washington Post

This week — and it still feels strange to write this — the major climate change news story came out of the Vatican.

There, at the center of global Catholicism, church leaders joined with politicians, scientists and economists to draft a statement declaring not only that climate change is a “scientific reality” but also that there’s a moral and religious responsibility to do something about it. And an even more powerful statement is expected soon from Pope Francis himself, who is slated to release a major papal encyclical on the environment this summer.

All of this is enough to make environmentalists, members of a traditionally secular movement, nearly rhapsodic. After a history of being rather too technocratic and wonky, there seems to be a growing realization in green circles about the importance of an alliance with the world of faith.

This has been a long time coming. The effort to mobilize religious believers to worry about climate as part of a broader, biblically grounded “creation care” mandate has a long history (though it has traditionally focused more on evangelicals than Catholics). Books have been written about it, and one of its major spokespeople — Katharine Hayhoe, an evangelical climate scientist at Texas Tech University — was named one of Time magazine’s 100 most influential people last year.

And then there’s the 2014 biblical epic film “Noah,” whose director, Darren Aronofsky, called its subject the “first environmentalist.” It grossed more than $300 million worldwide with a message about the relationship between faith and saving the planet.

Despite all that, having Francis on board takes it all to a much higher level (pun intended). The reason, as David Roberts of Vox has written, is that it makes the climate debate moral, not scientific or technocratic. And when issues are moralized, people feel before they think and refuse to compromise. It may not be what we strictly call “rational,” but it is politically powerful.

Roberts notes that there has been a long history on the left of failing to adequately moralize the climate issue — and contrasts this with the growing movement across the country in which students are pushing their universities to divest from fossil-fuel stocks (which, Roberts argues, is an inherently moral stance). Actually, though, there is another important and oft-discussed example of a time when a leader chose not to moralize the climate issue — President Obama in 2008-2010.
Those were the days, during the Great Recession, when the White House tried to persuade the world to act on climate change through a message about “green jobs.” This was about the economy, the White House told us. And, it was about advancing new technologies — smart meters and wind farms and solar panels.

What happened is that we largely got the technology — and the ever-greening economy. Many would say it was politically impossible no matter the argument, but the fact was that climate solutions couldn’t make it through Congress.

Obama II on climate change, though, has often adopted a moral framing, making sure to talk about “our children,” our “grandchildren” and “future generations.” It still may not be enough to get any legislation through this Congress — and in his second term, the president may be less guarded and more frank in his approach — but it also reflects a broadly shifting message. And that’s important: Obama is pursuing controversial executive action to stem climate change, and winning the public on the question will be part of the battle.

The question remains, however, why this has been so long in coming. Why have environmentalists (and their scientific allies) been so focused on talking about policies like cap-and-trade, on tracking emissions targets and parts per million, rather than moralizing the issue?

Here, I think we need to turn to the research of social scientist Jonathan Haidt of New York University, famed for his insights about the different moral triggers and motivations of liberals and conservatives. One of the messages of Haidt’s book *The Righteous Mind* is that the left and the right tend to have different moral “foundations,” by which he means that they get emotional and intense about different kinds of moral situations.

In Haidt’s analysis, it isn’t that the left (or environmental left) lacks emotionality, but rather that conservatives sense a broader suite of moral foundations related to loyalty, respect for authority, and disgust — as well as the more typically liberal moral foundations related to fairness and protecting the vulnerable from harm. Haidt suggests that this gives conservatives a political advantage — but liberals can access moral emotions, too, and that it can be very powerful when they do so.

The moral emotion that is probably most relevant to the environment is what Haidt would call the “care/harm” foundation, and what many of us would simply call compassion or empathy. Recent research suggests that this emotion drives people toward environmental causes. There seems to be a deep connection between caring about other humans and then extending that to nature.

The Vatican, if the signs are to be believed, may blast this emotional channel wide open. Thus, the recent Vatican conference statement noted, “The poor and excluded face dire threats from climate disruptions, including the increased frequency of droughts, extreme storms, heat waves, and rising sea levels.” So it appears that a key part of the pope’s moral message may be that we must care for the environment because the very vulnerable depend on its sustainability and stability — for instance, how people living in low-lying areas will be exposed to greater flood risks in a future of rising seas and, maybe, stronger storms.
Another part of the moral message, as Yale Divinity School professor Teresa Berger told me recently, may involve “the pope condemning sins of exploiting the Earth.”

So it has been long coming, but pope watchers in the environmental world are watching now for very good reason. They know this is the most powerful chance in a long time to make people care, and to create political will.


April 30, 2015

Pope Francis’ Encyclical on Global Warming

By Henry Auer
Global Warming Blog

Encyclicals. Pope Francis, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, will soon issue a papal encyclical on global warming. An encyclical is a document transmitted through the church hierarchy to its 5,000 bishops, and from them to all 400,000 parish priests. In this way its contents are presented to the parishioners of every Catholic church throughout the world, about 1.2 billion people.

Encyclicals, wrote Pope Pius XII in *Humani generis*, can resolve discussion or controversy on a particular topic. He declared “…if the Supreme Pontiffs in their acts, after due consideration, express an opinion on a hitherto controversial matter, it is clear to all that this matter… cannot any longer be considered a question of free discussion among theologians.”

This statement indicates that an encyclical can resolve a controversy of doctrine by establishing the Church’s position from that time forward.

Climate Change, The Loss Of Biodiversity And Deforestation. Pope Francis has consistently been concerned with the less fortunate among the world’s people, including those adversely affected by climate change. For example in October 2014, speaking to landless peasants and others, he stated

“An economic system centred on the god of money needs to plunder nature to sustain the frenetic rhythm of consumption that is inherent to it. The system [is based on] an economy … lacking in ethics…. Climate change, the loss of biodiversity and deforestation are already showing their devastating effects in the great cataclysms we witness.”

United Nations Climate Treaty. According to Bishop Marcelo Sorondo, the Vatican’s Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope Francis wants to exert a powerful influence on the convocation under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate
Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in December 2015, intended to finalize a worldwide climate treaty. It is intended to rein in emissions of greenhouse gases and provide for assistance to impoverished nations to enhance sustainable energy production. Bishop Sorondo stated

“Our academics supported the pope’s initiative to influence [upcoming] crucial decisions. The idea is to convene a meeting with leaders of the main religions to make all people aware of the state of our climate and the tragedy of social exclusion.”

Elsewhere Bishop Sorondo ascribed global warming to humanity’s use of fossil fuels.

Nurturing Creation. Pope Francis bases his concerns for the environment and global warming on the verses in Genesis dealing with creation. In May 2014 he spoke in Rome, saying the “beauty of nature and the grandeur of the cosmos” are Christian virtues. He urged his listeners to

“[s]afeguard Creation, [b]ecause if we destroy [it], Creation will destroy us! … Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is [it] the property of only a few: Creation is … a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.”

With these words the Pope distinguishes our husbandry of creation from exploitation of nature, especially by a minority that has little regard for humanity as a whole. In January 2015 he attributed global warming largely to manmade activities.

Vatican Symposium on Global Warming. The Vatican convened a meeting of world leaders including the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, world religious leaders and leading climate scientists, on April 28, 2015. Mr. Ban told the assembly “there is no divide whatsoever between religion and science on the issue of climate change.”

A report entitled “Climate Change and The Common Good”, prepared by clerical and lay scientists under the guidance of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences was released at the same time as the symposium. It summarizes the historical context of global warming, ascribing it to human activity “involving the unsustainable exploitation of fossil fuels and other forms of natural capital”. It summarizes the detrimental effects already visited on human society as a result, and reviews the scientific projections of future warming and its further harmful consequences to our planet and human society.

The Role of the World’s Religions. The report emphasizes how the religions of the world can be instrumental in combating continued global warming and its harms:

“The Catholic Church, working with the leadership of other religions, could take a decisive role in helping to solve this problem. The Church could accomplish this by mobilizing public opinion and public funds to meet the energy needs of the poorest 3 billion in a way that does not contribute to global warming but would allow them to prepare better for the challenges of unavoidable climate change…. [W]e have a responsibility not only towards those who are living in poverty today, but also to generations yet unborn.”
This moral imperative is expanded as follows:

“Generations to come will experience and will likely suffer from the environmental consequences of the fossil fuel consumption of the last two centuries. They are likely to wonder what took 21st century citizens of the world so long to respond to these frightening climate trends….

In addition to the issue of inter-generational equity, climate change from fossil-fuel burning poses a major problem of intra-generational equity….We have to solve both [these] problems.”

**Deniers of Global Warming.** This Vatican meeting so captured the attention of global warming deniers that they journeyed to Rome to counter the Vatican’s stand. The President of the Heartland Institute wrote “The world’s poor will suffer horribly if reliable energy—the engine of prosperity and a better life—is made more expensive and less reliable by the decree of global planners.” The American Petroleum Institute wrote “fossil fuels are a vital tool for lifting people out of poverty around the world, which is something we’re committed to.”

By such statements we see that these apologists for maintaining the status quo cynically seek to shift guilt for the use of fossil fuels onto the heads of those, including the leaders of the world’s great religions, who themselves advocate for the rights of the poor. These cynics suggest that energy reformers are guilty of prolonging suffering of the poor by removing their access to fossil fuel-derived energy. The deniers critically fail to admit that alternative sources of energy that do not contribute to global warming can accomplish the required objectives.

**The Papal Encyclical** itself is expected to be issued in June 2015. It is likely to reflect the themes identified here that have already been expressed by the Church. Subsequently Pope Francis will address the United Nations General Assembly and the U. S. Congress in September 2015. His energetic activities with respect to global warming are focused on bringing his considerable influence, indeed that of all the world’s major religions, to bear on the climate meeting in Paris in December 2015. That gathering, under the UNFCCC, is intended to finalize ongoing climate negotiations. It should provide a worldwide agreement to reduce annual rates of emission of greenhouse gases, undertake measures to improve land use practices, and set up a major financing program to assist poor countries to adapt to the effects of global warming.

**Discussion**

Pope Francis is undertaking an unprecedented, energetic campaign as the leader of the Roman Catholic Church to convince the nations of the world to commit to meaningful measures to attack global warming, and to help them adapt to the changing climate. While some detractors may question whether the Church has a role to play in this largely secular, scientific matter, he has grounded his message in several aspects of Christian doctrine.

First, the Scriptures emphasize the role of humanity to serve as stewards of Creation. This includes first, avoiding exploitation of resources (such as fossil fuels) that rewards only a portion of humanity; second, avoiding exploitation of those resources because they are irreplaceable; and third, shunning activities in the energy economy that exclude the poorest among us from its
benefits. The Pope is concerned with our “intra-generational” responsibility for alleviating the disparities brought about by fossil fuel use. About 3 billion of the world’s people currently do not benefit from the advanced lifestyle that fossil fuel-derived energy provides to the rest of us.

And second, moral doctrines embedded in the Scriptures emphasize our inter-generational responsibility for the welfare of future generations: our children, their children, and further progeny whom we as yet do not know. This concern arises from Pope Francis’s accurate understanding that the effects of global warming, ascribed to our present burning of fossil fuels, will persist for centuries and affect future generations. In view of the changes already wrought, and the worsening of those changes as our use of fossil fuels grows, we are directly responsible, in his view, for the wellbeing of our progeny.

When issued, the message of the encyclical will reach all 1.2 billion Catholics in the world. According to the ecclesiastical significance of encyclicals proclaimed by Pope Pius XII, we expect that all Catholics will regard its conclusions as laying to rest any prior controversy surrounding this issue. To the world’s Catholics the question of global warming will not “any longer be considered a question of free discussion among theologians.”

[Update: In a letter to the New York Times Maciej H. Grabowski, Poland’s environmental minister, writes that the Pope’s forthcoming encyclical will significantly influence the negotiations on a new global warming treaty that will take place at the end of this year. He states “Pope Francis’s message will be greeted warmly in Poland.”]

In the United States, more than 160 representatives and senators in the Congress are Catholics. This includes the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Yet a significant portion of these congresspersons, including the Speaker, to date have not publicly accepted the reality of global warming caused by human actions. To the extent that they consider themselves bound by their faith, we may expect that they will accept the forthcoming encyclical’s pronouncements as being beyond controversy. A change of heart by these legislators could lead to progress toward a legislated national energy policy whose goal should be a decarbonized energy economy.

Pope Francis envisions his encyclical and his promotion of sound energy policies as inspiring not only fellow Catholics around the world, but far more importantly as generating comparable actions in an ecumenical fashion among all the major faiths of the world. He is reaching out to leaders of other religions with the intention of developing a faith-based consensus for action among followers of most religions. This should lead to emboldened action by the world’s scientific and political leaders to reach early and meaningful agreement on a worldwide framework for the limitation of greenhouse gas emissions, appropriate changes in land use, and a well-funded resource to aid countries most in need of assistance in accommodating to climate change.

http://warmgloblog.blogspot.com/2015/04/pope-francis-encyclical-on-global.html

May 2015
Despair is Optional

By Bill McKibben
Sojourners Magazine

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We're like the bad babysitter who takes the 2-year-old out for a tattoo and some piercings.

AS POPE FRANCIS prepares to release his encyclical on climate change, it’s worth remembering exactly how far the conversation on religion and the environment has come in the past quarter-century.

When I wrote The End of Nature back in the late 1980s, there was very little religious environmentalism. Liberal churches believed that ecology was a subject to be addressed once you’d finished with war and poverty; conservative churches viewed it as a way station on the road to paganism. And Christians in general still reeled under the idea, propounded by Lynn White in an influential essay in Science magazine, that the Genesis call for dominion had led directly to the destruction we saw around us.

In those early days, there were a few wayfarers on this path. Thomas Berry, for instance, and even more important a pair of academics—Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim—who picked up his clues and sweated blood to assemble theologians from around the world and search every tradition for the roots of ecological thinking. Episcopal Power and Light—now Interfaith Power and Light—was an early and successful effort at congregational action; Shomrei Adamah (Guardians of the Earth) was an early effort in the Jewish community that has blossomed into many flowers.

More senior figures began to join. Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of 400 million Eastern Christians, became known as the “green patriarch” for his straightforward reckoning that environmental desecration was just that, a sin. Desmond Tutu has called climate change the “human rights challenge of our time.” Now the pope. “It is [humanity] who has slapped nature in the face,” Francis said. “We have in a sense taken over nature.”

There’s pushback still, of course. When the pope made his remarks, a blogger at the conservative journal First Things announced, “Francis serves an environmentalist mindset that, unlike the traditional ethos of conservation, views [humanity] as a parasite.” Oof; them’s fighting words. And from the corporatist, compromised center, there’s the usual dismay at having to take sides. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, for instance, has done its best to blunt the growing movement for fossil-fuel divestment, arguing that “companies aren’t the enemy.”

Happily, though, the momentum is clear. Denominations such as the United Church of Christ and the Unitarians have called for divestment; Methodist colleges and Catholic research universities are joining in. Religious people do understand that there are enemies in this fight—that the companies who melted the Arctic and then moved to drill for yet more oil in its open waters meet any theological test you could devise for radical irresponsibility.
This movement unites young—who will have to live for decades with a changed planet—and old, who will have to go to their graves knowing that we’ve left a damaged planet behind. It reaches across ideology—the question of how and whether we evolved is less pressing than the fact that we’re now running Genesis in reverse.

There’s a streak of sadness that runs through this movement: Clearly we’ve failed to responsibly exercise dominion (we’re the bad babysitter, who takes the 2-year-old out for a tattoo and some piercings). But there’s also a streak of joy. Unlike secular environmentalists, we’re entitled—if we work as hard as we know how to work—to imagine that some force will meet us halfway. Despair is optional, thank heaven.

Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.

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http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/despair-is-optional/

May 1, 2015

Blessed Are the Climate Advocates

The Vatican and United Nations present the beatitudes of a new movement.

By Michael Shank
Slate

This week, while at Vatican City in Rome to manage press for the first-ever meeting on climate change between Pope Francis and United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, my faith in a force more powerful was renewed. I am not religious, despite being descended from a long line of Amish and Mennonite preachers. But at the climate confab, I became a believer again. And I wasn’t alone.

It wasn’t my faith in God that was renewed at the Vatican but rather a faith in our ability to get something done on climate change. And as an American, whose Congress isn’t even close to acting aggressively or quickly enough on climate change, that’s saying something. Even the Pope’s and the U.N.’s top policy officials were clearly inspired by the event, which was hosted by the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Throughout the day I witnessed multiple about-faces of previously cynical staff rapidly turning toward optimism.

This Vatican moment was a game-changer. Science and religion were forcefully and unwaveringly aligning. Tuesday’s high-level session brought together multiple presidents, CEOs, academics, scientists, and all the major religions, and ended with this final, forceful statement. The event was a prelude to the Pope’s summer encyclical on climate change, and it laid a solid foundation.
But more importantly—and this is why it instilled faith in many of us—the meeting featured some of the strongest words yet from the Vatican’s Cardinal Peter Turkson, the Pope’s right-hand policy man and the drafter of the first round of what will eventually be the Pope’s climate encyclical, and from the U.N.’s Ban Ki-moon.

Beyond the expected shout-outs to the upcoming climate talks in Paris later this year and to the need for a strong Green Climate Fund, which will assist developing countries in climate adaptation, the U.N.’s Ban noted in no uncertain terms how “morally indefensible” it would be to allow a temperature rise of 4 to 5 degrees Celsius, calling on everyone to reduce their individual carbon footprint and thoughtless consumption. His pitch was more pointed than I had heard before. One of the leading rabbis, Rabbi David Rosen, took it one step further, calling out meat-intensive diets as completely unsustainable given their massive contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

The Vatican’s Turkson, meanwhile, pulled out all the stops, saying that “a crime against the natural world is a sin,” and “to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation ... are sins.” Turkson warned about how quickly we are degrading the planet’s integrity, stripping its forests, destroying its wetlands, and contaminating its waters, land, and air.

These declarations were not soft, feel-good, and vague speeches by politicos keen to be perceived as leading on the most urgent issue facing humanity. These were unequivocal, unwavering statements: “Decision mitigation is a moral and religious imperative for humanity” and the “summit in Paris may be the last effective opportunity” to keep the planet safe.

The leaders of the conference were undeterred by the hecklers who crept onto the Vatican campus. Marc Morano, for example, who is associated with the climate-skeptical Heartland Institute, snuck into the Vatican and attempted, to no avail, to disrupt the press briefing with the U.N. secretary-general while Ban was reporting on his meeting with the Pope. Morano’s account of what happened, that he was maliciously shut down after offering a benign question, misrepresents reality. Standing beside him, I can attest to what was instead a hijacking of protocol and the microphone. He said a few words about “global warming skeptics coming to talk” but coming to disrupt would be more accurate. He interrupted the secretary-general and the moderator, and was later escorted from the premises by Vatican officials.

What’s troubling about moments like this is that they work. The U.S. media reporting from the Vatican meeting felt compelled to give Morano critical space in their stories. It’s not just that he was an unexpected and therefore newsworthy interruption—giving his “side” is part of American broadcast media’s history of false balance even when there are not two legitimate sides of a story to balance. To be clear, the verdict is not still out on climate change. There’s overwhelming consensus when it comes to the science behind global warming, yet some media outlets (fewer all the time, fortunately) continue to give voice to the small percent that disagrees. Standing beside Morano, surrounded by representatives of the most powerful institutions in the world, it was quite clear to me that the Heartland Institute, though well funded by the Koch brothers, is ineffectually extreme and ultimately a minority player in society’s overall push toward climate progress.
In many ways, the Heartland emissaries proved, through their apoplectic protest, how peripheral they were to the whole process. There was no need for anyone to fight them in that moment; the majority opinion, the moral call to act on climate, was already winning the day. The global response to our conversation at the Vatican has been unequivocally positive, with every major outlet in the Western world covering the talks favorably.

As we left Vatican City this week—which is carbon-neutral thanks to solar power—there was a palpable sense that history was made within the walls of Casina Pio IV where our deliberations took place. This was no typical conference. This was a Sermon on the Mount moment, wherein the beatitudes of a new era were laid down. And we left as disciples, renewed in our faith that we must and will act in time to save humanity from itself—an agenda that would be a worthy legacy of the Pope’s Jesus.

Michael Shank is a professor at George Mason University’s School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and director of media strategy for Climate Nexus.

http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2015/05/pope_francis_ban_ki_moon_climate_change_talks_renewed_faith_from_vatican.html

May 1, 2015

Pope Francis Unlikely to Sway Catholic Republicans on Climate Change

Party doctrine will probably trump church doctrine in Congress, experts say, where more than a quarter of lawmakers are Catholics.

By Katherine Bagley
InsideClimate News

Pope Francis plans this summer to issue an influential and the first-ever encyclical devoted to global warming and its effects on the world's poor. Credit: Jeffrey Bruno/Aleteia

As Pope Francis steps up his moral campaign for global action on climate change, Republican Roman Catholics in Congress are more likely to listen to fossil fuel interests and party leaders than their pontiff, religious and political researchers say, based on lawmakers' track records.

The pope hosted a global warming summit at the Vatican this week with economists, scientists and religious and government leaders. The global leader of the Catholic Church plans this summer to issue the first-ever encyclical, a high-level Catholic teaching document, devoted to global warming and its effects on the world's poor.

But as much sway as the pope has with a sixth of the world's population, party doctrine will probably trump church doctrine in Congress, experts told InsideClimate News. The position of Pope Francis on climate change—and nearly every mainstream climate scientist—bucks that of American conservatives and fossil fuel interests such as the billionaire Koch brothers, who have
spent millions of dollars casting doubt on the reality of human-driven climate change and supporting candidates who oppose action to address it.

"If the science hasn't persuaded Republican politicians, the Pope won't," said R.L. Miller, founder of Climate Hawks Vote, a super PAC that works to elect climate-conscious candidates. "American Catholics have been in the habit of mixing and matching parts of Catholic doctrine when it suits them for decades. I don't see this as an exception."

The pope's doctrinal statement will come as world leaders prepare to meet in December in Paris on global warming. They plan to hash out an international accord to fight climate change and address the needs of billions of poor people who suffer from the worst effects of warming.

It also comes at a time when fossil fuel divestment campaigns are sweeping college campuses across the nation and the world. Like the pope, divestment activists have the goal of turning global warming action into the moral issue of this generation. Campaigns are underway at 500 colleges. Thirty schools worldwide—along with 41 cities, 72 religious institutions, 30 foundations and hundreds of individuals—have divested or pledged to divest from fossil fuels.

"Morality moves politicians. Politicians can dodge policy questions, it's harder to dodge a question like, 'why are you choosing Exxon over our kids?'" said Jamie Henn, director of strategy and co-founder of 350.org, the environmental group behind the divestment movement. "When climate is about widgets and circuits, you lose people. When it's about our health, our families, and our future, you start seeing people in the streets."

Catholics make up nearly 32 percent of the House of Representatives and 26 percent of the Senate, compared with 22 percent of the U.S. population.

The list of Catholics in Congress includes several of the GOP's most prominent climate denialists, such as presidential contender Marco Rubio, a Florida senator; House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio; and former vice presidential candidate and Wisconsin Rep. Paul Ryan. Likely presidential contenders Jeb Bush, a former governor of Florida; Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey; and Gov. Bobby Jindal of Louisiana are also Catholic. Those three question the science of human-caused global warming and oppose climate policy.

No Republican politician has yet commented on the pope's climate agenda, but conservatives such as the Heartland Institute, a right-wing tank that has received funding from the Kochs, have lambasted the Catholic leader's efforts.

The Heartland Institute sent a group of climate denialists to Rome earlier this week to, "inform Pope Francis of the truth about climate science: There is no global warming crisis!" according to a press release. Just nine journalists showed up to its press event.

At the invitation of Boehner, Pope Francis will address Congress in September, shortly after the publication of his climate encyclical.
Rubio, Boehner and Ryan, among others, will probably ignore the pope's calls for action in favor of following the Republican party line on climate change, political researchers said. None responded to InsideClimate News' requests for comment. On the other side of the aisle, Catholics including House minority leader Nancy Pelosi of California, Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois and Sen. Patty Murray of Washington, may use the encyclical to bolster their party's climate agenda, the researchers said.

"If you ask any politician, most say their faith is central to what they do," said Dan Cox, director of research at the Public Religion Research Institute, a nonprofit organization that examines the intersection of religion, values and public life. "But when you look at specific issues, like the death penalty and abortion, you're better off knowing their party then their religion."

**Invoking Their Faith**

Still, Catholic politicians, particularly Republicans, have a history of invoking their faith to justify policy decisions.

When Ryan, the Republican representative from Wisconsin, proposed in 2012 to slash social welfare programs including Medicaid and food stamps in his overhaul of the federal budget, he cited his Catholic faith.

"The preferential option for the poor, which is one of the primary tenants of Catholic social teaching, means don't keep people poor, don't make people dependent on government so that they stay stuck at their station in life," Ryan told the Christian Broadcasting Network at the time.

Rubio, the Republican senator from Florida who is running for president, often makes the religious case for immigration reform. In 2012, he told Christianity Today, "If your faith is real, burning inside of you, it's going to influence the way you view everything. That belief influences your job and the responsibilities you have."

Rubio has also criticized Pope Francis for helping to negotiate the opening of relations between the U.S. and Cuba.

Virginia Republican Senator Tim Kaine has spoken openly about how his Catholic faith drives his "moral position" against capital punishment. As an attorney, Kaine defended several death row inmates pro-bono.

Most Catholic politicians invoke their faith more selectively than they did two decades ago, choosing which teachings to follow instead of following the full church doctrine, experts said. It's the same with the majority of the American Catholic public.

"In today's Congress, party matters much more than the faith tradition you come from," said Geoff Layman, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, a Roman Catholic institution in South Bend, Indiana. "Catholic Democrats tend to vote like any other Democrat, and Catholic Republicans like any other Republican."
Future Impacts

Following publication of the Pope's climate encyclical this summer, Catholic bishops will spend 12 weeks discussing global warming in sermons, media interviews and letters to editors, the New York Times reported.

This could have an impact on the public and policymakers. Americans who attend a church where the pastor even occasionally preaches about climate change are more likely to accept the scientific evidence for global warming than those who don’t, according to a 2014 poll by the Public Religion Research Institute.

The institute's Cox said the pope currently enjoys widespread popularity among American Catholics, but that his climate campaign and Congressional visit could polarize opinions of him among politicians. But either way, he said, Francis' push for action could "raise the profile of climate change in the U.S."


May 6, 2015

Climate Change and the Christian Gospel: Why we need to respond more urgently

By David Atkins
Ekklesia
http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21667

Abstract:
One of the most notable omissions from the discussions and debates that have taken place in the run-up to the 2015 General Election has been any focus on environmental justice, climate change and global warming. It is as if there is a spirit of denial or apathy in the air. Yet by any measure this is one of the most urgent challenges facing our country, and indeed the world, right now. In recent years, churches in different parts of the world have started responding practically and theologically to the alarming picture being presented to us by climate science. That is encouraging. But as Bishop David Atkinson points out in this timely paper, there is a need for much more action. Care for the earth, which is God’s gift, should be a primary concern for Christians, people of other faiths, and everyone of good faith. Politicians need to be persuaded to act more decisively by the example of people across civil society, not least in the churches. This is not a Christian 'add on', but a core Gospel concern.

Read the full article:
http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/sites/ekklesia.co.uk/files/climate_change_and_gospel.pdf
May 6, 2015

Pope Francis: ‘If We Destroy Creation, Creation Will Destroy Us’

By Kieran Cooke
EcoWatch

A declaration at the end of a meeting in Rome hosted by the Vatican made a plea to the world’s religions to engage and mobilize on the issue of climate change.

“Human-induced climate change is a scientific reality, and its decisive mitigation is a moral and religious imperative for humanity,” the declaration said. “In this core moral space, the world’s religions play a very vital role.”

Vatican watchers and climate experts say the meeting, “The Moral Dimensions of Climate Change and Sustainable Development,” shows that Pope Francis is—in marked contrast to his predecessors—keen for the Catholic church to be more involved in the climate change issue, and is also urging other religions to become more actively engaged.

The meeting was organized by various religious and non-religious organizations, including the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the UN-affiliated body, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, also spoke at the one-day conference.

Fundamental principles

In a few weeks’ time, the Pope is due to release an encyclical on climate change—within the Catholic church, a statement of fundamental principles. He has also made several impassioned speeches on the issue.

“If we destroy Creation, Creation will destroy us,” the Pope told a gathering of thousands in St Peter’s Square, Rome, last month. “Never forget this.”

Groups that insist that climate change is not a threat, and that seek to oppose the findings of the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and other scientific bodies, have been quick to criticise the Pope’s stand.

Members of the Heartland Institute, a U.S.-based organization funded by billionaire industrialists and others who deny climate change is caused by human activity, travelled to Rome to speak against the meeting.

“The Pope has great moral authority, but he’s not an authority on climate science,” a Heartland employee told the UK newspaper, the Daily Telegraph.

“The Pope would make a grave mistake if he put his moral authority behind scientists saying that climate change is a threat to the world.”
Selling investments

Separately, the Church of England announced that it is selling various investments in fossil fuel industries. The Church said £12 million worth of investments in companies making 10 percent or more of their revenues from the production of coal or oil from tar sands would be sold.

The Church of England is not selling all its investments in fossil fuel operations, but says it wants to influence companies that contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions. The Church recently called on two major oil companies, BP and Shell, to be more transparent about their policies on climate change.

“The Church has a moral responsibility to speak and act on both environmental stewardship and justice for the world’s poor, who are most vulnerable to climate change” says Professor Richard Burridge, of the Church’s Ethical Investment Advisory Group.

https://ecowatch.com/2015/05/06/pope-francis-moral-dimensions-climate-change/

May 8, 2015

A papal statement on climate change could lead to greener Britain

By Soli Salgado
National Catholic Reporter

A third of British Catholics say they would consider “greening” their lifestyles should Pope Francis make an official statement on climate change.

The pledge came from a recent poll of 1,000 Catholics in England and Wales conducted by YouGov and CAFOD [1], the official aid agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. The 33 percent who said they would opt for greener choices, such as recycling or driving less, would account for more than 1 million Catholics in Britain.

The survey also showed a concern for climate change having adverse effects on social justice:

- 72 percent of those polled said that they are worried about the world’s poorest people being negatively affected by global warming.
- More than three quarters (76 percent) said that, as Catholics, they feel a moral obligation to protect the poor.
- Eight out of ten surveyed said they feel it is a moral duty to care for God’s creation, and that by Francis emphasizing the need for environmental mindfulness, it will be harder for people to isolate the issue of climate change from faithfully caring for creation.

“While the data shows us that almost two thirds of Catholics have engaged with the climate debate already, what’s most telling about these results is how many Catholics link the impact
climate change is having on vulnerable people with their faith, which calls us to protect the 
poorest in society,” said Neil Thorns, CAFOD advocacy director, in a statement.

More than half also said that because of Francis’ comments, they’ve given more thought to the 
issues facing modern society, with 18 percent saying they have already made active changes to 
their lifestyles as a result of his teachings.

And there’s optimism that this coming encyclical, expected in June or July, will have a profound, 
widespread effect: 70 percent of the Catholics surveyed said they believe the Catholic 
community will observe Francis’ message.

In the United Kingdom, U.S. and elsewhere, efforts at greening parishes have been ongoing for 
some time.

Fr. Peter Daly, pastor of St. John Vianney parish in Prince Frederick, Md., recently revisited the 
parish’s past decade of green initiatives [3], such as upgrading its recycling program, performing 
environmental audits and instituting “green liturgies” on a semiannual basis.

Other faith communities, including several Catholic parishes, have sought to become better 
environmental stewards by achieving GreenFaith sanctuary status [4] through the interfaith 
group GreenFaith. In 2014, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through its Energy Star 
program created a workbook [5] addressing ways religious groups could reduce energy usage in 
their worship and meeting spaces.

Francis -- who hopes to make the environment a key issue [6] during his papacy -- will address 
world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September, as they meet 
to develop new goals regarding climate change and its impact on global poverty.

[Soli Salgado is an NCR Bertelsen intern. Her email address is ssalgado@ncronline.org.]

Links:
worries-Catholics-Christians
sanctuary
academics-and-activists

http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/papal-statement-climate-change-could-lead-greener-
britain
May 9, 2015

Evangelicals become serious about climate change

Climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe presents a scientific-spiritual approach to the environment

By Douglas Todd
Vancouver Sun

Hundreds of millions of environmentalists will think “it’s about time” when they hear more evangelical Christians are becoming serious about tackling climate change.

If any group has been prone to denying that humans are causing global warming, polls show it is conservative Christians, particularly those who predominate in the Republican-dominated U.S. Congress, not to mention in political spheres in Canada.

However, a Canadian evangelical Christian and climate scientist, educated at the University of Toronto, is challenging the way North America’s influential evangelicals think about the phenomenon causing extreme weather, rising oceans, drought and the melting of glaciers.

Prof. Katharine Hayhoe, whom Time magazine named one of its 100 most influential people, spoke at SFU and Vancouver’s Chan Centre this week, including in a dialogue with the Suzuki Foundation’s Peter Robinson and former Reform party leader Preston Manning (a fellow evangelical).

Hayhoe grew up largely in Eastern Canada never knowing a person who didn’t believe climate change was a human-made problem. So she had a shock when she married American professor-pastor Andrew Farley, and discovered he believed climate change was a hoax.

Awkward. But over the years the couple worked it out. And they eventually co-wrote a book, A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions.

She now heads the Climate Change Center at Texas Tech University and has become the leading evangelical voice against human-made climate change.

Cheerful and collaborative despite the hate mail she receives from born-again Christians, Hayhoe’s scientific-spiritual approach to the environment was exemplified in a public conversation Canadian author Margaret Atwood took part in last year with Leah Kostamo, director of A Rocha Canada, a largely evangelical environmental organization that co-sponsored Hayhoe’s visit to Vancouver.

It’s mainly because Hayhoe is evangelical that she’s gaining a lot of media attention. The ecology movement has, since the 1970s, had no shortage of advocates. There have been big-name secular activists like B.C.’s David Suzuki and Bob Hunter, and a host of liberal Christians, including Vancouver’s Sallie McFague, plus Thomas Berry, John Cobb, Matthew Fox, Bill McKibben, Jurgen Moltmann and Eastern Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.
Last month, Pope Francis also pumped up the volume on Roman Catholicism’s battle against climate change.

Francis brought scientists to the Vatican to denounce exploitation of the Earth as an evil and urge action on greenhouse gases. Pundits speculate the pope will use his upcoming trip to the U.S. to convince climate-change-skeptic Catholics, like Republican presidential contender Jeb Bush, to wake up and smell the fumes.

Many desperately hope people like the pope and Hayhoe will make a dent in the way North America’s large conservative Christian population has generally opposed steps to reduce carbon use and to switch to cleaner energy. A Pew poll found two of three white U.S. evangelicals did not believe humans are causing the warming of the Earth.

And it’s not just U.S. evangelicals. Fraser Valley dairy farmer Dick Kleingeltink, former chair of the B.C. Agriculture Council, is an evangelical Christian who doesn’t think about global warming. He told me he is convinced God will save all born-again believers from oblivion.

“One day I’m going to be in heaven, so I don’t worry about climate change at all.”

Hayhoe, despite her friendly nature, is tough enough to take on such evangelicals about their theological and economic beliefs. That includes Prime Minister Stephen Harper, a member of the evangelical Alliance Church of Canada, and his federal caucus of which half are conservative Christians.

In an interview with Canada’s Salvation Army magazine, Hayhoe took apart Harper’s statement that “no country is going to take actions (against climate change) that are going to deliberately destroy jobs and growth in their country.”

Harper, Hayhoe says, “sets up an implicit straw man that doing something about climate change and renewable energy costs jobs. The reality is that the renewable energy sector is already providing way more jobs for the economy than the fossil fuel sector.”

Adding that “the prime minister’s statement completely ignores that climate change costs jobs and incurs enormous amounts of damages,” Hayhoe explained how increasingly extreme weather in the U.S., including Hurricane Katrina, has cost more than $50 billion.

“And that’s just tax dollars. We’re not even talking human life here,” Hayhoe said. She urges Canada and the U.S. to join European countries that are transitioning off fossil fuels.

Hayhoe has her work cut out in her country of origin, however. Climate Action Network Europe ranked Canada among the worst of 58 countries in the industrialized world for its failure to combat climate change.

Hayhoe sees a big part of her task as confronting people’s skewed understandings of God.
Evangelicals constantly tell her that God has absolute power, including to usher in an apocalypse, which they believe eclipses anything that humanity could do to the planet.

So Hayhoe counters with scriptures stating that while God created the Earth, Christians have to play an active role as its stewards, as protectors of the Earth, not just its exploiters.

By in effect maintaining humans need to work as “co-creators” with God, Hayhoe is hardly being theologically radical. Her views echo long-held convictions of mainstream Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Jews, not to mention a battalion of spiritual-but-not-religious environmentalists.

Sallie McFague, a Vancouver School of Theology eco-theologian, has long taught that, despite what some Christians believe, God is not a dictator. Instead, McFague says God is a divine lure inviting everything in the universe towards creativity and wholeness.

McFague, author of A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming (Fortress), was invited to India by the Dalai Lama to explain how all things are connected and that the “unlimited desire” that fuels the market system leads to injustice and is environmentally unsustainable.

David Ray Griffin is another strong liberal Christian voice that has emerged to challenge what he calls the “religion of economism,” in which humans serve the idol of financial growth while ignoring how it’s marching us to ecological catastrophe.

In Unprecedented: Can Civilization Survive the CO2 Crisis? (Clarity Press), Griffin describes the way alternative energy sources could be combined to achieve 70-per-cent clean energy by 2035 worldwide.

The acclaimed philosopher of religion and author of 30 books calls for a “full-scale mobilization paralleling that of the Second World War.”

The campaigns three goals, Griffin recommends, should be to:

• Eliminate subsidies of the fossil-fuel industry, which add up to $502 billion a year.

• Impose an escalating tax on carbon.

• Accelerate the transition to a 100-per cent green economy.

Even though Griffin, who has lectured widely in China, has grave worries about the fate of civilization, he had reason for cautious hope in November, 2014, just as his book was going to print.

That’s when the leaders of the two countries that most contribute to climate change, the U.S. and China, announced an agreement to reduce carbon emissions. Griffin believes the deal could be a game-changer.
The few commentators who did not call the U.S.-China agreement “historic,” Griffin notes, were members of the Republican-controlled Congress; the conservative Christians who act as if humans have nothing to do with climate change.

Katharine Hayhoe, clearly, is not the only person who wants to have a little chat with them.


May 11, 2015

250 Rabbis Sign Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis

By Rabbi Arthur Waskow
The Shalom Center

Encouraged by Pope Francis’ work, They Call for Vigorous Action

As of the morning of May 11, 2015, 250 rabbis have signed a Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis, calling for vigorous action to prevent worsening climate disruption and to seek eco-social justice.

The letter was initiated by seven leading rabbis from a broad spectrum of American Jewish life: Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector of the American Jewish University; Rabbi Arthur Green, rector of the Hebrew College rabbinical school; Rabbi Peter Knobel, former president, Central Conference of American Rabbis; Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College; Rabbi Susan Talve, spiritual leader of Central Reform Congregation, St. Louis; Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director of The Shalom Center; and Rabbi Deborah Waxman, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

The seven wrote their colleagues:

Our decision to do this arose out of our learning that Pope Francis will this summer issue an encyclical to the Church and the World that will address the climate crisis in the context of worsening concentrations of wealth and power and worsening degradations of poverty.

We believe it is important for the spiritual leadership of the Jewish people to speak to the Jewish people as a whole and to the world on this deep crisis in the history of the human species and of many other life-forms on our planet.

The Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis is below, and after that the present (and still growing) list of signers.
We will be undertaking a major effort to do outreach for this Rabbinic Letter to the whole Jewish community and to the world. Please help in this effort by clicking on the "Donate" button on the left margin of this page. Write "Climate Letter" in the "Honor Of" box, and your (tax-deductible) gift will be used only for that purpose. -- Shalom, Arthur

To the Jewish People, to all Communities of Spirit, and to the World:

A Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis

We come as Jews and rabbis with great respect for what scientists teach us – for as we understand their teaching, it is about the unfolding mystery of God’s Presence in the unfolding universe, and especially in the history and future of our planet. Although we accept scientific accounts of earth’s history, we continue to see it as God’s creation, and we celebrate the presence of the divine hand in every earthly creature.

Yet in our generation, this wonder and this beauty have been desecrated -- not in one land alone but ‘round all the Earth. So in this crisis, even as we join all Earth in celebrating the Breath of Life that interweaves us all -- –

-- You sea-monsters and all deeps, Hallelu-Yah.

Fire, hail, snow, and steam, Hallelu-Yah.

Stormy wind to do God's word, Hallelu-Yah.

Mountains high and tiny hills, Hallelu-Yah (Psalm 148)

We know all Earth needs not only the joyful human voice but also the healing human hand.

We are especially moved when the deepest, most ancient insights of Torah about healing the relationships of Earth and human earthlings, adamah and adam, are echoed in the findings of modern science.

The texts of Torah that perhaps most directly address our present crisis ar Leviticus 25-26 and Deuteronomy 15. They call for one year of every seven to be Shabbat Shabbaton – a Sabbatical Year – and Shmittah – a Year of restful Release for the Earth and its workers from being made to work, and of Release for debtors from their debts.
In Leviticus 26, the Torah warns us that if we refuse to let the Earth rest, it will “rest” anyway, despite us and upon us – through drought and famine and exile that turn an entire people into refugees.

This ancient warning heard by one indigenous people in one slender land has now become a crisis of our planet as a whole and of the entire human species. Human behavior that overworks the Earth – especially the overburning of fossil fuels --- crests in a systemic planetary response that endangers human communities and many other life-forms as well.

Already we see unprecedented floods, droughts, ice-melts, snowstorms, heat waves, typhoons, sea-level rises, and the expansion of disease-bearing insects from “tropical” zones into what used to be “temperate” regions. Leviticus 26 embodied. Scientific projections of the future make clear that even worse will happen if we continue with carbon-burning business as usual.

As Jews, we ask the question whether the sources of traditional Jewish wisdom can offer guidance to our political efforts to prevent disaster and heal our relationship with the Earth. Our first and most basic wisdom is expressed in the Sh’mah and is underlined in the teaching that through Shekhinah the Divine presence dwells within as well as beyond the world. The Unity of all means not only that all life is interwoven, but also that an aspect of God’s Self partakes in the interwoveness.

We acknowledge that for centuries, the attention of our people – driven into exile not only from our original land but made refugees from most lands thereafter so that they were bereft of physical or political connection and without any specific land – has turned away from this sense of interconnection of adam and adamah, toward the repair of social injustice. Because of this history, we were so much pre-occupied with our own survival that we could not turn attention to the deeper crisis of which our tradition had always been aware.

But justice and earthiness cannot be disentangled. This is taught by our ancient texts – teaching that every seventh year be a Year of Release, Shmittah, Shabbat Shabbaton, in which there would be not only one year’s release of Earth from overwork, but also one year’s sharing by all in society of the Earth’s freely growing abundance, and one year’s release of debtors from their debts.

Indeed, we are especially aware that this very year is, according to the ancient count, the Shmita Year.

The unity of justice and Earth-healing is also taught by our experience today: The worsening inequality of wealth, income, and political power has two direct impacts on the climate crisis. On the one hand, great Carbon Corporations not only make their enormous profits from wounding the Earth, but then use these profits to purchase elections and to fund fake science to prevent the public from acting to heal the wounds. On the other hand, the poor in America and around the globe are the first and the worst to suffer from the typhoons, floods, droughts, and diseases brought on by climate chaos.
So we call for a new sense of eco-social justice – a tikkun olam that includes tikkun tevel, the healing of our planet. We urge those who have been focusing on social justice to address the climate crisis, and those who have been focusing on the climate crisis to address social justice.

Though as rabbis we are drawing on the specific practices by which our Torah makes eco-social justice possible, we recognize that in all cultures and all spiritual traditions there are teachings about the need for setting time and space aside for celebration, restfulness, reflection.

Yet in modern history, we realize that for about 200 years, the most powerful institutions and cultures of the human species have refused to let the Earth or human earthlings have time or space for rest. By overburning carbon dioxide and methane into our planet's air, we have disturbed the sacred balance in which we breathe in what the trees breathe out, and the trees breathe in what we breathe out. The upshot: global scorching, climate crisis.

The crisis is worsened by the spread of extreme extraction of fossil fuels that not only heats the planet as a whole but damages the regions directly affected.

- Fracking shale rock for oil and “unnatural gas” poisons regional water supplies and induces the shipment of volatile explosive “bomb trains” around the country.
- Coal burning not only imposes asthma on coal-plant neighborhoods – often the poorest and Blackest – but destroys the lovely mountains of West Virginia.
- Extracting and pipe-lining Tar Sands threatens Native First nation communities in Canada and the USA, and endangers farmers and cowboys through whose lands the KXL Pipeline is intended to traverse.
- Drilling for oil deep into the Gulf and the Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound off the Pacific have already brought death to workers and to sea life and financial disasters upon nearby communities. Proposed oil drilling in the Arctic and Atlantic threaten worse.

All of this is overworking Earth -- precisely what our Torah teaches we must not do. So now we must let our planet rest from overwork. For Biblical Israel, this was a central question in our relationship to the Holy One. And for us and for our children and their children, this is once again the central question of our lives and of our God. **HOW?** -- is the question we must answer.

So here we turn from inherited wisdom to action in our present and our future. One way of addressing our own responsibility would be for households, congregations, denominations, federations, political action --- to Move Our Money from spending that helps these modern pharaohs burn our planet to spending that helps to heal it. For example, these actions might be both practical and effective:

- Purchasing wind-born rather than coal-fired electricity to light our homes and synagogues and community centers;
- Organizing our great Federations to offer grants and loans to every Jewish organization in their regions to solarize their buildings;
• Shifting our bank accounts from banks that invest in deadly carbon-burning to community banks and credit unions that invest in local neighborhoods, especially those of poor, Black, and Hispanic communities;
• Moving our endowment funds from supporting deadly Carbon to supporting stable, profitable, life-giving enterprises;
• Insisting that our tax money go no longer to subsidizing enormously profitable Big Oil but instead to subsidizing the swift deployment of renewable energy -- as quickly in this emergency as our government moved in the emergency of the early 1940s to shift from manufacturing cars to making tanks.
• Convincing our legislators to institute a system of carbon fees and public dividends that rewards our society for moving beyond the Carbon economy.

These examples are simply that, and in the days and years to come, we may think of other approaches to accomplish these ecological ends.

America is one of the most intense contributors to the climate crisis, and must therefore take special responsibility to act. Though we in America are already vulnerable to climate chaos, other countries are even more so --- and Jewish caring must take that truth seriously. Israeli scientists, for example, report that if the world keeps doing carbon business as usual, the Negev desert will come to swallow up half the state of Israel, and sea-level rises will put much of Tel Aviv under water.

Israel itself is too small to calm the wide world’s worsening heat. Israel’s innovative ingenuity for solar and wind power could help much of the world, but it will take American and other funding to help poor nations use the new-tech renewable energy created by Israeli and American innovators.

We believe that there is both danger and hope in American society today, a danger and a hope that the American Jewish community, in concert with our sisters and brothers in other communities of Spirit, must address. The danger is that America is the most flagrant contributor to the scorching of our planet. The hope is that over and over in our history, when our country faced the need for profound change, it has been our communities of moral commitment, religious covenant, and spiritual search that have arisen to meet the need. So it was fifty years ago during the Civil Rights movement, and so it must be today.

As we live through this Shmittah Year, we are especially aware that Torah calls for Hak’heyl -- assembling the whole community of the People Israel during the Sukkot after the Shmittah year, to hear and recommit ourselves to the Torah’s central teachings.

So we encourage Jews in all our communities to gather on the Sunday of Sukkot this year, October 4, 2015, to explore together our responsibilities toward the Earth and all humankind, in this generation.
Our ancient earthy wisdom taught that social justice, sustainable abundance, a healthy Earth, and spiritual fulfillment are inseparable. Today we must hear that teaching in a world-wide context, drawing upon our unaccustomed ability to help shape public policy in a great nation. We call upon the Jewish people to meet God’s challenge once again.


May 12, 2015

Key advisor blasts US criticism to pope’s environmental stance

By Inés San Martín, Vatican correspondent

Crux

ROME — Pope Francis’ closest cardinal advisor on Tuesday blasted “movements in the United States” hostile to the pontiff’s forthcoming document on the environment, claiming the criticism is fueled by a form of capitalism protecting its own interests.

“The ideology surrounding environmental issues is too tied to a capitalism that doesn’t want to stop ruining the environment because they don’t want to give up their profits,” said Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga.

Rodríguez is the coordinator of a group of nine cardinals that serves as Pope Francis’ informal cabinet.

He said both the church and the wider world are awaiting Francis’ ecological manifesto, known as an encyclical letter, “with hope,” especially in tandem with a U.N.-sponsored agreement on Sustainable Development Goals and a U.N. summit on climate change in Paris later this year.

Rodríguez spoke at a press conference in Rome to mark the beginning of a general assembly of Caritas Internationalis, a global federation of Catholic charitable groups.

“I have already heard criticism over the encyclical,” Rodríguez said at a news conference, referring to reaction in the United States. He called it “absurd” to reject a document that hasn’t even been published yet.

Francis’ encyclical letter, the first such document even devoted by a pope entirely to environmental themes, is expected to be released in early summer.

But already some prominent American skeptics on global warming and climate change have voiced alarm about the document.

When the Vatican recently co-hosted a environmental summit with the U.N., the Chicago-based Heartland Institute hosted a rump event in Rome featuring speakers challenging both the science
of climate change and also the Vatican’s partnership with the U.N., on the grounds that some agencies of the global body also support population control.

On Monday, veteran American Catholic writer Russell Shaw published a piece for Our Sunday Visitor cautioning against “kneejerk antipathy” to the encyclical.

“No papal document in years has received so much prejudicial negative comment before it’s been read,” Shaw wrote.

During the five-day Caritas gathering that opens Tuesday, leaders of Catholic charitable organizations from around the world will focus on growing inequalities as well as the impact of climate change.

Caritas’ work, Rodríguez said, is not merely to aid the victims of poverty, war and natural disasters, but to do so in a Christian spirit.

“We have to remember what Francis says: the Church isn’t an NGO, we’re the faith in action through charity. We have to pay attention to spiritual poverty too,” Rodríguez said.

“[Caritas] wants to help every baptized understand that the goods of this earth are not to be accumulated but made available through service.”

Famed Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the founding fathers of the liberation theology movement in Latin America in the 1960s and 70s, urged Caritas to address “the need to provide justice for the poor.”

Liberation Theology is a movement that sought to place the Catholic Church on the side of the poor in struggles for social justice.

Gutiérrez complained that people today love to speak about living in a moment of “post-socialism”, “post-capitalism”, “post-industrialization”.

“People today love to be post,” said. “But we’re not living a post-poverty era.”

Pope Francis was scheduled to open the Caritas assembly with a Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on Tuesday.

Beyond Rodríguez and Gutiérrez, other keynote speakers during the five-day Caritas Internationalis will be Ghana’s Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who helped write a draft of Francis’ environment encyclical; South African Prof. Beverley Haddad, an expert in the intersection of religion and the HIV epidemic; and famed American economist Jeffrey Sachs, a United Nations special advisor.

Rodríguez has served as president of Caritas for two four-year terms and will be replaced during this week’s general assembly. The organization’s secretary general, French layman Michel Roy, was appointed in 2011 and will remain in his post.
The candidates to the presidency are Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, and the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, Joseph Soueiph.

Several members of the organization have told Crux that Tagle, who hosted a record-breaking visit to the Philippines by Pope Francis earlier in the year, is the strongest candidate coming into the general assembly.

Since 2004, Caritas has been recognized by the Vatican as a “public juridical person” under church law. According to its rules, both the secretary general and the president require an approval from the Vatican prior to their election.

Roy said that beyond choosing a new president, confederation will use the general assembly to define the strategy for the next four years to be implemented at national and regional levels.

Roy listed key aspects of the strategy, including building a poor church for the poor; improving the response to unforeseen emergencies; and long-term strategies for emergencies one can anticipate, such as needs in the Philippines, which is hit by an average of 20 typhoons a year.

http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2015/05/12/key-advisor-blasts-us-blowback-to-popes-environmental-stance/

May 12, 2015

Pope says environmental sinners will face God's judgment for world hunger

AFP in Vatican City
The Guardian

Pope Francis has warned “the powerful of the Earth” they will answer to God if they fail to protect the environment to ensure the world can feed its population.

“The planet has enough food for all, but it seems that there is a lack of willingness to share it with everyone,” Francis said at a mass to mark the opening of the general assembly of the Catholic charitable organisation Caritas.

“We must do what we can so that everyone has something to eat, but we must also remind the powerful of the Earth that God will call them to judgment one day and there it will be revealed if they really tried to provide food for Him in every person and if they did what they could to preserve the environment so that it could produce this food.”

The striking comments from the Argentinian pontiff came ahead of the upcoming publication of a papal encyclical on the ethical aspects of environmental issues that is eagerly awaited by campaigners for action to address global warming.
An encyclical is a statement of fundamental principles designed to guide Catholic teaching on a subject. It is issued in the form of a letter from the pope to bishops around the world.

Campaigners on climate change believe that a signal from Francis that the church considers global warming a grave danger could influence the global discussion on the severity of the problem, what has caused it and what can be done.

The pope is due to address the UN Special Summit on Sustainable Development in September and the international community will seek to reach a universal agreement on climate change at a summit in Paris in December.

Climate change sceptics have warned Francis not to take sides in the debate but all the signs so far are that he sees the problem as man-made and as one which can be alleviated by political action.

Caritas is a confederation of 165 Catholic charity and aid groups operating in 200 countries worldwide.

It holds a general assembly once every four years. This year’s meeting, the first under Francis’s papacy, runs to Saturday.

The archbishop of Manila, Luis Antonio Tagle, is tipped to take over from the Honduran cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga as the organisation’s president, the latter cleric having served the maximum two terms.

http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/12/pope-environmental-sinners-will-face-god-judgment

May 14, 2015

How will the world react to Pope Francis's encyclical on climate change?

By Neil Thorns
The Guardian

Whatever the Pope says in his highly-anticipated climate message it will present challenges - not just for climate sceptics, but for all Catholics, on how we should act to protect our environment and the world’s poorest people

“Do you think people will listen to Pope Francis on this?” a journalist asked me recently. The easiest answer is, who isn’t listening to Pope Francis at the moment?

The subject in question is climate change, as the Holy Father gears up to release a much-anticipated Papal encyclical – a letter to Catholics everywhere – that will consider care for
creation, sustainable development and the impact that climate change is having on the world’s poorest people.

The expectations for this document are huge. I attended a meeting this month at the Vatican to prepare for its release, chaired by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, which brought together scientists, faith leaders, businesses, NGOs such as Cafod and politicians. (There was a certain irony in an institution set up to ensure there would not be another Galileo ‘mistake’ holding this conference on climate change while the modern day naysayers to the science tried to cause a distraction outside.)

The mixture was a good one; the scientists know the facts but can’t say what should be done, and faith leaders are not scientists but can bear testament to the effect climate change is having on the poor communities they serve.

Regardless of their faith, every single person who attended the meeting, alongside the general public, is looking to the Pope to drive momentum and create an atmosphere where world leaders will act on climate change, looking beyond national borders and our immediate generation.

As United Nations secretary general Ban Ki-moon – his presence further testament to the influence the encyclical is already wielding – told delegates: “We are the first generation that can end poverty, but the last that can take steps to avoid the worst impact of climate change.”

If Ban is right and climate change is the defining issue of our time, then the Church must reflect and speak on the signs of the times, just as it did during the industrial revolution when it called for workers’ rights and freedom of association, or when it spoke on the need for peace in the post-world war two era.

And yet, whatever the Pope says on the subject is likely to present a challenge to us all.

An encyclical is not a scientific document, rather one that explores a particular issue in the light of Catholic social teaching. Yet the Pontifical Academy of Science has thoroughly investigated the research, producing its own documents on topics such as glacier retreat, and it is clear that we must take on board what the science is telling us.

In September, the Pope will travel to the US, where he’ll address the United Nations, as world leaders gather to agree a new set of goals that will define development work for the next 15 years. He'll also travel to Washington, where he'll become the first Pope ever to address the US Congress.

Estimates suggest around a third of Congress are Catholic – yet many have been vocal in their climate scepticism. How will they cope when presented with the unassailable truth that their faith calls them to care about creation, and the impact that environmental degradation is having on the world’s poorest people?

The question of economics is often used to try and deflect the climate debate – with suggestions that challenging the status quo will impede the economic progress of developing countries - but
the Vatican discussions this month left us in no doubt that the pursuit of purely economic growth by richer countries is leading to exploitation of natural resources and contributing to a growing chasm between the world’s richest and poorest. How will politicians in one of the world’s richest countries react if they are asked to step away from a ruthless pursuit of GDP?

What of the US news stations that report on the impacts of climate change with a healthy degree of cynicism – how will they choose to cover the Holy Father’s words? It seems unfathomable that they will openly criticise the stance he takes, and yet his words and actions will undoubtedly present a challenge to their standard editorial line.

And what of ordinary people? The Catholic community everywhere will be called upon to reflect not just on whether our lifestyles are promoting care for creation, but whether our social, political and economic choices truly promote the interests of the poorest among us.

Pope Francis is not the first pontiff to tackle environmental issues, and nor will he be the last. And while countless sceptics may try and use their own scientific interpretations to detract from his message, the fact remains that the Church’s role has always been to consider issues such as these from the viewpoint of humanity, to provide a moral compass that motivates people everywhere to do the right thing and think about how their choices are impacting on the poorest and most vulnerable.

Those protesting outside the Vatican climate meeting proclaimed that they weren’t obliged to listen to the Pope on this issue. Perhaps not, but as the Chancellor of the Vatican’s scientific academy points out – any Catholic choosing to ignore the encyclical’s message will need to have a very good reason for doing so.

http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/14/how-will-the-world-react-to-pope-franciss-encyclical-on-climate-change

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May 15, 2015

Buddhists Go to the White House

By Hozan Alan Senauke
Lion’s Roar

The streets of Washington DC were lined with blossoms and greenery, the prospect of promise. One hundred thirty Buddhist teachers, monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, academics, and organizers met on Thursday May 14 for the first “White House—U.S. Buddhist Leadership Conference,” the subject at hand being “Voices in the Square—Action in the World.”

While I am ambivalent about a designation of Buddhist “leaders” — and can think of many other friends and elders who could have, should have been in the room—in this event the notion of leadership cuts in two directions. A remarkably diverse group of women and men were meeting
to shape a common understanding of how to bring our various Buddhist practices into a troubled world. At the same time there was a unique opportunity to be in dialogue with White House and State Department staff interested in finding Buddhist allies to work on issues of climate change, racial justice, and peacebuilding.

Point person for this all-day event was William Aiken, public affairs director for Soka Gakai International, with help from Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi of Buddhist Global Relief, Dr. Sallie King of James Madison University, the International Buddhist Committee of Washington DC, and Dr. Duncan Ryuken Williams of University of Southern California. With all their respective contacts and networks, this was a remarkable gathering, with wide and unique diversity in race, nationality, gender, and Buddhist traditions.

Beginning with welcomes and a short meditation, the morning program at George Washington University featured brief presentations on some broad and pressing concerns. A video from Mary Evelyn Tucker and a strong analysis by Bhikkhu Bodhi laid out the Four Noble Truths of Climate Change. Rev. angel Kyodo Williams of the Center for Transformative Change made the compelling connection between climate justice and racial justice, saying, “We have in our hearts the willingness to degrade the planet because we are willing to degrade human beings.”

Even more briefly we heard accounts of social change work taken on by a half dozen communities and organizations among us. These presentations could have continued productively for days.

After a vegetarian box lunch and a brief time to make new acquaintances in four topical breakout groups, we all strolled a few blocks to meet with staff at the “working White House” of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. There was a quick hand-off to White House staffers of two Buddhist declarations — one on climate change and another on racial justice. Then followed two and a half hours of staff briefings along with sometimes pointed Q & A between Buddhists and staff.

Our discussants were: Melissa Rogers of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Partnerships; Dr. Shaun Casey, the State Dept.’s Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs; Rev. Susan Hayward, Interim Director, Religion and Peacebuilding, US Institute of Peace; and Angela Barranco from the White House Council for Environmental Quality (CON).

Three things stand out from the day. First, that we gathered in collective concern for compelling issues that threaten the wellbeing of all sentient beings, not the interests of Buddhists alone. Second, the rich opportunity and frustrating brevity of being with so many friends and allies. Third that in the “working White House” of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, we were able, Buddhist practitioners and White House staff together, to chant the four Bodhisattva vows, beginning with: “Beings are numberless; I vow to save them.”

The organizers’ intention and participants’ hope is that this would be the first in a series of meetings in Washington. For this first step to lead in a productive direction that must be the case.
It is good to meet a first time but it is only through relationship—among ourselves as Buddhist practitioners and with the ear of those in government—that we will accomplish anything and turn to the work of bodhisattvas.

In his eloquent closing words, Jack Kornfield drew our attention to a quotation at the foot of one of our White House briefing pages. He likened it to the teachings of our great and ancient Tibetan teacher Shantideva. But the source is rather different:

“Instead of driving us apart, our varied beliefs can bring us together to feed the hungry and comfort the afflicted; to make peace where there is strife and rebuild what has broken; to lift up those who have fallen on hard times.” —President Barack Obama, February 2008


May 15, 2015

Pope Francis endorses climate action petition

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

A petition calling for world leaders to address climate change and “drastically cut carbon emissions” received a big endorsement last week in Rome from the pope.

Members of the Global Catholic Climate Movement met with Pope Francis May 6 while in Rome for planning meetings around the upcoming papal encyclical on the environment. During his weekly audience in St. Peter’s Square, they introduced their petition and asked for his blessing.

“He was very supportive,” Tomás Insua, a Buenos Aires, Argentina, native and co-founder of the group, said in an email. “He even joked that we were competing against his encyclical before it was published.”

The petition, released in late March and addressed to world leaders, reads:

“Climate change affects everyone, but especially the poor and most vulnerable people. Impelled by our Catholic faith, we call on you to drastically cut carbon emissions to keep the global temperature rise below the dangerous threshold of 1.5°C, and to aid the world’s poorest in coping with climate change impacts.”

On May 7, Msgr. Guillermo Karcher, a papal master of ceremonies, signed the petition on behalf of the pope, as protocol prevents popes from signing such documents themselves. Karcher also presented the six representatives of the Global Catholic Climate Movement with the book The
Energy of the Sun in the Vatican, a gift from the pope to illustrate the Vatican’s commitment to renewable energy as a solution to climate change.

“The Pope's endorsement is a huge thing for us, because we are just starting to promote our climate petition in the Catholic community and his support legitimizes our movement,” Insua said.

The Global Catholic Climate Movement formed in January ahead of the pope’s trip to the Philippines. It has grown to a network of more than 100 Catholic organizations worldwide. Among its partners are the Manila archdiocese’s Ecology Ministry in the Philippines, Acción Católica Argentina, and Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA). U.S. participants include Catholic Climate Covenant, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life, and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

The network is seeking 1 million signatures to present to world leaders in December at the Paris climate negotiations, where they are expected to finalize and sign a potential agreement for international action to address climate change.

“Climate change hits the poorest first and hardest, and will leave an unnecessarily dire legacy for future generations,” Allen Ottaro, director of the Kenya-based CYNESA, said in a statement. “We Catholics need to step up against climate change and raise a strong voice asking political leaders to take action urgently.”

The Rome meetings, held May 6-8, brought together 45 Catholic leaders heavily engaged in environmental issues to brainstorm strategic and collaborative actions to promote the encyclical.

In addition to members of the Global Catholic Climate Movement, participants included several Brazilian bishops, along with representatives of Caritas; CAFOD, the official aid agency of the Catholic church in England and Wales; CIDSE, an alliance of Catholic development agencies; the Sisters of Mercy; and the Columbans.

“We want to make sure that the encyclical and this whole issue is not perceived as climate change is the issue -- that climate change is a symptom of a greater issue,” said Patrick Carolan, executive director of Franciscan Action Network, who attended the meetings. “And the greater issue is our lack of connectedness, our viewing ourselves as separate from creation instead of part of creation.”

As far as actions, the meetings largely targeted three events: the release of the pope’s encyclical, currently undergoing translation and expected in June or July; Francis’ U.S. visit in late September, when he will address Congress and the United Nations; and the Paris climate talks in December.

On June 28, the Catholic environmental leaders are asking churches around the world to ring their bells as a way of saying thank you to the pope for the encyclical. In addition, they have planned a rally in Rome that day and for smaller prayer vigils concurrently held around the world.
Other plans include a meatless Friday campaign and climate pilgrimages to Rome and Paris, as well as smaller, local versions. A prayer vigil in Washington will take place Sept. 23, the night before Francis addresses a joint session of Congress, with supportive vigils held elsewhere around the globe.

The Global Catholic Climate Movement hopes events like these help raise awareness not only of the pope’s encyclical, but of a host of ecological issues.

“In Argentina it is starting to generate excitement, although I would say that most Catholics are still unaware that the eco-encyclical is coming,” Insua said.

In the U.S., much discussion has preceded the encyclical, and it has generated interest outside Catholic circles. Carolan said he planned to meet with representatives of the World Wildlife Fund at some point to talk about the papal teaching document, and that other environmental groups have contacted him about possible collaboration.

“They’ve reached out to us and said that they think that Pope Francis’ encyclical is one of those defining moments in history, this encyclical, and they understand it’s important, even as a secular organization,” he said.

Carolan sees the interest from nonfaith groups as a good thing: a potential avenue to expand the public’s view of climate change from simply a science or environmental issue to an issue concerning faith and morality.

“If they can use the pope’s message to really get the message out to their members, some of whom are Catholic but many of whom are not or not even people of faith … that this is a moral and ethical and spiritual issue, it might be bringing us all closer together,” Carolan said.

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May 20, 2015

Nuclear weapons: the greatest threat to the environment

By Thomas C. Fox
National Catholic Reporter

As the Vatican gets set to roll out its highly anticipated encyclical on the environment, it is wise to recall the greatest signal threat to the global environment is the explosion of a nuclear weapon. Even one such explosion would significantly alter the world’s environment, as the radiation cloud would drift around the planet. An exchange of nuclear weapons -- nearly all such weapons in the arsenals of the nuclear-weapon-possessing nations are many times more powerful than
those dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan -- could eradicate most human life on the planet.

The Vatican is aware of this and has spoken to this issue repeatedly. But with the likelihood growing that the ongoing Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, now wrapping up at the U.N., will end in pessimism and failure to move the nuclear disarmament agenda forward, it becomes imperative that global moral voices speak out against the stockpiling of these weapons. NCR courageously has condemned the possession of these weapons. The U.S. and Russia, meanwhile, have an estimated 2,500 on "launch-on-warning" alert. (This is human madness 25 years after the end of the Cold War.)

Nuclear disarmament has almost stopped. There are no nuclear disarmament talks between Washington and Moscow. Congress is strongly opposed to nuclear disarmament. So is the U.S. arms industry. Instead of making cuts, the nuclear-weapons-possessing nations are now involved in a new arms race to "modernize" their arsenals, meaning that they are upgrading and replacing warheads with more "precise" weaponry. This is lunacy. This is suicide. The U.S. is spending $350 billion to modernize the U.S. nuclear arsenal in the next 10 years, nearly $1 trillion in the next 30 years.

While the U.S., Russia, England, France and China cling to their nuclear weapons, their cries to non-nuclear nations to maintain their non-nuclear postures ring increasingly hollow.

Many arms critics say the continued possession of nuclear weapons will eventually lead to their use, by intent or accident. It is only a matter of time -- unless stringent efforts are made to outlaw and remove these weapons from the planet. To say it cannot be done is to give up and passively give in to the idea of their eventual use.

The world community has outlawed chemical and biological weapons. It is time now time to outlaw and ban nuclear weapons.


May 21, 2015

The Catholic Case for Tackling Climate Change

By Stephen Seufert
The Huffington Post

"Protecting our environment is an urgent moral imperative and sacred duty for all people of faith and conscience." Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations

Pope Francis's much anticipated encyclical on the environment and address to the UN provides Catholics a rare opportunity to take the lead on presenting the moral argument surrounding climate change. While scientific, economic and political arguments regarding climate change
have been made for decades, a moral case has yet to fully materialize. Some climate change
deniers, in an effort to avoid a discussion on the morality behind the issue, are using their
personal religious beliefs to legitimize their views. Luckily, Pope Francis and Catholics around
the world aren't buying into such obtuse arguments on climate change.

A study by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication found Catholics believe in
climate change more than most other Christian denominations. Furthermore, more Catholics than
non-Catholic Christians believe humans are mostly causing climate change. Why is this the case?

First and foremost, Catholics who believe in the common good are always thinking about the
poor, sick and marginalized. Furthermore, Catholics think about why people are poor, sick and
marginalized and take steps to end such suffering. Pope Francis once aptly stated, "What you
think, you must feel and put into effect. Your information comes down to your heart and you put
it into practice." This is the core of Catholic moral teachings: using the mind, heart, and body in
unison to spread love and joy to those around us.

Morality means making a distinction between right and wrong, good or bad. For Catholics,
morality has always been framed in the context of promoting and protecting life. Therefore, will
life be promoted and protected when coastlines erode or lakes dry up? Ask the residents of
Florida and California these questions— for many are already experiencing such environmental
challenges. Millions of lives are already being affected by climate change. If nothing is done to
curtail or prepare for climate change, millions more will needlessly suffer.

In the United States at least, a confrontational divide between religion and state exists. Such a
divide touches every aspect of society: from debates over marriage to traditionally non-partisan
issues such as science and how it relates to the environment. Such a divide wasn't always the
case.

In the 1950s, Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower inserted the phrase "Under God" into
the pledge of allegiance and made "In God we trust" the official national motto. With these
measures, it's clear Eisenhower was a deeply religious man. Yet Eisenhower's religious beliefs
didn't stop him from signing into law the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, or
NASA as it's commonly known. By and large, religious beliefs and the pursuit of scientific
advancements lived in harmony during the Eisenhower administration.

Today however, NASA is facing budget cuts due to climate denying elected officials who use
their personal religious beliefs to shape national policy. Overseeing NASA is Republican Senator
Ted Cruz of Texas—a man who believes studying earth's atmosphere isn't part of NASA's core
mission and who announced his bid for the presidency at a college which denies evolution and
believes the Earth is only six thousand years old. In contrast, Pope Francis and the Vatican
believe the theories of evolution and the Big Bang are correct.

Senator Cruz, and those who share his views, constitute a small, vocal minority in government
who don't accept the science behind climate change— yet still exert tremendous political and
economic influence on the issue.
The question then becomes: will Catholics who believe in the dangerous effects of climate change allow a small group to compromise efforts to promote and protect the common good? Furthermore, even if climate change is found to not be largely caused by mankind's actions, are not the health and safety concerns surrounding climate change enough for concrete action?

A marriage between faith based morality, science and economics could be the final nail in the coffin for climate change deniers. Climate change deniers have already lost the debate within the scientific community and investors are increasingly pressuring financial institutions to disclose information on firms which contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Prior to a U.N. climate summit last September, the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook, called on corporations to recognize the environmental impact of the products they sell to consumers.

If scientific and economic leaders are already calling for action on climate change, what will happen if Pope Francis actively petitions 1.2 billion Catholics to take up the cause?

Knowing the influence Pope Francis has over Catholics and non-Catholics, attempts to discredit or downplay the importance of the pope's encyclical on the environment and address to the UN is being vigorously pursued by special interest groups and lobbyists. Climate change deniers recently tried to persuade the pope that "there is no global warming crisis." Such persuasions have fell on deaf ears from within the Vatican. Perhaps special interest groups and lobbyists are worried about a faith based discussion on the morality of climate change because they know social justice Christians have little interest in money or power, but rather the protection and promotion of life.

Catholics can't miss the opportunity to shape the moral discussion on what to do about climate change. It is not in our nature to let others debate and decide issues which affect the common good. Now is the time for Catholics to stand alongside Pope Francis in his crusade to combat the suffering climate change brings with it.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stephen-seufert/the-catholic-case-for-tackling-climate-change-_b_7363650.html

May 22, 2015

Dominican Sisters of Caldwell fight against climate change

Sisters seek sustainable lifestyles

By Nicole Bitette
New Jersey Hills

Caldwell — The Dominican Sisters across five congregations, including Caldwell, are working together to reduce their carbon footprint and lead more sustainable lifestyles.
The Dominican Sisters have been studying ways to make ecologically sound decisions since the 1970s, according to the Promoter of Justice for the Dominican Sisters in Committed Collaboration, Sister Didi Madden.

Madden said the sisters live more sustainable lifestyles through simplicity.

“Education about saving energy, practices that reduce use of water, electricity, plastics is a regular part of our justice work and so the sisters find new ways of reducing their carbon footprint,” she said.

Specifically, the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell have installed solar panels on their Rosary Hill property and their newest building, Sacred Heart Convent, includes many sustainable initiatives, such as rainwater capture, energy efficient heating and cooling, “green” electric, gardens and bee hives, Madden said.

The sisters have also conducted energy audits and participated in recycling efforts in conjunction with Caldwell University and Mount St. Dominic Academy.

The Dominican Sisters learn information on climate change through an NGO delegate at the United Nations through their involvement with the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investments and educational programs through the Earth Council, Madden explained.

The Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investments comprises of 40 Catholic institutions, mostly congregations of sisters and priests, who assist investors in engaging with companies, educating their members and connecting investment activity with Catholic social teaching, according to the organization.

Sister Pat Daly of the Dominican Sisters of Caldwell and executive director of the Tri-State Coalition has been working with companies on climate change since 1988.

“All of the Dominican Sisters are committed to a corporate stance on climate change. This is just one of two corporate stances the sisters have agreed to.

The stance is an attitude and commitment made by the sisters after much study, conversation and prayer, according to Madden.

“The stance calls us individually, communally, and as congregations to take action and make decisions in keeping with the values outlined in the corporate stance,” she said.
The care of creation is an essential element of living and that is why the sisters get involved because they know that the way people live today is destructive to the environment, Madden added.

“The sisters get involved because they know as we pollute the Earth, the poor and marginalized will impacted in a disproportionate manner and will be at risk for even more extreme poverty, violence and forced migration,” she said. “The sisters get involved because we know that increased suffering of some caused by increased consumerism and exaggerated need for comfort needs to be corrected.”


May 23, 2015

Catholics prepare for pope's climate stance

Encyclical expected to underscore social justice, human cost

By Rachel Zoll, Associated Press
The Columbian

NEW YORK — There will be prayer vigils and pilgrimages, policy briefings and seminars, and sermons in parishes from the U.S. to the Philippines.

When Pope Francis releases his much-anticipated teaching document on the environment and climate change in the coming weeks, a network of Roman Catholics will be ready. These environmental advocates — who work with bishops, religious orders, Catholic universities and lay movements — have been preparing for months to help maximize the effect of the statement, hoping for a transformative impact in the fight against global warming.

"This is such a powerful moment," said Patrick Carolan, executive director of Franciscan Action Network, a Washington-based advocacy group formed by Franciscan religious orders. "We're asking ourselves, 'What would be the best way for us to support the faith community in getting this out and using it as a call to action?'"

Francis is issuing the encyclical by the end of June with an eye toward the end-of-year U.N. climate change conference in Paris. While previous popes have made strong moral and theological arguments in favor of environmental protection, Francis will be the first to address global warming in such a high-level teaching document.

The pope, who will address the U.N. General Assembly Sept. 25 when he visits the U.S., has said he wants the encyclical to be released in time to be read and absorbed before the Paris talks. Advocates are pressing for a binding, comprehensive agreement among nations to curb rising global temperatures, which scientists say are largely driven by carbon emissions.
"People are really putting a lot of weight on this," said Nancy Tuchman, director of the Institute of Environmental Sustainability at Loyola University Chicago. "I think the real hope is that he says it like it is and tells us there has to be a call to action and it has to be immediate."

The institute, which has been working to unite 28 U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities as a common voice on climate change, plans to collect papers from students, faculty and staff with their reflections on the document and how they can be "one of its champions," Tuchman said. A school colloquium on the papers is planned for Sept. 9.

Carolan was among about 40 Catholic leaders who gathered in Rome this month for a strategy meeting organized by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, a network he co-founded which includes organizations representing religious orders, church aid agencies, Catholic social justice advocates and others. The movement started a petition that urges political leaders to take action to curb global warming and plans a prayer vigil in Washington the night before Francis' Sept. 24 address to Congress, where he is likely to touch on environmental protection.

**Challenges planned**

His audience at the Capitol will include skeptics on climate change, and like-minded groups are preparing a response to the encyclical.

The Heartland Institute, a conservative Chicago-based think tank that sent a team to Rome last month to warn the pope against the U.N.'s climate change agenda, says it is building relationships with Catholic leaders and planning to distribute reports on sustainable development and challenges to climate science to a Catholic audience.

Jim Lakely, a Heartland spokesman, said since the Rome event, the institute has heard from Catholic groups, bloggers and others "who share our concern that the pope is being misadvised by the United Nations on this complicated scientific issue."

At the same time, however, other Catholics worldwide are mobilizing to echo the pope's words among the faithful.

Catholic Earthcare Australia, the ecology agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, plans an event on the encyclical at the Australian Parliament and will publish a book on the encyclical for use in parishes.

In the Philippines, the Archdiocese of Manila's decade-old ecology ministry is asking bishops to encourage all parishes to ring their church bells when the encyclical is released, among other efforts to highlight the pope's statement, ministry director Lou Arsenio said. Each September, the Manila ecology ministry holds a month of liturgies and church activities on environmental protection called a "Season of Creation."

"The big issue here is that environmental issues are not just about science but about ethics and moral values," said Pablo Canziani, an atmospheric physicist who works with the Argentine bishops' conference.
Canziani, who worked with then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires before he became Pope Francis, recently led a two-day environmental seminar organized for Argentine diocesan priests. Canziani said he and others also hope to incorporate prayers related to the encyclical in the many upcoming Argentine pilgrimages to shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

In the U.S., Dan Misleh, director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, an education and advocacy network that works with the U.S. bishops, is preparing model sermons on the expected themes of the encyclical.

Over the last 15 years or so, Catholic and other faith traditions have been increasingly taking up environmental protection, or what they call creation care, as a moral issue, emphasizing the impact not only on nature but also on poor people who struggle for access to clean water and farmable land and are often the most vulnerable in natural disasters.

However, theologians and secular environmental activists say this stunningly popular pope, who has captured the world's attention, can bring into focus the human toll from climate change in a way few other leaders can.

"The social justice aspect, and the way climate change is going to affect the poor and underprivileged and less privileged — that's not the first thing people think about when they think about climate change," said Lou Leonard, a World Wildlife Fund vice president who specializes in climate change issues. "For those who see this primarily as an issue of polar bears or other impact on species — which is all really important — this is an opportunity to say this is as much a human issue as anything else."

The church, given its reach and structure, also provides an unparalleled network for amplifying calls to reduce global warming.

Bishops' conferences in many countries, including in the U.S., have social justice programs that focus on the environment. Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, head of the U.S. bishops' domestic justice and human development committee, speaks frequently about Catholic teaching on preserving creation and the impact of climate change on the poor.

Global warming has also emerged as an issue for Caritas International, a confederation of Catholic charitable groups who play a major role in development and disaster relief in more than 160 countries. Caritas leaders worldwide said in a survey released this month that climate change was a top contributor to food insecurity.

Major environmental organizations are also abuzz about the encyclical and have been contacting Catholic groups for guidance. In webinars for them, Carolan has been explaining what an encyclical is. Misleh has cautioned the groups that the pope will be making a theological statement and speaking "as a Catholic, not a member of the Sierra Club."

May 25, 2015

Catholics organize to promote pope's climate change message

USA Today

NEW YORK (AP) — When Pope Francis releases his much-anticipated teaching document on the environment and climate change in the coming weeks, a network of Roman Catholics will be ready.

There will be prayer vigils and pilgrimages, policy briefings and seminars, and sermons in parishes from the U.S. to the Philippines.

These environmental advocates — who work with bishops, religious orders, Catholic universities and lay movements — have been preparing for months to help maximize the effect of the statement, hoping for a transformative impact in the fight against global warming.

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May 26, 2015

Encyclical on environment sparks hope among academics, activists

By Thomas Reese
National Catholic Reporter

The encyclical on the environment, which Pope Francis is expected to release in June or July, is stimulating a great deal of discussion and hope in academia and the environmental movement.
The pope wants to make the environment one of the signature issues of his papacy. As he explained to reporters three days after his election, one reason he took the name Francis was that St. Francis of Assisi is "the man who loves and protects creation."

Conservationists are hoping that the encyclical's attitude toward animals, especially wildlife, will reflect the spirit of St. Francis, according to Lonnie Ellis, associate director of Catholic Climate Covenant.

The encyclical is widely expected to give support to those who attribute climate change to human activity since the pope has already said he accepts this scientific conclusion.

Although popes are clearly not infallible when it comes to science, Francis is the first pope to have a modern scientific training: He was educated as a chemist and worked as one in Argentina before he entered the seminary.

Christiana Peppard of Fordham University said she hopes the encyclical will affirm that "contemporary science is a marvelous way of knowing the world and that it represents a collective, collaborative way of discerning important realities about the Earth that we share, and thus that there is zero justification for skepticism of climate change among Catholics."

"The climate crisis is an issue of unparalleled urgency," says Dan DiLeo of the Catholic Climate Covenant. "Scientists generally agree that there is a closing window of opportunity within which to avoid runaway and largely irreversible human-forced climate change."

But the encyclical will, of course, need to be about more than science.

Immaculate Heart of Mary Sr. Nancy Sylvester has worked for a number of years on climate change concerns. One thing she has learned is that "data alone will not convert people. We need to 'feel' differently about Earth. Doing what Pope Francis does so well, I'd like to see him frame the issue in a pastoral way."

This pastoral approach would speak "to a new relationship to Earth that sees all beings as partners and interconnected," she continued. "To stress not stewardship but our responsibility with all of life to work together for not only our survival, but our flourishing as a planetary community. To bring new metaphors and symbols to how we think and feel about who we are on this our Earth home."

But the encyclical also needs a theological foundation.
Walter Grazer said he hopes the pope "will place our concern for the environment within the theological framework of the Trinity, Genesis and the prophetic tradition." Grazer, a consultant on religion and environment, is a former manager of the Environmental Justice Program at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Many Catholics wonder why the church is getting into this issue, and it would be helpful for them to know that our ecological concern flows from our theology. Catholics see "the Trinity as relational and social," Grazer said, and "all of creation and life reflects this relational and social notion -- so all creatures are intimately linked and share kinship."

But, he said, "while Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI strongly called for a respect for the integrity of nature, it was always qualified by references of nature ultimately in service to humans."

"I hope the encyclical will stress that nature and the rest of creation has an integrity of its own as a creation of God," he said. "This does not mean a diminishment of the unique and special place of humans in creation or a hands-off approach, but rather a call for an even greater respect and intimacy with nature and a less instrumental notion."

This is a major concern of Dan Scheid of Duquesne University. "The one thing I would most like to see is for Francis to describe a vision of the common good that is non-anthropocentric and that sees caring for the environment not only as a concern for the poor and for future generations, but also because human flourishing is only possible as part of a flourishing planet and cosmos," he said. "I would like to see 'human ecology' and 'natural ecology' unified back into what many religious orders describe as a concern for the 'integrity of creation.'"

Scheid would like the encyclical "to move beyond dominion and stewardship models and closer to 'partnership' models of ecological theology that celebrate the commonalities between humans and nonhumans." And "since mercy has been a prominent theme of his, I would love it if he expressed the call to be merciful to the Earth and to nonhumans."

Mercy Sr. Margaret Farley of Yale University agreed that the encyclical needs to offer a new perspective on the relationship between humans and nature.

"From relations primarily of utility, domination, exploitation, nature-human relations may instead be based on the intrinsic value inherent in each, and in all non-living, living, non-human, and human beings," she said. "The relationship is one of interdependence, participation and, for humans, the possibility of conscious gratitude and awe."
What is said about the environment also needs to be connected to Catholic social teaching about
the common good, solidarity, and concern for the poor. Farley notes that this teaching has helped
people recognize that "ethical claims for justice and care" apply "not only in one's own group but
in relation to all peoples, including future generations."

_Gaudium et Spes_ of the Second Vatican Council is a good place to start for the new encyclical,
said Dolores Christie of John Carroll University. "There is good stuff in the tradition, but it needs
to be applied explicitly to critical contemporary issues. A ravaged Earth is not sustainable." DiLeo argued, "Ecological degradation compromises the Catholic commitment to protect and
defend human life and dignity, especially of the poor and vulnerable."

According to Peppard, "an ethical-theological treatment of shared, vital environmental goods,
like freshwater," would be helpful. It should articulate "responsibility across geographic space
and chronology (including duties to future generations)."

Vince Miller of the University of Dayton said, "Just as Catholic social doctrine teaches that no
person exists without society, we need to also learn that our species does not exist without the
rest of creation."

According to Tobias Winright of St. Louis University, "how climate change and related
environmental issues connect with other important concerns, including war and peace,
economics, and health care," needs to be articulated in the encyclical.

Ron Pagnucco of the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University agreed on the importance
of discussing the environment, conflict and peace, since environmental degradation is a "threat
multiplier."

The relationship between the environment and the economy is especially important, noted
Catholic Climate Covenant's Ellis. "Environmentalists are looking to the pope for continued
linkages to poverty and impact of degradation on the poor," he said.

Jesuit Fr. James Keenan of Boston College would also "like to see the sustainability issues
related to climate change woven into issues related to economic inequality."

Environmental problems are also connected to racism, said Alex Mikulich of Loyola University
New Orleans. And M. Shawn Copeland of Boston College notes that "it would be important to
consider the connection between the desire to dominate the earth/cosmos and domination of
women."
One of the reasons environmentalists are embracing religion is because it is one of the few things that can motivate people to sacrifice their own self-interest for the sake of others.

David Cloutier of Mount St. Mary's University calls for a "forthright confrontation with so-called lifestyle choices."

"It's all the choices we make that cause the per capita carbon footprint of the average American to be roughly twice that of most European countries, and that cause the insanity of California lawns and water-thirsty agriculture," he said. "I'm all for better laws and structures, but until we stop expecting strawberries in February, spacious living quarters, and large SUVs, I'm not sure how those structures change."

Likewise, Scheid said he hopes for Francis to deliver "a critique of consumerism and a 'scrap culture' or 'throwaway culture' that uses and then discards as trash people, especially the poor; created goods; and the Earth as a whole. I hope he ties the preferential option for the poor and solidarity with ecological concerns."

Grazer said he hopes the pope "will call upon the larger and more wealthy nations to lead and make the sacrifices needed to make urgent progress regarding climate change, and in particular, helping the most vulnerable people and nations mitigate and adapt to climate change."

The pope "needs to call for much greater leadership on the part of wealthier nations and also for sufficient changes in personal and corporate lifestyle, moving away from consumerism," Grazer said.

But Miller of Dayton University stressed that structural change, not just individual choices, is essential. "Our moral and Christian obligation is not simply to change our consumption as individuals, but to collectively build a culture/society/civilization that is sustainable," he said.

It requires "a broadening of moral responsibility to care for creation from individual choice to the larger, structural policy responses that are required to address the environmental crises we face," he said. "Yes, greed is a problem, but environmental despoliation is cooked into the system we have built."

Peppard agreed that "market processes are not morally trustworthy guides to long-term flourishing of the physical bases on which all life depends" because the markets are oriented "towards short-term profit and economic growth without a recognition of natural capital as a substrate of those developments."
How people and governments respond to the encyclical will be critical.

"The theology of the encyclical is important," said Marian Diaz of Loyola University Chicago, "but the implementation or the lack thereof matters more."

The encyclical is being prepared in advance of the Paris talks on climate change, to be held Nov. 30-Dec. 11.

"It would be good for Pope Francis to set a higher standard and urge nations to be bolder in adopting a broader and more meaningful agreement," Grazer said. "It would be good if he called for full funding for the Green Climate Fund. That would help send a message that the poor of the world will not be left to handle climate impacts on their own. They did not cause the problem, but they do end up paying the price."

Winwright noted that since few people read encyclicals, the teaching of "our vocation to serve and protect creation" needs to be tied to "the one practice that most of us regularly participate in: the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of Christian life in this world."

Keenan said he hopes the pope will specifically "appeal to institutions, including Catholic ones, to look to their own internal practices and policies and to their investments to see whether they promote economic equity and environmental sustainability."

Lisa Cahill of Boston College and Peppard said they hope the pope encourages ecumenical and interreligious cooperation and learning on the environment.

Jesuit Fr. John Langan of Georgetown University said that since "environmental issues, like politics in general, is intensely local," after the encyclical is issued, "business leaders [should] be positively involved in discussions of the issues."

"This is one way of preventing the dismissal of environmental proposals," Langan said. The lack of such local discussions, he said, "limited the effectiveness of 'Economic Justice for All,' " the 1986 pastoral letter issued by the U.S. bishops' conference.

The encyclical has already triggered "reflection and conversation about our natural world and climate change among Americans of many faiths," said Jeremy Symons, senior director for climate policy at the Environmental Defense Fund. "It's a welcome conversation, because protecting the natural world and caring for our children's future are matters that touch all parts of our lives."
Edwin Chen of the Natural Resources Defense Council said that when the encyclical comes out, it "will elevate the church's powerful voice on the moral imperative of advancing justice, defending human dignity and protecting the poor and the most vulnerable among us."

"It is our duty to do all we can to secure a peaceful and safe planet for this and all future generations," Chen said. "We expect his message will resonate in every corner of the world."

We will have to wait and see if the encyclical fulfills the expectations of academics and activists. They are eagerly waiting for it and will have lots to say about it.

[Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is a senior analyst for NCR. His email address is treesesj@ncronline.org.]


May 27, 2015

Awaiting ecology encyclical, Catholic groups prepare for pope's message

By Dennis Sadowski
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Few papal encyclicals have been as eagerly awaited as Pope Francis’ upcoming statement on the environment.

While no date other than early summer for its release has been announced, anticipation is building among Catholics as well as non-Catholics and advocates for the environment. Based on the pope’s past statements, they expect the document will call people to protect human life and dignity through greater appreciation and preservation of God’s creation.

What Pope Francis is expected to say has its roots in God’s creation of the world, Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, told the First Friday Forum of Lorain County in Elyria, Ohio, in early April.

“Pope Francis is first a priest and a pastor,” Misleh explained. “He is a Catholic Christian who is reflecting on and articulating the best of our tradition.

“Let us remind ourselves that our creation care tradition goes back to Genesis, not Earth Day. Let us remind ourselves that this ancient teaching is the teaching that was familiar, too, and articulated in new ways by Jesus Christ, reinforced by the witness of St. Francis, expounded
upon by St. Thomas Aquinas as well as by St. John Paul and especially Pope Benedict, the ‘green pope.’

“Let us remember that what Pope Francis is offering here and will offer in the encyclical is not new teaching, but a new application of that old teaching,” Misleh said.

That understanding has made it easier for organizations such as the U.S. and Australian Catholic bishops’ conferences, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic advocacy groups and local environmental ministry programs to prepare resources for disseminating and implementing the pope’s message.

Representatives of Catholic organizations told Catholic News Service they are not only preparing for active study of the encyclical in parishes and schools, but that they are hopeful the document will open doors with leaders of other faiths and religious traditions, secular environmental groups and policymakers in the U.S. and around the world.

The encyclical and follow-up programs also are being seen as a way to build momentum for Pope Francis’ first U.S. visit in September and move world leaders to reach a climate change pact during the U.N. Climate Change Conference meeting in Paris Nov. 30-Dec. 11.

“We want to ensure as best we can that this encyclical is not just written and stuck on a shelf in a library and discussed only by theologians and others in schools. We want this to be a call to action,” said Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network.

Carolan will be in Rome May 6-8 to meet with representatives of the Global Catholic Climate Movement to discuss how they can best develop and share resources based on Pope Francis’ message. A handful of GCCM members were to meet with Pope Francis as well during an audience May 6.

Meanwhile, organizations such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Climate Covenant and Catholic Rural Life are working on joint programs as well as complementary resources to share the pope’s document.

The bishops will discuss steps to spread the encyclical’s message during its spring meeting in June in St. Louis.

“As with any encyclical, I think the conference is going to give an analysis, a read of it, provide some content for people who want to get to know the document,” said Mark Rohlena, director of the bishops’ Office of Domestic Social Development and its Environmental Justice Program.

CRS planned to highlight its work around the world in communities already affected by climate change, said Joan Rosenhauer, executive vice president for U.S. operations for the agency. “We want to lift up those stories to illustrate what the Holy Father is talking about,” she told CNS.
“He’s been talking about the intersection of the environment and humanity and the dignity of every person and care for the poor,” Rosenhauer explained. “We can illustrate what he has been talking about.”

CRS unveiled a new page on its website April 22, Earth Day, offering elementary school programs, a prayer and links to other resources in preparation for the encyclical.

The Catholic Climate Covenant is developing a series of videos outlining the church’s long teaching tradition on the environment. Misleh said they will be part of an online and social media effort the organization is planning.

In addition, Misleh and his staff are planning to send homily aids to parishes as a way to encourage priests to discuss the encyclical at Masses.

Around the world, church organizations and Catholic environmental advocates also are preparing educational programs, pamphlets, study guides, classroom aids and special events to introduce and share Pope Francis’ message.

“The encyclical just ups the ante in every sense, which is energizing and wonderful. It provides great impetus,” said Jacqui Remond, national director of Catholic Earthcare Australia, the ecological program of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

Remond told CNS the office is working with Caritas Australia to host an information session on the encyclical in August at Parliament House for all elected officials. She called such sessions crucial to helping policymakers understand the church’s teaching and the need to act to protect creation.

The real effect of the encyclical will be felt locally in parishes, schools and neighborhoods.

Father Robert Sanson, senior parochial vicar at St. Peter Parish in North Ridgeville, Ohio, is expecting to use the encyclical as a way to share the church’s teaching with parishioners who may not be familiar with it.

“I hope to be able to carefully articulate the difference between the church’s moral position and political posturing that creates so much divisiveness,” he said. “We have to raise the issues of fracking, of capital punishment, of ethical investing and hope they will create a conversation as Pope Francis has asked us.”

Sister Jean Verber, a member of the Dominican sisters in Racine, Wisconsin, said it will be important for parishes to engage their members so they better understand why and how Pope Francis is calling each person to take better care of the world.

“The pope has a very significant role to play here if it all goes well,” she said. “It’s very important that people know this and it’s one of the ways to engage them.”
May 28, 2015

Pope Francis' Integral Ecology

By Dave Pruett,
Former NASA researcher; Emeritus Professor of Mathematics, James Madison University
Huffington Post

"The age of nations is past. The task before us now, if we would not perish, is to build the earth."
-- Teilhard de Chardin

There's a new term being bandied about, and it's high time we paid heed: integral ecology.

Whenever the same notion arises synchronously in a number of different contexts -- in this case the Catholic Church, the Occupy movement, the climate movement, and the new-economy movement -- it's an idea whose time has arrived.

Rumor has it that integral ecology is the central theme of Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology and climate, due out at the end of summer. Encyclicals, "the highest and most comprehensive level of teaching in the Catholic Church," are the primary instruments by which the Church advises its 1.2 billion members on pressing moral issues.

The impending encyclical has already generated considerable media buzz, much of which can be followed at the website of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. Moreover, Teilhard Perspectives, the semiannual publication of the American Teilhard Association (ATA), has dedicated its most recent edition to providing background and commentary on integral ecology. (For those unfamiliar, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), whose quotation begins this essay, was a Jesuit paleontologist-priest whose influence on Christian thought, some believe, is second only to that of St. Paul.) The lovely lead article, by ATA president John Grim, deserves to be read in its entirety. Here, I'll summarize and offer a few complementary perspectives and quotations.

Integral ecology begins with the recognition that humanity now faces existential crises on multiple fronts: extreme economic disparity, increased competition for resources including land and water, a severely degraded natural world, failing nation states, and a climate on the verge of spinning out of control.

The "integral" in integral ecology is what's new. It realizes that these crises are not independent, but closely intertwined. Here's how Grim puts it:

... Francis will likely bring together issues of social justice and economic inequity into relationship with our growing understanding of global climate change and environmental trauma. ... While economic analysis is not the central agenda of his encyclical, it appears as if Francis
will consider how relentless growth through capital investment both adversely affects the poor and the health of biological life on the planet. While discussions about social justice have been robust in Catholic and Christian contexts for centuries, this encyclical marks the first time social and eco-justice are brought into close relationship.

In her blockbuster environmental manifesto *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein states bluntly: "Climate change isn't an 'issue' to add to the list of things to worry about, next to health care and taxes. It is a civilizational wake-up call."

Like Francis, Klein connects the dots. "[Effectively addressing climate change] means continually drawing connections among seemingly disparate struggles -- asserting, for instance, that the logic that would cut pensions, food stamps, and health care before increasing taxes on the rich is the same logic that would blast the bedrock of the earth to get the last vapors of gas and the last drops of oil before making the shift to renewable energy."

How did we humans allow our planetary home to fall into such a degraded state? In addition to flaws in ourselves -- primarily greed -- we humans have been operating from flawed economics and flawed theology. Regarding the latter, Klein cites journalist Thomas Sancton:

In many pagan societies, the earth was seen as a mother, a fertile giver of life. Nature -- the soil, forest, sea -- was endowed with divinity, and mortals were subordinate to it. The Judeo-Christian tradition introduced a radically different concept. The earth was the creation of a monotheistic God, who, after shaping it, ordered its inhabitants, in the words of Genesis: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." The idea of dominion could be interpreted as an invitation to use nature as a convenience.

Francis' encyclical will attempt to realign both our economics and our theology to catalyze a more viable future. In doing so, Francis is not freelancing. As Grim's article reveals, somewhat surprisingly, Francis is building upon the insights of his predecessors.

In an 1891 encyclical, states Grim, "Pope Leo XIII strongly affirmed 'the condition of the workers' in which their labor had become a mere commodity in an economic milieu that gave primacy to a free market and unregulated exploitation of workers."

Pope John Paul II similarly addressed the "fundamental error of socialism" as its devaluation of the individual. While reaffirming the dignity of work and of workers, he established that individuals have value independent of their contributions in the sphere of economics.

Francis' immediate predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, recognized that nature should be afforded the same intrinsic value that his predecessors had granted to individuals. "The natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a 'grammar' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation. Today much harm is done to development precisely as a result of these distorted notions."
Thus integral ecology revisions the relationship between the human being and the natural world. It recognizes the human as integral to nature rather than nature as subject to human domination. In the words of Father Thomas Berry (1914-2009), Teilhard's heir-apparent: "The change indicated is the change from an exploitive anthropocentrism to a participative biocentrism. The change requires something beyond environmentalism, which remains anthropocentric while trying to limit the deleterious effects of the human presence on the environment."

Integral ecology also reverses the current economic paradigms, whether capitalistic or socialistic. It envisions an economic sphere that serves the legitimate needs of individuals and societies rather than exploiting them to serve the artificial needs of the economy. And it demands that the economy respect the finite limits of the natural world.

From Vatican insiders, we know already the broad outlines of integral ecology. One such insider is Cardinal Turkson, former Archbishop of Ghana and current president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Cardinal Turkson lays out four principles that undergird integral ecology, summarized by Grim:

1. The call to all peoples to be protectors of the environment is integral and all embracing.
2. Care for creation is a virtue in its own right.
3. It is necessary to care for what we cherish and revere.
4. A new global solidarity is a key value to direct our search for the common good.

In summary, Francis will call for no less than revolution, not of violence but "a revolution of tenderness, a revolution of the heart." That tenderness of solidarity should extend not only to the earth's poor but to the earth herself. Both have been exploited. Both have been debased. "At such a moment," intuited Berry, "a new revolutionary experience is needed, an experience wherein human consciousness awakens to the grandeur and sacred quality of earth process."

The fates of all peoples are linked, and they are linked ultimately to the fate of the earth. What befalls the earth befalls us all.

(The author is grateful to Doug Hendren, the earth's troubadour.)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-pruett/pope-francis-integral-eco_b_7460058.html

May 30, 2015

Pope Francis’ climate change encyclical expected to make global impact

By Ed Stannard
New Haven Register

Pope Francis’ much anticipated encyclical about climate change will make a major impact.
throughout the Roman Catholic Church and beyond, propelled by the severity of the issue and the pope’s personal popularity, say religious and environmental leaders in Connecticut.

According to Mary Evelyn Tucker, who teaches in Yale’s schools of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Divinity and Law, “This is the most important thing that will happen in our lifetime on the environment.” Tucker, a Catholic, coordinates the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim.

“It’s important because this is the moment when the moral and ethical issues of the environmental movement will be visible” and taken seriously in a religious sense, Tucker said. “Science and policy are necessary but not sufficient to solve these problems” of climate change and the related issues of sustainable development and environmental justice, she said.

“We need to see these issues as moral,” she said; global warming threatens God’s creation, which is sacred.

“The pope’s encyclical puts this on another level of moral import,” Tucker said.

Release of the encyclical is the first of three events anticipated by environmentalists in and outside the churches. Next will be the pope’s speech at the United Nations in September. Then, on Nov. 30, the 12-day-long U.N. Climate Change Conference, known as COP-21, will open in Paris, involving almost 200 nations.

The Rev. James Manship, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church in New Haven, said his mostly Latino congregation knows well how pollution and climate change affects their families in nations such as Guatemala and Ecuador, where Chinese mineral mining creates poisonous runoff into drinking water.

“I think there’s going to be a little bit for everybody in this encyclical,” Manship said. “Climate affects everybody and I think it’s going to affect a lot of folks and their family members back home.”

Manship said Pope Francis, who is from Argentina, is listened to closely by his Hispanic parishioners. “Anything that the pope has been saying, he’s really been getting us in the church to think in a much clearer … way about living out our faith.”

Teresa Berger, professor of Catholic theology and liturgical studies at Yale Divinity School, said the world is in an “ecological crisis” and that the pope’s message, expected in June or July, will offer “some guideposts and challenges in terms of how to respond to this crisis.”

While no one knows exactly what the encyclical will say, Berger said “there are some informed guesses to be made because some of the people with whom he has been in conversation on the subject have spoken about the overarching themes.” She said Francis’ message is likely to be directed at both developed and developing nations and will address “the tension between legitimate desires for better standards of living and the issue of sustainability.”
She said three things are coming together: “a charismatic pope … with a huge appeal, an environmental crisis that demands everybody’s attention” and “the fact that he is taking charge … at a time when other institutions are grappling with this important issue.”

However in a church of 1.2 billion followers, there are those “who are a bit worried about the position the pope will take,” Berger said. “Not everybody … is enthusiastic about this.”

This month, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, called for a development model that combines economic growth with low-carbon, energy-efficient technology, according to The Associated Press.

“When the future of the planet is at stake, there are no political frontiers, barriers or walls behind which we can hide to protect ourselves from the effects of environmental and social degradation,” Parolin said at a conference of business and church leaders. “There is no room for the globalization of indifference, the economy of exclusion or the throwaway culture so often denounced by Pope Francis.”

Parolin continued, “We can foster economic growth and mitigate climate risk at the same time. In fact, this is the only way to achieve long-term, sustained economic growth, and through it to alleviate poverty for the millions of souls that need, demand and deserve it.”

Deacon Art Miller, executive director of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries in the Archdiocese of Hartford, said the poor are most vulnerable because “those who live in impoverished environments more often than not live in places where there is more pollution.”

But he said the issue is “deeper than that. … There are no walls against polluted air. What happens everywhere affects everywhere.

“I’m worried about the community, both the poor who are underserved but [also] the Earth” and everyone who lives on the planet, Miller said.

UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN CONTRIBUTION

Environmentalists outside the Catholic Church are looking forward to Francis’ encyclical, as well.

“There’s been quite a bit of buzz about it,” said Pam Arifian, a member of the United Church of Christ and director of the Environmental Justice Center at Silver Lake Conference Center in Sharon.

“The UCC has taken a stand a long time ago about understanding the human contribution to climate change and understanding our response as people of faith to mitigating and solving the problem,” Arifian said.

Reducing carbon emissions, the major cause of global warming, is a matter not only of saving the climate but of justice, Arifian said. Often it is the poor and those in the inner city who live
closest to aging, carbon-emitting power plants and are denied access to clean air and water. “Those who suffer the most are the ones who are on the front lines and (in) the lower-income communities, who can’t just pick up and move,” she said.

At a conference at Yale in April, Dean Peter Crane of the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies made the connection between climate change and environmental justice. “The encyclical will re-emphasize that the world’s most vulnerable people shoulder the greatest environmental burdens — and that it is the health and daily lives of the poor that are, and will be, most impacted by environmental degradation,” he said. Crane added, “The encyclical will give new prominence to the ethical and moral dimensions of environmental degradation — including climate change.”

Terri Eickel, director of the Inter-Religious Eco-Justice Network in Connecticut, said she believes the encyclical will have a major impact. Francis is “not afraid to speak very boldly and very plainly,” she said.

Eickel, a member of First Baptist Church in West Hartford, said the environment is a moral issue that is based in Scripture. She cited John 3:16, which begins, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son,” and Psalm 24, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it.” She noted that the verses refer to the whole world, not just people.

“They are both holistic and all-encompassing,” Eickel said. “They make a point to not just say ‘mankind.’ We as people have become so accustomed to see ourselves as the pinnacle of everything.” On the other hand, we are stewards who are given responsibility to care for the Earth, she said.

Eickel also said she believes the pope’s ability to communicate, including in social media, will help bring wide attention to climate change, especially among younger people, for whom the environment is a primary issue. “If we are not addressing an issue like climate change, which is so important to young people today … they look at us as religious communities and wonder where our moral relevance is,” she said.

“The man has credibility at this point, so when he speaks clearly about an issue like this, I think people are going to listen,” Eickel said.

This is not the first statement by a pope on the environment, but it’s expected to have the largest impact because of the problem has become critical and because of Francis’ wide popularity.

Pope Paul VI was the first to address the issue in 1972 in a statement to the Stockholm Conference on the Environment called “A Hospitable Earth for Future Generations.”

June 2015

Earth Keeper Newsletter

*Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute*

[http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=ad971c16e9&e=a758405790](http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=ad971c16e9&e=a758405790)

June 2015

Green Church Newsletter

[http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=61&key=d85c0949d324a6a6fcffa5a0ef53788c&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f](http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=61&key=d85c0949d324a6a6fcffa5a0ef53788c&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f)

June 2, 2015

“Cultivating and Caring for Creation,” 12 new on-line videos and study guides in anticipation of Pope Francis’ coming encyclical, “Praised Be,” on the environment (unconfirmed publication date: June 16, 2015).

Green Spirit Television

*“Cultivating and caring for creation* is God’s indication given to each one of us not only at the beginning of history; it is part of His project; it means nurturing the world with responsibility and transforming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone.” *Pope Francis*. World Earth Day, 2013.

Produced by greenspirit.tv.com (GSTV), a participant in roman catholictv.com (RCTV), “Cultivating and Caring for Creation” is narrated by Bishop Donald Bolen, chair of Justice and Peace, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) and includes content from several Canadian Catholic eco justice leaders.

See the full press release: [http://fore.yale.edu/files/Cultivating_and_Caring_for_Creation.pdf](http://fore.yale.edu/files/Cultivating_and_Caring_for_Creation.pdf)

June 3, 2015

*All children deserve a healthy climate*

By Mitchell C. Hescox
Eco Catholic
National Catholic Reporter

Pope Francis' increasingly powerful statements on global warming highlight that climate action is becoming a growing moral imperative for all people of faith. Why? Because climate action is about saving people.

The pope's highly anticipated encyclical will come after a long history of the Christian community pushing for climate action. And we do so to care for the most vulnerable people -- the people the Bible commands us to care about most.

Francis' many climate-concerned Christian predecessors include the Lausanne Movement (founded by Billy Graham and John Stott), Cape Town Commitment, and the Evangelical Climate Initiative (signed by more than 300 evangelical leaders, including Rick Warren, Bill Hybels and Joel Hunter). These are just a few of the Christians who recognize climate change as both the greatest moral challenge of our time and a great opportunity for hope.

The recent Vatican climate summit underscored a broad area of agreement between the Roman Catholic community and the evangelical community: Climate action is a pro-life issue.

*NCR* made that same point *in an editorial last year* after the release of the third National Climate Assessment, which, in exhaustive detail, made the case for the reality of human-caused climate change in the strongest terms to date.

Every child, born and yet-to-be born, deserves the promise and holy covenant of clean air and a healthy climate. What's more, every child deserves to reach the fullness of his or her God-given intellectual abilities. If we continue to rely on toxic mercury-emitting, coal-burning power plants, we risk harming our children's achievements.

Today, nearly one out of every six babies born in the U.S. has harmful mercury levels in his or her blood, which can easily affect developing children's brains, causing brain damage, developmental disabilities, neurological disorders, lower intelligence and learning difficulties.

Action to slow warming will protect future generations' mental development and potential, by assuring that human development is healthy and sustainable as we move from dangerous, polluting and highly subsidized fossil fuels to clean, affordable renewable energy. This transition will turn energy poverty into energy prosperity.

Carbon pollution threatens our children's health in many ways. For example, scientists have shown that air pollution from cars, factories and power plants is a major cause of asthma, which has dramatically increased in inner cities, and disproportionately strikes the poor, who are "at least 50 percent more likely to have the disease than those not living in poverty," according to the America Asthma Association.

The American Lung Association said in February that meeting the targets set by the EPA's newly proposed Clean Power Plan "will prevent up to 4,000 premature deaths and 100,000 asthma
attacks during the first year implemented (2020), and prevent up to 6,600 premature deaths and 150,000 asthma attacks in 2030, when fully implemented.

We must ensure that our children grow up in healthy environments -- and clean, affordable renewable energy can replace polluting fossil fuels.

Business giants like JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Bloomberg Energy acknowledge that renewable energy is unstoppable. Sustainable clean energy makes economic sense, which is why it's helping to lift billions of people out of poverty. And along the way, it provides clean air, cleaner water and healthy children.

The developing world is deploying renewables over old-fashioned fossil-fuel power. Solar installations are doubling every two years, with developing countries installing renewable energy projects at nearly double the rate of developed nations. In fact, global emissions of carbon dioxide flatlined in 2014, while the global economy grew that same year. It was the first time in 40 years that we experienced a halt or reduction in carbon dioxide emissions without an economic downturn, according to the International Energy Agency.

The energy transition has begun, but we all have an obligation to ensure that it moves forward, with a commitment to the highest possible purpose. The costs of a changing climate are being felt now by all Americans and will be felt with a much more devastating force by future generations, unless we take responsible and moral action today.

In Brazil in July 2013, Francis reflected on the pastoral work of the church in the Amazon basin among the indigenous people and the "forceful appeal for respect and protection of the entire creation which God has entrusted to man." God's creation should not "be indiscriminately exploited, but rather made into a garden," he said.

It's time for Americans of every faith to demand the respect for creation that will foster smart, ethical and affordable policies for climate change adaptation. These policies and plans are needed to secure the safety and prosperity for every one of God's children.

It's time to stop exploiting God's gift of creation and to start tending the garden. Doing so is pro-life.

[The Rev. Mitchell C. Hescox is president and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network.]

http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/all-children-deserve-healthy-climate

June 5, 2015

Sustainable Development Goals: Where is the Common Good?

By Kamran Mofid
Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative (GCGI)
(This article is dedicated to the children of the world, the torch bearers of the next sustainable agenda, who are the unfolding story of the decades ahead. May they rise to the challenge of leading our troubled world, with hope and wisdom in the interest of the common good to a better future)

Abstract

"Already a billion of us go to bed hungry every night. Not because there isn't enough, but because of the deep injustice in the way the system works." - OXFAM International

In the year 2000, the world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration: A commitment to a peaceful, prosperous, and just world. The declaration included a set of targets for development and poverty reduction to be reached by 2015. These came to be known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A cursory look at the world today can easily show that the MDGs journey has been nothing but a big disappointment: Where is “a peaceful, prosperous, and just world”? Hopes were raised and hopes have been dashed.

These goals will expire on December 31, 2015, and will be replaced by yet another set of goals, namely the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

I would argue that just as with the MDGs, the new proposed SDGs will not change the world for the better, as long as they are guided and inspired by the neo-liberal values and agenda which shaped the MDGs. These values are not compatible with the socio-economic and environmental goals we so desperately need to achieve and implement.

As well as setting goals every now and again, what people need to hear is an account of why there is so much suffering in this world. Why is there such a sickening level of abject poverty and inequality in and between nations? Why is there such a level of global mistrust and injustice? Why is there so much environmental degradation? Why are we told there is not enough money for education, health, sanitation, drinking water and social services, but there is always plenty for military expenditures and waging wars? If we try to answer these questions first, then there would be a greater possibility of attaining those goals.

To find those answers we need to appreciate that the ethos of neo-liberalism is destructive of the very SDGs we are seeking to establish in our relationships in society and with Mother Nature. The current neo-liberal capitalist paradigm – economic liberalization, marketisation, privatisation, free trade, endless economic growth, profit-maximisation, cost-minimisation, fierce competition, huge bonuses for short-term gains, and more – provide strong incentives to ignore distributive justice and ecological sustainability, the very aims of the SDGs.

When economics and politics are based on the worst aspects of human nature, then societies become riddled with inequality, violence and mistrust.
To try to solve global crises, without first questioning the reasons for their continuing existence, will be a wasted and costly journey to nowhere. As Einstein put it: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result”.

If the SDGs are to be reached, it requires a different path with a different set of values. Then an answer to these pertinent questions may be found.

Full article:


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June 5, 2015

About Pope Francis’ Encyclical, “Laudato sii”

By Terri MacKenzie
Ecospirituality Resources

**WHEN:** The Pope’s highly anticipated first encyclical is expected to be published June 18th, 2015.

**TITLE:** The title is “Laudato Sii” (Be Praised or Praised Be), from St. Francis of Assisi’s Canticle of Creation praising elements of creation and naming them as kin. (How prescient for one untaught in modern science!) Users of my Advent and Lent resources have found quotes from this prayer on most cover pages. See the entire prayer below.

Pope Francis’ encyclical is also expected to be given the Italian subtitle: “Sulla cura della casa comune” (On the care of the common home).

**IMPORTANCE:** “Laudato sii” will set a key ethical framework for discussion and policies surrounding climate change ahead of the Pope’s address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress on September 24 and his address to the United Nations Special Summit on Sustainable Development Sept. 25.

The Pope’s words will set the moral standard for everyone concerned about climate change, the issue that affects all living beings. He is sure to link Scripture references, care of the poor, and religious responsibility to act to protect creation. Media coverage has already been extensive, with articles and reports both pro and con.

**RESOURCES:**

Among the resources for those wishing to explore the Pope’s encyclical are these two:
In keeping with the Lent material I have been writing since 2004, I shall provide a 5-session program – “Praised be: On the care of the common home” — for those who wish to integrate Lent’s 2016 Scripture readings and the encyclical. It will be available free by November 1st: http://ecospiritualityresources.com/lent.

RENEW International, GreenFaith, and Catholic Climate Covenant are collaborating to produce an in-depth 12-session resource available in English and Spanish this fall: http://www.renewintl.org/renew/index.nsf/vPages/, I highly recommend this resource.

**Canticle of Creation**

O Most High, all-powerful, good Lord God, to you belong praise, glory, honor and all blessing.

Be praised, my Lord, for all your creation and especially for our Brother Sun, who brings us the day and the light; he is strong and shines magnificently. O Lord, we think of you when we look at him.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon, and for the stars which you have set shining and lovely in the heavens.

Be praised, my Lord, for our Brothers Wind and Air and every kind of weather by which you, Lord, uphold life in all your creatures.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Water, who is very useful to us, and humble and precious and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire, through whom you give us light in the darkness: he is bright and lively and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Earth, our Mother, who nourishes us and sustains us, bringing forth fruits and vegetables of many kinds and flowers of many colors.

Be praised, my Lord, for those who forgive for love of you; and for those who bear sickness and weakness in peace and patience — you will grant them a crown.

Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister Death, whom we must all face.

I praise and bless you, Lord, and I give thanks to you, and I will serve you in all humility.

http://ecospiritualityresources.com/2015/06/05/popes-encyclical-laudato-sii/

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**June 7, 2015**

5 Reasons Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Environment Matters
The first encyclical on the environment in the history of the Catholic Church has its detractors, but it also has the power to inspire meaningful climate action.

By Reynard Loki
AlterNet

Pope Francis' forthcoming encyclical on the environment has been described as "long-awaited" and "much-anticipated." Indeed, as Peter Smith, who covers religion for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, recently put it: "Rarely in modern times has a major papal pronouncement received so much attention and debate before it’s even been delivered." And why not? In addition to being Francis' first encyclical, it will be the first encyclical on the environment in the history of the Roman Catholic Church.

The landmark document is expected to be issued sometime this summer, and perhaps even later this month, with the title "Laudato Sii" ("Praised Be You"), taken from the pope's namesake St. Francis of Assisi’s Canticle of the Sun, which praises God for creation, and the subtitle "Sulla cura della casa commune" ("On the care of the common home"). Published around the year 1224, St. Francis’ prayer reads: “Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun,” and continues to praise God for “Sister Moon,” “Brothers Wind and Air,” “Sister Water,” “Brother Fire, and “Mother Earth.”

In a speech he delivered in Ireland in March, Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which prepared the first draft of the encyclical, said that Laudato Sii "will explore the relationship between care for creation, integral human development and concern for the poor.”

The pope means business

A papal letter sent to all the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, an encyclical is the second most important type of document issued by popes, after an Apostolic Constitution. Its content carries significant weight, even beyond the church itself. In 1950, Pope Pius XII wrote about the authority of encyclicals in one of his own, Humani generis: "If the Supreme Pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute, it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the Pontiffs, cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among theologians."

Unsurprisingly, popes have used them to help clarify the church's position on a wide range of controversial issues, from birth control and contraception (Pius X), to the Soviet invasion of Hungary (Pius XII) and the Vietnam War (Paul VI). Even before its release, Francis' encyclical is already stirring controversy in the hotly debated arena of climate change.

Amid detractors, reframing the climate debate

While environmentalists are hopeful about the papal message, resistance has been building. The Heartland Institute, a leading American think tank for climate change skeptics, sent a
contingency to Rome last month during a U.N.-Vatican summit as a "prebuttal" to the encyclical. “We’re here to prevent the pope from making the mistake of having the U.N. as an advisor, because he won't be getting the whole picture,” Heartland spokesman Jim Lakely said. He defined global warming as “the combination of abandoning the scientific method to analyze climate change, stacking the deck in favor of climate alarmism, and frankly, outright corruption.”

GOP presidential hopeful Rick Santorum wants the pope to refrain from engaging in the climate change debate, saying the pontiff should "leave science to the scientists," (Francis actually earned a secondary diploma in chemistry from a technical college in Argentina and worked as a chemist before entering the seminary.) In addition, pro-lifers are concerned that the encyclical will be a backdoor entry to population control, which some environmentalists see as a potent mechanism to save a planet with dwindling resources and a skyrocketing number of humans. “The road the church is heading down is precisely this: To quietly approve population control while talking about something else," writes Riccardo Cascioli in La nuova Bussola Quotidiana, a widely read Italian Catholic website.

While detractors are lining up against the pope, many welcome the encyclical as a teaching document that reframes the environmental debate — particularly humanity's response to climate change — within the context of morality, along with a call to global action. Considering the failure over the past two decades of world leaders to come to any international climate change agreement, reframing the debate could help: Intended not just for the church and theologians, but for world leaders and the general public, it hopes to tap into something that goes far deeper than carbon trading and limits on greenhouse gas emissions: a duty to God. While atheists may cringe at the thought, for non-believers that idea can simply translate into a moral duty. Simply replace the word "God" with "Earth," and everyone has a seat at the table.

Here are five reasons Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment matters.

1. **It builds on the foundation laid down by his predecessors.**

Francis' encyclical is important because it capitalizes on the environmental discourse established by the previous two pontiffs. Pope Benedict, who immediately preceded Francis, is known as the first environmental pope. In a 2011 address to a group of Italian students, the so-called Green Pope said, "Respect for the human being and respect for nature are one and the same."

Benedict put his money where his mouth was: Not only did he install solar panels on the Vatican and turn the Popemobile into a hybrid electric car, he authorized the Vatican bank to purchase carbon credits by funding a Hungarian forest, a move that made the Vatican the world's first carbon-neutral country, and also showed the church's support for the economic-based climate change mitigation mechanism that underlies the [Kyoto Protocol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyoto_Protocol).

Pope John Paul II, Benedict's predecessor, may not have been as hands-on in terms of improving the Vatican's energy efficiency, but he was keenly aware of the importance of protecting the environment. In 2002, he issued the "Common Declaration of Environmental Ethics," in which he expressed concern about "the negative consequences for humanity and for all creation resulting from the [degradation of some basic natural resources](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_resource) such as water, air and land,
brought about by an economic and technological progress which does not recognize and take into account its limits."

2. **It shows that Africa has a high-level climate champion.**

By making environmental issues a top line item for the world, Pope Francis is being a good representative for his flock: Not only is Africa the region where the church has seen its most explosive growth, it is the continent most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. (Since 1980, Europe’s Catholic population grew by a mere six percent, while the number of African Catholics grew by **238 percent**.)

"When it comes to climate change Africa is in the eye of the storm," argues Coleen Vogel, a professor at the School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences at University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, South Africa. And it's not just because of Africa's unusually high exposure to climate risks like droughts and flooding. Vogel, one of the authors of the Africa Chapter of the 4th Assessment Report of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), points out that the continent "has low adaptive capacity making it particularly vulnerable and exposed because of high rates of poverty, financial and technological constraints as well as a heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture."

Pope Francis has made clear moves to help support outreach efforts in Africa, such as naming, in January, two Africans — Archbishop Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel of Ethiopia and Bishop Arlindo Gomes Furtado of Cape Verde — to the College of Cardinals. Notably, **nine of the 15 new members** are from the developing world, reflecting the worldview of the first pope to hail from the global south. “From a global perspective, this is very important,” said Patrick Nicholson, a spokesman for Caritas Internationalis, the Vatican's charity arm. "What the pope is saying [to the church] is, go to the peripheries and try to help the most vulnerable communities."

"Consistent with the Catholic notion of the 'preferential option for the poor,' Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized the vulnerability of the poor to environmental crises,” notes Rabbi Lawrence Troster, founder of Shomrei Breishit: Rabbis and Cantors for the Earth, a multi-denominational network of rabbis and cantors advocating climate change action and environmental justice. "In line with the teachings of every major religion, [the encyclical] will urge leaders to protect from environment-related devastation those who have been 'excluded' from the world economic system."

3. **It comes at a critical time for the world.**

In his speech in March, Cardinal Turkson pointed out why the release of the document is timely:

The timing of the encyclical is significant: 2015 is a critical year for humanity. In July, nations will gather for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa. In September, the U.N. General Assembly should agree on a new set of sustainable development goals running until 2030. In December, the Climate Change Conference in Paris will receive the plans and commitments of each government to slow or reduce global warming.
The coming 10 months are crucial, then, for decisions about international development, human flourishing and care for the common home we call planet Earth.

Jeff Nesbit, former director of legislative and public affairs at the National Science Foundation under the Bush and Obama administrations, argues that "climate change is rapidly becoming the moral issue of our time." He underscores the social dimension of the debate:

People of all ages, from all demographics and all corners of the planet, are beginning to recognize that significant changes are occurring in our ecosystem, and they’d like to see someone, anyone, do something about it. They’re beginning to challenge leaders to act boldly. They’re learning how to act as low-carbon consumers. They’re demanding an end to the fossil fuel age. They’re turning a distant threat into a moral cause that demands a much more immediate response from business and political leaders.

Nesbit believes that, because it armed with the moral authority of a hugely popular pope, the encyclical "has the potential to catalyze a great deal of action across the world when it’s issued."

4. **It helps reduce the rift between science and religion.**

As part of the "encyclical tour" to help ensure that the document has a strong impact leading up to the Paris climate talks, the Vatican has aligned itself with the scientific and global development communities. In April, an event at the Vatican titled "Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity: The Moral Dimensions of Climate Change and Sustainable Development" helped to establish the parameters of the dialogue for the coming months.

Organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences; the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences; the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a U.N. initiative; and Religions for Peace, an international multi-religious peace advocacy coalition, the event was opened by a speech from U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who pointed out that the major religions represent the third largest category of investors in the world. "I urge you to invest in the clean energy solutions that will benefit the poor and clear our air," he said. "Sustainable development requires sustainable energy for all. I also urge you to continue to reduce your footprint and educate your followers to reduce thoughtless consumption."

It makes sense that the pope is contributing to a scientific debate: Francis is a Jesuit, a Roman Catholic order of religious men known for its strong connection to the sciences. From discovering the orbital phases of Mercury and writing on non-Euclidean geometry to participating in the discovery of Peking Man and helping found the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, Jesuits boast an impressive scientific record compared to other Catholic orders. If any pope can help heal the rift between religion and science, it's this one. It was Francis, after all, who said that the Big Bang theory is not inconsistent with Creation, telling an assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences last fall that believers should not view God as "a magician, with a magic wand."

By helping to bridge the gap between science and religion, the encyclical can help foster a more inclusive dialogue on a host of other scientific queries that may benefit from a theological
dimension. There's a reason, after all, that the elusive Higgs boson, an elementary particle in the
Standard Model of particle physics that is believed to be the source of all matter in the universe,
is nicknamed the "God particle." The late John Dobson, an astronomer and Vedantic monk in the
Ramakrishna Order, argued that physicists and priests were essentially seeking answers to the
same questions, just in different ways.

5. It has a significant reach, even beyond Catholicism.

You don't have to be Catholic to get behind the basic idea of protecting the environment. And if
you don't respect the office of the pope, you still must respect its reach: Francis is the spiritual
leader of some 1.2 billion Roman Catholics across the world. In any case, the main points of the
encyclical will likely be non-denominational. One of the main themes will be that "the Earth is a
gift from God and reflects a divinely ordained beauty and order," posits Rabbi Troster. "This
theme is integral to Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which share an understanding of God as a
magnificently generous creator."

Troster also asserts that one of the likely directives in the declaration — that humans must act as
the stewards and protectors of the Earth — is a view held by all the major religions. "Judaism,
Christianity and Islam offer variations on this theme, rooted in Biblical creation accounts and
from passages from the Qur'an," he writes. "Hinduism and Buddhism, with their traditional
teachings on ahimsa (non-violence), consistently emphasize that it is our dharma (duty) to treat
the natural world with respect. The moral imperative to protect the earth is strong across all
faiths."

"An essential document for Roman Catholics, the encyclical will also be influential for other
Christians and people of all faiths and good will," says Troster. "When the encyclical makes
headlines, diverse faith leaders globally will want to highlight their own traditions' eco-
teachings. This is good, because over the past two decades, eco-theologians globally have
articulated values deeply consistent with the themes that Pope Francis can be expected to share."
It will be interesting to see the response he gets when he shares those themes in September
during a papal address to a joint session of Congress, which is rife with climate deniers, several
of whom would be president.

Spirit, courage and faith

In 2000, the Acton Institute, a religious-based libertarian/conservative public policy think tank,
published an essay titled "A Biblical Perspective on Environmental Stewardship," co-authored
by Thomas Sieger Derr, a professor of religion at Smith College, and P.J. Hill, then-professor of
economics at Wheaton College, among others. "As history has repeatedly shown," the authors
argue, "it is the creative spirit of the human person that permits wise stewardship, and institutions
that encourage this spirit are more likely to also facilitate environmentally sound ends." Their
premise raises a fair question: What institution encourages the most creative spirit? Congress?
The U.N.? The church?

There are ways a spiritual leader like the pope can offer a fresh viewpoint on the climate issue,
particularly when politicians, legislators and international negotiators have failed so miserably
for so long. When a discussion turns to the topic of environment, for example, Francis is fond of saying, "God always forgives, man sometimes forgives, but nature never forgives." It's a shrewd aphorism that presents the climate issue in a different light.

Perhaps it's the perfect time to give the mantle of climate change leadership to the first truly modern pope. "Francis’ upbeat, quotable approach and emphasis on charity over doctrine have quickly made him perhaps the most talked about and admired person on the planet," observed Shawn Tully, an editor-at-large at Fortune, which named the pope No. 1 on its World’s Greatest Leaders list last year. And really, who else do we have? President Obama? Ban Ki-moon? Al Gore? No one has the nearly the global reach and respect that Pope Francis does.

During a recent Q&A, Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) said, "Too many of the people in Washington do not represent the folks who elected them." On certain issues, like protecting the Earth/creation, could society be better served by their spiritual leaders than their political leaders? It's certainly worth a try. In the end, addressing climate change through a combination of the two could be productive.

In his earliest days as pontiff, Francis recognized the centrality of environmental stewardship to the future of humanity. Just after his election, he said he chose the name Francis of Assisi because “for me, he is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation. These days we do not have a very good relationship with creation, do we?”

No matter if you call it creation, Earth, the environment or the Big Blue Marble, by many measures, humanity hasn't been the best caretaker of a planet shared by 7.2 billion humans and many, many billions of other Earthlings who live and die by our decisions. And while Pope Francis' encyclical won't by itself limit the average global surface temperature increase to 2°C — which a majority of scientists agree will prevent the worst effects of climate change — it may have the power to be a spiritual salve that helps loosen the gridlock that has dogged international climate negotiators for the past 20 years.

Speaking at a January 15 press conference, Pope Francis said the last U.N. climate change conference, held in Lima, Peru, in December, “was nothing great. I was disappointed by the lack of courage; things came to a stop at a certain point. Let’s hope that in Paris the delegates will be more courageous.” More courage would certainly be good — and perhaps a little faith.

Reynard Loki is AlterNet's environment editor.

http://www.alternet.org/environment/5-reasons-pope-franciss-encyclical-environment-matters

June 8, 2015

INTERFAITH OCEANS Urges Honoring Divine Gift of Oceans on World Oceans Day

Interfaith Oceans Press Release
Washington D.C., June 8, 2015 — In support of World Oceans Day, INTERFAITH OCEANS urges churches, mosques, temples and other faith communities to pray with gratitude and celebrate World Oceans Day today to honor the Divine gift of ocean systems, species, and peoples. Contributing to the scores of events happening around the world today, INTERFAITH OCEANS has developed awareness-building resources, including faith-based posters and a wealth of information to enhance community involvement, all available free of cost via www.oceanethicscampaign.org and facebook.com/interfaithoceancampaign.

“We did not create the vastness and power of the oceans, and we take them for granted,” says INTERFAITH OCEANS Director Marybeth Lorbiecki. “We depend upon them for breath, food, rain, weather systems, beauty, and relaxation, yet we are harming them faster than they can recover.” INTERFAITH OCEANS (formerly the Interfaith Ocean Ethics Campaign—IOEC) is an ethics campaign bridging faith and science, restoring oceans and their communities. “The coastal poor suffer the most from the devastation to the fisheries, climate systems, and other ocean destruction.” This multi-faith effort encourages religious people to stand up because of shared faith principles to protect the world’s oceans from overfishing, plastics trash, fossil fuel pollution that leads to ocean acidification and so much more. “We hope to get religious congregations outdoors doing hands-on restoration work wherever they are, be it of a beach, river, forest, or prairie.”

Lorbiecki, who is the author of Following St. Francis: John Paul II’s Call for Ecological Action (Rizzoli Ex Libris, 2014), observed: “I am especially hopeful that with Pope Francis’s upcoming encyclical on caring for creation, Roman Catholics and other people of faith will look in new ways at the intersections of environmental destruction and poverty, and God's call to care and act in new ways.”

To learn more about World Oceans Day, please visit www.worldoceansday.org. To learn more about INTERFAITH OCEANS and the shared spiritual principles upon which the campaign is based, visit: www.oceanethicscampaign.org.

For media queries, please contact INTERFAITH OCEANS Managing Director, Farley Lord Smith at 202-590-0771, farleylord@gmail.com.

ABOUT INTERFAITH OCEANS: INTERFAITH OCEANS, formerly the Interfaith Ocean Ethics Campaign (IOEC), works with partners of varying faith traditions, scientific advisers, and ocean conservation organizations to protect and restore ocean systems, species, peoples and cultures. It is dedicated to making everyone, but especially people of faith, more aware of the wonder and interdependency of the oceans with the lives of human beings, and engaging them in the blessed work of caring for them.


June 8, 2015

Climate encyclical expected to send strong moral message to the world
By Barbara Fraser, Catholic News Service
National Catholic Reporter

Lima, Peru — Pope Francis' upcoming encyclical on ecology and climate is expected to send a strong moral message -- one message that could make some readers uncomfortable, some observers say.

"The encyclical will address the issue of inequality in the distribution of resources and topics such as the wasting of food and the irresponsible exploitation of nature and the consequences for people's life and health," Archbishop Pedro Barreto Jimeno of Huancayo, Peru, told Catholic News Service.

"Pope Francis has repeatedly stated that the environment is not only an economic or political issue, but is an anthropological and ethical matter," he said. "How can you have wealth if it comes at the expense of the suffering and death of other people and the deterioration of the environment?"

The encyclical, to be published June 18, is titled *Laudato Sì* ("Praised Be"), the first words of St. Francis' "Canticle of the Creatures."

Although Barreto was not involved in the drafting of the encyclical, he worked closely with then-Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio in 2007 on a document by the Latin American bishops' council that included an unprecedented section on the environment.

The encyclical is not expected to be a theological treatise or a technical document about environmental issues, but a pastoral call to change the way people use the planet's resources so they are sufficient not only for current needs, but for future generations, observers said.

The document "will emphasize that the option for stewardship of the environment goes hand in hand with the option for the poor," said Carmelite Fr. Eduardo Agosta Scarel, a climate scientist who teaches at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina and the National University of La Plata in Buenos Aires.

"I think the pope wants us to become aware of this," said Scarel, who was involved in preparatory consultations about the encyclical. "He is aiming at a change of heart. What will save us is not technology or science. What will save us is the ethical transformation of our society."

The pope probably foreshadowed the encyclical during his first public Mass as pope on March 19, 2013, Agosta said. In his homily, he said, "Let us be 'protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment."

Although the document will be published in the wake of a seminar on climate change in April at the Vatican, it will not be limited to that issue and will probably focus on the relationship between people and their environment, Barreto said.
"What the pope brings to this debate is the moral dimension," said Anthony Annett, climate change and sustainable development adviser to the Earth Institute at Columbia University and to the nonprofit Religions for Peace. "His unique way of looking at the problem, which is deeply rooted in Catholic social teaching, resonates with people all across the world."

Annett called the timing of the encyclical "extremely significant."

A month after it is published, global representatives will meet at a conference on financing for development in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In September, the pope will address the United Nations at a session that is likely to see the approval of a new set of global development objectives, the Sustainable Development Goals, which include environmental criteria.

And in December, negotiators and world leaders will converge on Paris to finish hammering out a treaty aimed at reducing the emission of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

Some politicians have already questioned the pope's credentials for wading into the issue of climate change, but that is only one of several environmental problems the pope is likely to address, said David Kane, a Maryknoll lay missioner in Joao Pessoa, Brazil, who works with Maryknoll's Faith-Economics-Ecology Program.

The pope has spoken out in the past on the "throwaway culture, both of material goods that we buy and use for a few months and then throw out, and also throwaway people," he said.

Kane hopes the encyclical will help people understand that overusing resources, from forests to fish to water, results in scarcity that can both increase and be exacerbated by climate change. He expects Pope Francis will remind people of the responsibility of caring for God's creation.

"Whether you think climate change is a problem or not, you cannot deny that running out of fish, oil, water and other resources is a really big problem. The solution is a radical change in our concept of what makes a person happy. We need to move away from the idea that the more things we have, the happier we'll be," Kane said.

Barreto expects some controversy once people read the document, because resisting the "throwaway culture" by being satisfied with less means "putting money at the service of people, instead of people serving money."

The encyclical "will have many critics, because they want to continue setting rules of the game in which money takes first place," he said. "We have to be prepared for those kinds of attacks."

June 8-16, 2015

Theology, Ecology, and the Word: Notes from Halki Summit

By George Handley
Home Waters

Part 1
June 8, 2015

I have arrived this week for the Halki Summit II, a meeting co-sponsored by the Patriarch Bartholomew and Southern New Hampshire University at the island of Halki off of the coast of Istanbul. The topic of the summit is “Theology, Ecology, and the Word: A Conversation on the Environment, Literature, and the Arts.” You can read more about the summit here. I intend to provide some observations about it as I attend.

Much of my writing on this blog has been devoted to the intersection between religion, literature, and the environment, and I am currently working on a book that seeks to understand the ecotheological insights of a variety of authors from the 20th and 21st centuries. I have never thought of religion, science, and the humanities as separate spheres. I think it behooves any religious person to find ways to integrate, rather than to separate, different forms of knowledge. To put it in the simplest of terms, I would say that this work, and this summit, is about assessing the extent of the environmental crisis and then seeking to understand where our greatest sources of wisdom and inspiration might come from to assist us in meeting the demands of the crisis. To ignore religion in this quest or to ignore the ways in which the arts and religion can work together to move and shape us is to lose out on our most valuable sources of inspiration. Facts alone do not move us. The reality of environmental degradation and our relationship to it must be woven into the stories we tell and the arts we create in order to understand ourselves and our role in this world. The fact is, the story of the earth is already deeply woven into all religions and virtually all of the arts, but we have not had the eyes to see nor the ears to hear. As the Patriarch Bartholomew says on the conference website, “We fervently believe that any chance of reversing climate change and the depletion of the earth’s resources requires first and foremost a radical change in values and beliefs in order that people can include the ethical and spiritual dimension of environmental sustainability in their lives and practices.” It is deeply moving to me that he has the visionary understanding that the arts and religion must be seen as complimentary to one another to help in this transformation. Too much is at stake, so the time is ripe for finding common ground, rather than falling back into separate sectarian, partisan, or disciplinary camps.

Most environmentalists (and even many of environmentalism’s detractors) rather incorrectly assume that environmentalism is essentially a secular movement that has nothing to do with religion, or that if it does, it is a new embrace of older pagan and non-Western forms of religious practice. This is because it is believed, again against much evidence, that Christianity and environmental stewardship are somehow at odds with one another. I insist on this being a false perception of Christianity because of the history of environmentalism itself and its profound
indebtedness to Christian thought (a relationship which is very well documented in David Stoll’s recent and fascinating history of the religious origins of environmentalism, *Inherit the Holy Mountain*—highly recommended reading). I also say this because of the decades-long work of many religious communities today, both within Christianity and in many of the other world religions, to act on behalf of shoring up the health of the planet. Certainly the Patriarch Bartholomew, the leader of over 300 million Orthodox Christians, has been at the forefront of this effort, making it clear that environmental degradation is a form of sin because it is a profound neglect and disregard for God’s creations. Such degradation is a symptom of our greed, indifference, and pride. You can read about his considerable efforts to preach a return to greater effort and stewardship of the Creation [here](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/homewaters/2015/06/theology-ecology-and-the-word-notes-from-halki-summit-part-ii.html). Later this month, Pope Francis will be releasing his encyclical about climate change and the environment. As I have noted earlier, the LDS Church has recently created a page in the online Gospel Library devoted to conservation and stewardship. Unfortunately this important work gets overshadowed in the news by our obsession with polarizing social issues. I wish more of my fellow Mormons understood stewardship as a natural extension of their belief rather than as some political agenda you either like or don’t like.

I grow tired of being considered an “environmentalist” or of being seen as someone with a pet theme that I am trying to impose on others. I certainly don’t relish such a role. I guess I have a hard time understanding why it is not more obvious to everyone that the environment is not some specialized interest or concern, either academically or religiously. It concerns every single one of us, and it pertains to our most deeply held beliefs, whatever they might be. It’s really quite simple: whatever passions, dreams, ambitions or hopes we might have for ourselves and for others cannot be realized in a world that is increasingly degraded, polluted, or otherwise compromised in its basic integrity and health. This would suggest simply that such dreams and ambitions should include, rather than ignore or be indifferent to, the well-being of the planet. Most of the world’s greatest artistic minds have certainly understood this, as has every single one of the world’s religions.

**Part II**

June 10, 2015


I have a few things to report that deserve commentary from the Halki Summit II co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church and Southern New Hampshire University. It is an extraordinary privilege to be a part of these conversations.

What kicked it off were two brief speeches, first by the Patriarch himself and then by his chief environmental advisor, Father John Chrissavgiss. In both cases, what they called for was a happier marriage between religion, science, and the arts. The goal is to find means of raising awareness and heightening motivation to address the environmental crisis and climate change most specifically. On this point the Patriarch called for assistance from artists and critics: “We feel quite comfortable with art; we are very much at home with color and music. Therefore, we believe that you, prominent speakers and precious participants, can assist the world to discern and relearn this vocabulary of art through poetry and literature, through film and sculpture, and through the culture and cuisine of food. We know this because we look to you as images of
divine creativity and godly compassion, as reflections of divine imagination and holy innovation. How unfortunate that theology seldom includes poetry or that politics is often void of art. Our plea and prayer for the world is that people may learn to see with the eyes of the photographer, to hear with the ears of the composer, to touch with the hands of the sculptor, to taste with the palate of the hungry child, and to smell the way a bee is attracted to the flower.”

These are stirring words. I love the idea of “holy innovation,” that God is a motivator of creativity, that he is indeed expressed through imagination. We are more spiritually attuned when we are more responsive to the senses, when we strive, like the novelist that Henry James once described who is someone on whom nothing is lost. Father John connected the ambition of the arts to the ambition of religion, that is to act with what Paul calls charity. Father John said: “both [religion and art] express and both profess the deep-seeded nostalgia and at the same time yearning for ‘whatever is true and honorable, whatever is just and pure, whatever is beautiful and grace-filled’ (Philippians 4.8).” And this love of all that is good and beautiful, of course, makes us more sensitive and responsive to the fate of the physical world.

It is an unusual situation, to be sure, to watch an international religious leader spearhead such a conversation out of a profound moral concern for the reality and root causes of climate change. It may prove less unusual after June 18, when Pope Francis will release his encyclical about climate change. Climate change deserves moral attention, not partisan or ideological posturing. I say this because its root causes are based on greed, overconsumption, and stubbornness to innovate and change, and because its consequences are disproportionately suffered by the poor. So it makes perfect sense that believers of all kinds who care deeply about God’s creation would find inspiration from their respective religions to respond and that leaders such as the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis seek to use their authority to wake up their members to this new moral problem. The Patriarch noted, “For, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that far too little has been achieved in terms of people reviewing and reforming their ways, repenting for their destructive impact on the planet and transforming their lifestyle to tread more lightly on God’s creation.”

There are a great deal of issues of concern in the world today and a lot of energy has been spent in the Mormon community over issues of relevance to us and our families. These are not unimportant issues and people have strong and often different opinions on such issues as gay marriage and gay rights, religious freedom, the role of women, and Mormon history and theology. But I think we are too concerned about getting people to agree with our point of view, with arguing over ideas and not concerned enough about building and sustaining communities where all people and all life can flourish. There are over a billion people in extreme poverty. And species are going extinct at unprecedented rates and the climate is warming and heading to disaster. This is not to mention human trafficking and sex slavery that are happening on extraordinary scales all over the globe. So I hope that in all of the energy we expend on issues that matter to us, we save some of that energy for trying to solve the problems of our planet. Who knows, we might even find ourselves fighting with one another less often. I say this because this kind of work requires building coalitions and working across cultures. I do not say any of this to disparage my many good friends who have very strong feelings about these issues nor do I mean to suggest that these issues don’t matter, but I do wish the Mormon commitment to and passion for global problems was more evident.
Mormon belief, it turns out, was not irrelevant to the very first presentation of the day. Terry Tempest Williams, whose environmentalism both stems from and is a reaction to her contemporary Mormon context, spoke the first morning. I can’t quite explain how surreal it was to watch the audience listening to stories of the environmental problems in Utah about which Terry has been such an exceptionally important voice. What was especially interesting to me was that Terry insisted on sharing the stage with one of her students in the Environmental Humanities program at the University of Utah, Alisha Anderson. It said as much about Terry as it did about Alisha that she would have insisted on sharing the stage at such a venue with a student. Terry clearly feels that she has found something special in Alisha and Alisha proved worthy of that trust. Alisha spoke and then showed a film that she had made about her art that mourns the loss of the Oquirrh mountains in Salt Lake Valley. This is the mountain range that has all but disappeared due to Rio Tinto’s copper mine. It was deeply moving. You can watch it here. I can’t say enough good about this film. It is a literary and visual masterpiece and its tone and approach are also masterful. This is environmental art that can teach and inspire many. Many in the international audience were moved to tears, and what was particularly moving to me was knowing that it stems from the convictions of a devout Mormon woman and graduate of Brigham Young University. Terry, of course, knew that Alisha would inspire, and it signaled the possibility of the next generation coming on board with their energy, genius, and wisdom. I know that Alisha represents many young Mormons I know, many of them women as well, who are unusually capable and ready to rise to the occasion of making important contributions to solving the problems we face. I told Alisha, as I do my own students frequently, especially those who seemed touched by a special passion for the environment, that she should follow her passions, magnify her calling, as it were, by building on and expressing her talents, and that she should refuse to allow self-doubt or the occasional raised eyebrows she might get from her fellow members to discourage her.

This is no time to play small, to hide one’s gifts, or to apologize for one’s compassion for God’s creation.

Part III
June 16, 2015

The Halki Summit ended after a provocative and fruitful discussion of the role the arts can play in helping religious cultures to address climate change. I still think the most impassioned and well reasoned explanation about how theology, art, and the environment intersect was offered by Father John Chryssavgis at the outset of the summit. He articulated an understanding of the relationship between science and religion that allowed for their differences and for the mysterious nature of creation itself: “If they are to be true to themselves, both science and religion must accept that every revelation of reality – whether religious or scientific – can only make sense if the world is respected in its mysterious, holistic integrity. Religion and science alike must disabuse themselves of their exclusive, esoteric parlor, which render it difficult, if not impossible, to develop an ecological grammar or vocabulary that would involve all religions and all disciplines.”
This humility that each way of knowing must have manifests itself in respect for the mystery, complexity, and interdependence of all life. And he advocates, rightly, that art serve as a bridge that can help to astonish, surprise, and awake us from customary ways of apprehending the world. The challenge is to see the divine and the earthly in close relation and to learn to see across cultures. The arts are unique in this sense. Often inspired by earthly beauty or divine light, or both, the arts speak across cultures and across beliefs. They help to expand our understanding of community beyond the known and the familiar. This is essential in our quest to find solidarity with others across the globe in our fight to the worst effects of climate change.

What followed over the course of the next three days was a series of keynote addresses and responses from participants, formal and informal. You can see a summary of the participants here. The keynote speakers were often speaking from their strong points, either as artists, environmentalists, or theologians but rarely from all three perspectives at once. Conversation flowed freely, sometimes with strongly held differences of opinion, either about matters of theology or art. Rarely was there disagreement about the problems of the environment. For example, in addition to hearing from Terry Tempest Williams (who was emotionally powerful, humble, and accessible) and Alisha Anderson, whom I have already described, we heard fascinating presentations by James Balog (of Chasing Ice fame) about disappearing glaciers, Raj Patel about finding sustainable solutions to food crises in the developing world. Terry Eagleton, a well known Marxist literary critic who has recently made a turn to defending religion, spoke on his understanding of the human/nature divide based on his best reading of biblical tradition and good reasoning. Timothy Gorringe described the role the arts can play in transforming our culture to become more sustainable.

There was a pattern to discussion topics that ensued, mainly circling around the following questions: What exactly are the theological grounds for caring for the environment and for needing art? What can the arts do? What are their limits? Why, if they are often in a marginal position, can we expect them to make a difference? Is the special moral function of art still something we can believe in? There was no final consensus on these questions. Indeed, some participants seemed dismayed by the disagreement itself. But as I mentioned, there was little disagreement about the urgency and import of changing our culture to respond to the crisis we face. I took considerable inspiration from this fact. This agreement was clearly what brought the group together and kept the conversations, which were intense and prolonged, from devolving into deep ideological divisions. I think there is a lesson in that.

As I have said a few times on this blog before, I have often thought that the true test of character and perhaps of the sincerity of one’s commitment to high principles is how willing one is to be forbearing toward those who see things differently. If the drive is to convince others of your point of view, even to the point of arguing endlessly and needlessly in the face of unchanging opposition, you will have endless and needless work ahead of you. If instead you can work, at least some of the time, on finding common ground and making the quest about the quest and not about yourself, something good might come of it. The environmental crisis is, of course, the literal common ground we share with one another and is the ultimate test of how well we will do in the test. We have to ask ourselves: Are we more motivated to make a difference for the earth or are we more motivated to demonstrate to others that we are right? The former requires getting our ego out of the equation as much as we can, and it has proved no easy thing for me and most
people I know. Indeed, the higher the stakes and the more we know, sometimes we find ourselves less and less tolerant of others and more content to do all the talking.

Don’t get me wrong. I am NOT saying we should leave our passions aside or that we should shy away from argumentation when both are necessary to change opinion, to motivate others, and to condemn evil, apathy, and willed ignorance when they are at play. And they almost always are when great problems emerge. But it is also important to understand, when it comes to “solving” environmental problems that complex problems like climate change are not going to be “solved,” at least of all through simple one-size-fits-all solutions. We can mitigate its worst consequences, but climate change is here to stay. That isn’t to say we should shrug our shoulders and do nothing. There is still a great deal at stake, but perhaps it helps to remember that we are all in this together and that no one is without sin, so to speak. And maybe this gives us some pause to consider the value of letting cultures and communities find their own pathway to greater sustainability, rather than engaging in predictable culture wars over religion and science, or over liberal and conservative values. Such debates are not only nauseatingly boring, but they expend needed energy to forge goodwill across cultures. Among our goals for sustainability, we need to figure out how to sustain this kind of energy, since it is vital to our future. I came away from the Halki Summit immensely inspired by the many examples of good will I witnessed and by the extraordinary lifelong efforts made by so many, in so many different cultural, religious, and political contexts, to make a difference.

I have said it before and I will say it again: working for the common ground of our environment has expanded my community and my circle of friends to include many beautiful places and just as many beautiful people. As a Mormon and a Utahn, I have unique perspectives to bring to the table. This was confirmed for me at such an international occasion as this. But as such I also have many opportunities to learn from others and expand my understanding of what the world offers. This in turn expands my own self-understanding. I recommend this kind of work to one and all.

http://www.patheos.com/blogs/homewaters/

June 9, 2015

Sustainability pledge a natural progression for Santa Clara graduates

By Sharon Abercrombie
Eco Catholic
National Catholic Reporter

When graduating seniors at Santa Clara University, in Santa Clara, Calif., bid farewell June 13 to their alma mater, many will have signed onto a pledge to carry their school’s social and environmental consciousness into their future careers.
Endorsed by seven campus organizations, the promise is part of the Graduation Pledge Alliance, a global community effort to remind an employee that their jobs can be more than their paychecks and that living green is a moral act. In 2011, the pledge’s first year, 135 students signed in agreement.

“I pledge to explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organizations for which I work,” the pledge reads.

Taking the pledge comes as a natural progression for many of the students from their time at the San Francisco Bay Area Jesuit school. Lindsey Kalkbrenner, director of the school’s Center for Sustainability, said that SCU has a Career Center whose mission is to “transform education into application for the common good.”

“The world is the stage for our students’ learning about social and environmental injustices throughout internships, immersion trips, international fellowships and other experiential learning,” she told NCR.

In the past three years, 60 students have completed a “Careers for the Common Good” course, where they participate in a weekly community-based learning placement, listen to guest speakers and visit Silicon Valley companies to explore for social and environmental benefits. Another 30 have participated in a Boot Camps program to help them prepare for work in a specific field, such as the electric car industry.

Since 2004, Santa Clara has placed sustainability at center stage for the Bay Area school. That year, administrators formally adopted a sustainability policy, which committed it to improving environmental stewardship, education and outreach throughout the campus. In 2007, its president at the time, Jesuit Fr. Paul Locatelli, signed the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment. The pledge holds schools to work toward climate neutrality and to integrate sustainability into its teaching and research, outreach and stewardship.

The school projects it will become climate neutral -- producing net-zero greenhouse gas emissions -- by the end of 2015.

With these actions, fostering earth-mindfulness -- or as the late eco-theologian Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry would say, becoming a “benign presence in the natural world,” instead of a “disruptive force” -- has become commonplace in more than 770 courses at the 9,000-student university. Wherever possible, faculty are also encouraged to add ecological teachable moments to their classes by scheduling guest speakers and organizing field trips to local sites and businesses in Silicon Valley putting sustainability into practice.

So far, Santa Clara’s efforts are earning national attention.

In August, the Princeton Review named Santa Clara one of 24 colleges on its 2015 Green Rating Honor Roll, a title given to schools receiving the highest score on its sustainable and
environmental practices. Santa Clara has ranked 19th in the publication’s 2014 and 2015 lists of the top-50 green colleges.

If there is a better way to save water, build an energy efficient house, or keep garbage out of landfills, “there is nothing we won’t try,” Kalkbrenner said.

A graduate of Santa Clara with degrees in biology and business administration, Kalkbrenner began in 2006 as the school’s first sustainability coordinator. “I had to learn on the job,” she said, as there was no precedent for the kind of work she was to do.

By 2012, Kalkbrenner had two staff members and seven undergraduate interns. Her team currently reaches out to every campus entity: from academics, athletics and recreation, to curriculum development, residence life and student involvement.

With California approaching its fourth year of drought, water conservation remains an ongoing concern on campus.

Santa Clara began addressing the situation in 2003 when it first started recycling water. Since then, it has avoided the use of 487.5 million gallons of freshwater due to numerous conservation measures: among them, low-flow toilets, waterless urinals, sink faucet aerators and low-flow showerheads.

In response to the drought, the Center for Sustainability and the student government launched in April a “60 Seconds Less” campaign encouraging students to reduce their shower time by one minute.

In addition, the university has turned off four of its six decorative fountains. The remaining two will continue working but will be converted to recycled water. Sprinklers now run during the night to cut back on water evaporation, and drought-resistant plants are replacing their thirstier counterparts.

Kalkbrenner’s work sometimes takes her to unusual campus sites. Earlier this year, a group of faculty, staff and student volunteers joined her in donning lab coats, gloves and special glasses on a visit to the campus recycling center to find out what was happening in the world of garbage.

Their visit was part of a quarterly “waste characterization” session, sponsored by the center to bring home the reality of what goes into the waste stream and how to reduce it through more conscious recycling or composting. In 2013, the campus diverted 58 percent of its garbage from municipal landfills.

The Center for Sustainability has its lighthearted moments, too, but like everything else connected with acting as a “benign presence” on the earth, the moments come with a serious message.
Each January, it sponsors an eco-fashion and recycled art show. The event showcases the talents of SCU students, faculty, staff and alumni. People are invited to design their own fashions from recyclable materials that would usually end up in landfills.

Now a popular spring semester tradition, the show started in 2011 when a student wanted to contrast eco-fashion, which seeks to respect people and the environment, with high-end fashion, which can often lead to exploitation of garment factory workers and pollute water systems with harmful dyes.

At this year’s show, students transformed blue yarn and bottle caps into earrings, conference brochures and a red and white tablecloth into two long skirts, and an old plastic daisy chain into a nifty necklace.

These efforts and others at Santa Clara would likely leave Passionist Fr. Thomas Berry beaming if he were alive today. In them, he would see there is no limit to what can be accomplished in an academic setting when ecology, as Berry said, “becomes the foundation of all courses, all programs, and all professions.”


June 10, 2015

On the ethics of energy

Just in time for the Pope's eco-encylical, moral theologians offer guidance on ethical energy production and use

By Bill Patenaude
Catholic Ecology

A document to be introduced to the Church and the world on Saturday examines the natural environment and energy use through the lens of Catholic moral theology. No, not that document by Pope Francis.

This one is authored by five influential theologians from the United States. It was contributed to and reviewed by many other theologians and experts in the natural and social sciences. And while this work has not gotten (nor will likely receive) the attention of Pope Francis’s encyclical, it is exceptionally important. The easy-to-read article offers important ethical considerations to better answer questions about energy production and use.

“Catholic Moral Traditions and Energy Ethics for the Twenty-First Century” is a unique publication in a number of ways, says its lead author Dr. Erin Lothes of the College of St. Elizabeth.
The text is a collaborative effort, which is something of a rarity within the field of moral theology, with its often single-author preference. In addition to Dr. Lothes, Energy Ethics' primary authors are Dr. David Cloutier (Mount St. Mary’s), Elaine Padilla (New York Theological Seminary), Dr. Christiana Z. Peppard (Fordham), and Dr. Jame Schaefer (Marquette).

Providing critical commentaries at the start of the project were Drs. Meghan Clark (St. John's University), Christine Firer Hinze (Fordham), Richard Miller (Creighton), Nancy Rourke (Canisius College), and Matthew Shadle (Marymount University).

In addition to the level of collaboration, the document is being made available online at the Journal of Moral Theology, free to anyone interested. It is hoped that this availability will inspire conversations about where we get our energy, how we use it, and how we can plan ahead for a sustainable, equitable use of resources in the future.

“The moral issues around energy use are extremely complex because of the science and economics of individual choices,” said Dr. Lothes. “And they are global in nature. So we wanted a more global perspective, especially from the global south” than any one author could contribute. Dr. Lothes said that the resulting interdisciplinary approach allowed for “accuracy and credibility” in how the natural sciences speak of the benefits and harms—that is, the ethics—of various uses of energy sources.

The essay concludes with suggestions about global leadership and intergenerational responsibility.

“In the past two hundred years,” the document opens, “the rapid extraction and combustion of fossil fuels have contributed to anthropogenic interference in global climate systems, while also increasing net global wealth and some forms of economic development. In the twenty first century, it is now clear that fossil fuel sources have both positive and negative impacts on economies, livelihoods, and environments worldwide. What might formal Catholic teaching and theological moral reflection offer to this situation?”

The remaining 36 pages unpack the answers.

**Origins and direction**

Energy Ethics originated in an “interest group” led by Dr. Lothes within the Catholic Theological Society of America [CTSA]. This group on “Discipleship and Sustainability” looked at a range of ecological issues through the Christian understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The group filled a need within the CTSA when one on climate change, organized by Dr. Schaefer, came to the scheduled close of its work.

Eventually the new Discipleship and Sustainability group sought to contribute to the Catholic understanding of energy ethics by examining the United States’ Bishop’s 1981 document on energy use—“but in a different context,” Dr. Lothes noted. The 1981 document was written in a world where energy scarcity dominated conversations and global warming was not the driving
concern that it is today. Thus Energy Ethics connects the bishops’ teachings with 21st-century issues.

The authors of Energy Ethics maintained the original foundational principles used by the bishops in 1981 to address energy choices. Those principles are to

- Cherish and protect life as a gift from God;
- Accept an appropriate share of responsibility for the welfare of creation;
- Live in solidarity with others for a common good, namely, the sustainability of an abundant Earth;
- Strive for justice in society; give special attention to the needs of the poor and members of minority groups;
- Contribute to the widespread participation in decision-making processes.

The authors added a seventh principal, to employ technological prudence.

Work on Energy Ethics began in 2007. “We divided up the bishops’ statement on energy, and provided commentary/updates,” Dr. Cloutier said. “But we also wanted the article to digest the material and go through a peer-review process. … For me, the most important part of this project is aligning key moral principles with detailed, well-informed prudential judgment. A model for this is the just war tradition—the tradition is valuable because (a) the principles are enumerated clearly (and debated, of course, but you can’t debate something that isn’t clearly enumerated), and (b) the judgments about the application of the principles have been engaged in detail by people who are knowledgeable about warfare.”

In part, Energy Ethics examines the pros and cons of existing fuels—especially “bridge” fuels like natural gas and nuclear energy. It also calls for action for the common good in the long term, for instance by investing in available renewable energies and offering the poorest three billion people of the world clean, convenient ways to heat their homes, cook their meals, and benefit from electric lighting.

**Hopes for Energy Ethics**

Dr. Cloutier added that he would like Catholic Social Teaching “to develop a comparable seriousness on the issue of energy use, and environmental ethics more generally, and I see the paper as doing exactly this.”

Dr. Richard Miller III, Associate Professor of Theology at Creighton University, agrees.

“This paper is one way to quantify the scale and types of change that is needed” to prevent the projected impacts of climate change, he told Catholic Ecology.

Dr. Miller provided the group with an early commentary paper on the use of coal and oil. Like others involved, the project helped focus in an academic setting his concerns about climate change and sustainability. These concerns began in 2007 with talks he attended while in Belgium, and later from learning of flood-control measures on the Thames River to protect
London from increased flooding due to sea-level rise. His resulting research culminated in his book *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis* (Orbis, 2010).

His hope for the reception of Energy Ethics—and of Pope Francis’s upcoming encyclical (as well as the general involvement of the Church in climate talks)—is to show the average person not just the scale of changes needed, “but importantly that it is possible” for these changes to take place for the good of one and all.

A copy of "Catholic Moral Traditions and Energy Ethics for the Twenty-First Century" can be downloaded [here](http://catholicecology.net/blog/ethics-energy).

Ed. Note: Stay tuned for an upcoming post on *Just Sustainability*, a new book edited by Dr. Peppard with contributions from many of those who worked on Energy Ethics.

**June 10, 2015**

Torah, Pope Francis, & Crisis Inspire 300+ Rabbis to Call for Climate Action

Religion News Service

**PHILADELPHIA** – More than 300 rabbis — inspired by the climate crisis, the Torah’s call for a Sabbatical Year of releasing the Earth from overwork, and the impending Papal Encyclical on the climate crisis — have joined their voices in the *Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis* — a call to action to prevent further climate-fuelled disasters and work toward eco-social justice.

The Rabbinic Letter was initiated by seven leading rabbis from a broad swathe of American Jewish life: Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector of the American Jewish University; Rabbi Arthur Green, rector of the (Boston) Hebrew College rabbinical school; Rabbi Peter Knobel, former president, Central Conference of American Rabbis; Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.; Rabbi Susan Talve, renowned spiritual leader of Central Reform Congregation, St. Louis; Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director of The Shalom Center; and Rabbi Deborah Waxman, president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Movement. They were joined by Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, a leader of the Orthodox community.

More than 300 rabbis from across the denominational spectrum signed in support of the call in less than two weeks, and their numbers continue to grow.

The seven initiators wrote their colleagues explaining:
“Our decision to do this now arose out of our learning that Pope Francis will be issuing an encyclical to the Church and the World that will address the climate crisis in the context of worsening concentrations of wealth and power and worsening degradations of poverty.

“We believe it is important for the spiritual leadership of the Jewish people to speak to the Jewish people as a whole and to the world on this deep crisis in the history of the human species and of many other life-forms on our planet.”

Although the immediate inspiration for the Rabbinic Letter was news that Pope Francis would be sending out an encyclical on the climate crisis, many of the initiators, other rabbis, and many others in the Jewish community have been working on issues of climate change for at least a decade; and the Rabbinic Letter speaks in the language of Torah and draws on the deepest teachings of Jewish text and tradition.

Pope Francis’ encyclical on the climate crisis will be published to the world on June 18. He has entitled it “Laudato Si” [“May the Creator Be Praised”], a phrase from St. Francis of Assisi’s famous prayer celebrating Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and all the other aspects of God’s Creation.

The 333 rabbis speak out especially against certain extremely destructive ways of extracting fossil fuels, including fracking, off-shore drilling in the Arctic, oil trains, and the disproportionate impacts of these practices upon low-income communities and communities of color.

The call also notes America’s impact upon other more vulnerable nations, stating, “America is one of the most intense contributors to the climate crisis, and must therefore take special responsibility to act. Though we in America are already vulnerable to climate chaos, other countries are even more so — and Jewish caring must take that truth seriously.”

The rabbis point out that among these especially vulnerable countries is the State of Israel, which faces the climate crisis impact of massive desertification and rising seas there.

The call suggests that Jewish households, congregations, and institutions move their money away from purchasing their electric power from coal, and purchase wind power instead; and that they shift investments away from fossil fuel producers, which it calls “Carbon Pharaohs” that endanger human beings and bring plagues upon the Earth. It calls on households, congregations, and denominations to move their money instead into life-giving enterprises, including sources of renewable energy.

And it urges that an ancient Torah teaching that the Jewish people assemble every seventh year during the harvest festival of Sukkot be carried out this fall with public assemblies to explore Jewish and multireligious responses to the climate crisis, pointing toward demanding strong governmental action at the international conference on climate due to take place in Paris this coming December.

See the full text and list of signers of the Rabbinic Letter at https://theshalomcenter.org/torah-pope-crisis-inspire-300-rabbis-call-vigorous-climate-action
June 12, 2015

Episcopal-Anglican-Lutheran leadership of Canada, US write to President Obama, Prime Minister Harper

Episcopal News Service

[Episcopal Church Office of Public Affairs press release] Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori has joined with the Episcopal-Anglican-Lutheran leadership of Canada and the United States in a letter to both United States President Barack Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper concerning the review and future of the Columbia River Treaty, drawing attention to its impact on Indigenous peoples and regional residents as well as the implications of climate change for this sensitive ecosystem, the fisheries it supports, and the environmental services it provides.

In writing the letter, Presiding Bishop Jefferts Schori joined with: Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Most Rev. Fred Hiltz, Primate, Anglican Church of Canada; and Bishop Susan Johnson, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

“We hear in this moment the call of God to work for justice and to deepen our practice of living as treaty people,” the four leaders stated in the letter. “In this time of climate change, the United States, Canada, tribes and First Nations working together to promote stewardship of shared waters would be a sign of hope for a healthier environment and a fairer world.”

The following is the letter to the President and Prime Minister.

To President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Stephen Harper

June 11, 2015

We write to you to add our voices to those who are calling for a review of the Columbia River Treaty in order to respect the rights, dignity and traditions of the Columbia Basin tribes and First Nations by including them in the implementation and management of the Treaty, and to include the healthy functioning of the ecosystem as an equal purpose of the Treaty.

On September 23, 2014, you received the Declaration on Ethics and Modernizing the Columbia River Treaty, and the Columbia River Pastoral Letter upon which the Declaration is based. The Declaration sets forth eight valuable principles to consider in the review of the Columbia River Treaty.

As noted in the Declaration, the original treaty only included flood control and hydroelectric power generation as international management purposes of the Columbia River. We stand at a critical moment in history regarding both the renewal of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and the addressing of climate change. In fact, Indigenous rights and climate justice are deeply interrelated. The right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent is enshrined in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The wisdom of Indigenous peoples is vital to addressing the environmental crisis.

We hear in this moment the call of God to work for justice and to deepen our practice of living as treaty people. In this time of climate change, the United States and Canada working together to promote stewardship of shared waters would be a sign of hope for a healthier environment and a fairer world.

Please move forward with negotiations to review the Columbia River Treaty, and thereby provide a respectful, just and sustainable model for stewardship of these vital waters.

Sincerely,

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Most Rev. Fred Hiltz
Primate
Anglican Church of Canada
June 12, 2015

Pope Francis' encyclical: PIK-scientists to speak in the Vatican and in Berlin

Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK)

When the much anticipated environmental encyclical will be launched on 18 June, John Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) will give a speech in the Vatican. He's the only scientist to join Cardinal Peter Turkson for the presentation. In the run-up of the encyclical, Schellnhuber participated in a number of workshops organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The document issued by the leader of more than one billion Catholics around the world is expected to be an important signal on the road to a global agreement on reducing greenhouse-gas emissions which will be negotiated by governements at the world climate summit in Paris later this year.

Also on 18 June Ottmar Edenhofer, chief economist of PIK and director of the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change, together with Bishop Bernd Uhl will discuss the encyclical at the Catholic Academy Berlin in front of likely 250 guests. The atmosphere as a global common will be a central issue here. Edenhofer, too, had been consulted by the Vatican in the run-up of the encyclical. On 1 July, he will debate the Pope's messages with Cardinal Turkson and author Naomi Klein ("Capitalism versus Climate") in Rome.

June 15, 2015

National Sacred Places Prayer Day Coming Up

Indian Country Today Media Network

On June 19, The Morning Star Institute, a national Native rights organization, will hold a respectful observance to honor sacred places, sacred beings, and all who care for them, and protect them from harm.
The National Sacred Places Prayer Day gathering will be held on the U.S. Capitol Grounds in the west front grassy area at 8:30 a.m., and be in the form of a talking circle. The public is welcome to attend, and all are welcome to share words, songs, or a moment of silence for all sacred places, especially those being desecrated now.

Read below for some information on sacred sites currently in danger, and in the news:

RELATED: [Take Oak Flat to a Higher Court: Why US & Canada Fear Human Rights Courts](#)

RELATED: [Havasupai Tribe and Allies Fight to Stop Uranium Mining Near Grand Canyon](#)

RELATED: [NCAI, Tribal Nations, Pearl Jam and Change.org Help Blackfeet Protect Sacred Badger-Two Medicine Site](#)

RELATED: [4 Ways to Show Your Support for Mauna Kea](#)

RELATED: [Navajo Nation Reaches Out to IACHR in San Francisco Peaks Battle](#)

RELATED: [Sacred Blindness II: The Indigenous Eight](#)

Prayers will be offered for the following sacred places, among others:


June 15, 2015

Pope Francis warns of destruction of world's ecosystem in leaked encyclical

Vatican condemns early release of document in which pontiff calls on people to change their lifestyles and energy consumption or face grave consequences

By Stephanie Kirchgaessner and John Hooper in Rome

The Guardian

Pope Francis will this week call for changes in lifestyles and energy consumption to avert the “unprecedented destruction of the ecosystem” before the end of this century, according to a leaked draft of a papal encyclical. In a document released by an Italian magazine on Monday, the pontiff will warn that failure to act would have “grave consequences for all of us”.

Francis also called for a new global political authority tasked with “tackling … the reduction of pollution and the development of poor countries and regions”. His appeal echoed that of his predecessor, pope Benedict XVI, who in a 2009 encyclical proposed a kind of super-UN to deal with the world’s economic problems and injustices.

According to the lengthy draft, which was obtained and published by L’Espresso magazine, the Argentinean pope will align himself with the environmental movement and its objectives. While accepting that there may be some natural causes of global warming, the pope will also state that climate change is mostly a man-made problem.

“Humanity is called to take note of the need for changes in lifestyle and changes in methods of production and consumption to combat this warming, or at least the human causes that produce and accentuate it,” he wrote in the draft. “Numerous scientific studies indicate that the greater part of the global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases … given off above all because of human activity.”

The pope will also single out those obstructing solutions. In an apparent reference to climate-change deniers, the draft states: “The attitudes that stand in the way of a solution, even among believers, range from negation of the problem, to indifference, to convenient resignation or blind faith in technical solutions.”

The leak has frustrated the Vatican’s elaborate rollout of the encyclical – a papal letter to bishops – on Thursday. Its release had been planned to come before the pope’s trip to the US, where he is due to address the United Nations as well as a joint meeting of Congress.

Journalists were told they would be given an early copy on Thursday morning and that it would be released publicly at noon following a press conference. Cardinal Peter Turkson, who wrote an
early draft of the encyclical, and Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, a noted climate scientist in Germany, were expected to attend the press conference. On Monday evening, the Vatican asked journalists not to publish details of the draft, emphasising that it was not the final text. A Vatican official said he believed the leak was an act of “sabotage against the pope”.

The draft is not a detailed scientific analysis of the global warming crisis. Instead, it is the pope’s reflection of humanity’s God-given responsibility as custodians of the Earth.

At the start of the draft essay, the pope wrote, the Earth “is protesting for the wrong that we are doing to her, because of the irresponsible use and abuse of the goods that God has placed on her. We have grown up thinking that we were her owners and dominators, authorised to loot her. The violence that exists in the human heart, wounded by sin, is also manifest in the symptoms of illness that we see in the Earth, the water, the air and in living things.”

He immediately makes clear, moreover, that unlike previous encyclicals, this one is directed to everyone, regardless of religion. “Faced with the global deterioration of the environment, I want to address every person who inhabits this planet,” the pope wrote. “In this encyclical, I especially propose to enter into discussion with everyone regarding our common home.”

According to the leaked document, the pope will praise the global ecological movement, which has “already travelled a long, rich road and has given rise to numerous groups of ordinary people that have inspired reflection”.

In a surprisingly specific and unambiguous passage, the draft rejects outright “carbon credits” as a solution to the problem. It says they “could give rise to a new form of speculation and would not help to reduce the overall emission of polluting gases”. On the contrary, the pope wrote, it could help “support the super-consumption of certain countries and sectors”.

The document is not Francis’s first foray into the climate debate. The pontiff, who was elected in 2013, has previously noted his disappointment with the failure to reach a global accord on curbing greenhouse gas emissions, chiding climate negotiators for having a “lack of courage” during the last major talks held in Lima, Peru.

Francis is likely to want to influence Republicans in Washington with his remarks. Most Republicans on Capitol Hill deny climate change is a man-made phenomenon and have staunchly opposed regulatory efforts by the Obama administration.

The encyclical will make for awkward reading among some Catholic Republicans, including John Boehner, the Republican speaker of the House. While many Republicans have praised the pope, it will not be unprecedented for them to make a public break with the pontiff on the issue of global warming.

June 16, 2015

Archbishop joins faith leaders calling for action on climate change

Archbishop of Canterbury

Archbishop Justin Welby and other faith leaders pledge to fast and pray for success of UN climate summit in Paris.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has joined faith leaders in Britain pledging to fast and pray for the success of key international negotiations over climate change, in a new declaration warning of the “huge challenge” facing the world over global warming.

Representatives of the major faiths, including Archbishop Justin Welby, said climate change has already hit the poorest of the world hardest and urgent action is needed now to protect future generations.

In the Lambeth Declaration, which will be launched tomorrow, signatories call on faith communities to recognise the pressing need to make the transition to a low carbon economy.

The call comes ahead of the international climate change talks in Paris this December where negotiators from more than 190 nations will gather to discuss a new global agreement on climate change, aimed at limiting greenhouse gas emissions from 2020 when current commitments run out.

The Declaration, signed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and other faith leaders in the UK, warns that world leaders must agree to reduce emissions to avoid average temperatures rising beyond 2°C, widely considered to be the threshold above which it is considered that the impacts of climate change will be most severe.

The original Declaration was hosted by former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and signed by faith leaders in 2009 ahead of the Climate Summit in Copenhagen.

The Declaration will be launched tomorrow (Wednesday June 17) by the Bishop of Salisbury, the Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam, the Church of England’s lead bishop on the environment, at ecumenical services in Westminster, London, to mark the national lobby of Parliament over the Paris talks.

Signatories include representatives from the Muslim, Sikh and Jewish communities as well as the Catholic Church in England and Wales, Methodist Conference and other denominations and faiths, with more leaders continuing to sign the Declaration.

Hundreds more people are expected to sign up to the declaration as it travels rounds the country during a summer of pilgrimages.
June 16, 2015

Will Pope's Much-Anticipated Encyclical Be A Clarion Call On Climate Change?

By Sylvia Poggioli
NPR

In April this year, on Earth Day, Pope Francis urged everyone to see the world through the eyes of God, as a garden to cultivate.

"May the way people treat the Earth not be guided by greed, manipulation, and exploitation, but rather may it preserve the divine harmony between creatures and creation, also in the service of future generations," he said.

On Thursday, the Vatican will release the pontiff's hotly anticipated encyclical on the environment and poverty. The rollout of the teaching document has been timed to have maximum impact ahead of the U.N. climate change conference in December aimed at slowing global warming — and has angered climate change skeptics.

Past popes have also spoken about man's duty to protect the environment. Pope Benedict XVI was known as the "Green Pope" for installing solar panels at the Vatican.

Francis has made it clear that he believes climate change is mostly man-made.

"It's man," he said earlier this year, "who has slapped nature in the face."

Safeguard creation, Francis warned — because if we destroy it, it will destroy us.

Statements like these are generating controversy in some quarters. For example, Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum — who is Catholic — believes the pope should focus on problems that Santorum says are more pressing than climate change.

"The church has gotten it wrong a few times on science, and I think that we probably are better off leaving science to the scientists, and focusing on what we're really good at, which is theology and morality," Santorum said.

As a young man, the future pope studied chemistry and worked as a chemist before entering seminary, so he may have more scientific training than most of his critics.
"It's nice — for once the Catholic Church is on the side of science," says the Rev. Thomas Reese, senior analyst for the National Catholic Reporter.

The encyclical won't be just about economics and politics, he says, but will focus on a moral issue that could affect many millions of lives.

"This is a call to respond, to help people, to protect people from the disasters that can come from climate change," Reese says. "The pope sees it as one of the most important challenges that we face as humanity."

As the first Latin American pope, Francis warns against what he calls the myth of trickle-down economics and the "throw-away culture" whose primary victims are the poor. As a result, some conservatives have labeled the leading voice of the global south a "closet Marxist."

But Mary Evelyn Tucker, professor of religion and ecology at Yale University, says the pope focuses on inequities in incomes and distribution of resources in societies across the world. She believes the papal document will stress not just sustainability, but development centered on human beings and on justice.

"Not development that allows the poor to sink and the rich to rise," she says, "so this is a new integration called eco-justice."

The title of the document is Laudato Siì, or "Praised Be," a refrain from the "Canticle of the Creatures" written in the 13th century by St. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the environment — and the man from whom the pope took his name.

The pope's encyclical, says Reese of the National Catholic Reporter, will help rid environmentalists of their image as tree-huggers and Gaia worshippers and bring the movement into the mainstream.

He's also convinced it will have a far-reaching impact, encouraging Catholics to make major changes in what they consume and how they live their daily lives, and inspiring leaders of other religions to pick up the challenge.

"Religion is one of the few things that can motivate people to self-sacrifice — to give up their own self-interest for something else," Reese says. "This is going to be extremely important because people are not going to change their lifestyles to save the polar bears."

Listen to the story:

http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/06/16/414666357/popes-missive-on-environment-poverty-could-affect-habits-of-millions

June 17, 2015
Pope Francis is actually bringing America’s environmentalism movement to its religious and moral roots

By Mark Stoll
Washington Post

Pope Francis is set to publish “Laudato Si’: On the Care of Our Common Home” on Thursday, the first encyclical on the environment by any pope. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and many others have expressed hopes the encyclical will put the moral weight of a popular pope and the world’s largest Christian church behind meaningful action on environmental problems, such as global warming.

What most Americans seem to have forgotten is that the link between religion and environment is not recent. The relationship between religion and environment goes back centuries, but the original moral and religious inspiration for conservation and environmentalism was forgotten during environmentalism’s heyday in the ’70s.

The environment is a natural concern for a pope who took the name of Saint Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the environment. The encyclical’s title, Latin for “Praised be,” is taken from Saint Francis’s most popular prayer.

Pope Francis has said that the saint “teaches us profound respect for the whole of creation and the protection of our environment, which all too often, instead of using for the good, we exploit greedily, to one another’s detriment.”

Laudato Si’ will restate what previous popes have said on environmental destruction and its impact on the poor, but as an encyclical, the church’s highest teaching document, it will have magnified impact.

The encyclical should remind us of American environmentalism’s own intensely religious and moral roots, which have mostly been forgotten since the 1960s.

The very issues that Francis will emphasize — sin, the common good, and the harm that greedy exploitation causes society — inspired conservation and environmentalism from their earliest beginnings. Their roots, however, were in the social and religious teachings, not of the Catholic Church, but of Calvinist churches, such as Congregationalism and Presbyterianism.

In early colonial days, Puritans following Calvinist principles established communities across New England. Calvinism put special emphasis on God’s presence in the works of nature, and Puritans often went alone into the fields, woods, and hills to pray and meditate.

So that none would be poor, New England towns granted each family a share of land, which religious duty commanded they pass on to future generations in as good or better condition. Towns regulated land and timber use to ensure resources for the future.
By 1830, colonies became states, Puritans became Congregationalists, and New England towns, with their white steepled Congregational churches on the greens, became the very emblem of democracy, prosperity, and moral order.

Congregationalists held their towns up to the nation as models of morality, equity, and sustainability. They spearheaded the first parks movement to provide green space for recreation for all classes.

Most prominent was Frederick Law Olmsted, the great landscape architect who designed New York’s Central Park and many other parks and developments. Others advocated forestry and conservation to sustain fertility and preserve resources. Five of the first six heads of the Forest Division (later reorganized as the Forest Service) had New England ancestry, and one of them was a Congregational minister. At the same time, Transcendentalists and others spread the idea of nature as a church, temple, or cathedral where God drew close.

By the 20th century, people raised Presbyterian took over the cause. Less communal and more political, Presbyterians turned the movements for parks and conservation into a national crusade for nature and against sinful greed.

As President Theodore Roosevelt insisted, “Conservation is a great moral issue. I believe that the natural resources must be used for the benefit of all our people, and not monopolized for the benefit of the few.” His friend John Muir, the nature writer and parks advocate, said of those who would exploit National Parks, “These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar.”

After World War II, Presbyterian-born writers and activists laid the foundations for environmentalism. Rachel Carson, granddaughter and niece of ministers, is said to have started the environmental movement in 1962 with “Silent Spring,” which blamed corporate greed for dangerous overuse and misuse of pesticides.

David Brower crusaded against destruction of nature and transformed the Sierra Club into a national environmental organization. Edward Abbey, son of a church organist, railed in his 1968 bestseller, “Desert Solitaire,” “Original sin, the true original sin, is the blind destruction for the sake of greed of this natural paradise which lies all around us.”

But by 1970, environmentalists were blaming the ecological crisis on Christianity’s theology of conquest of nature and dominion over it as a gift of God to humankind to do with as they pleased. Recoiling, conservative Protestants called environmentalism pagan and anti-Christian. The divide helped create today’s political impasse over global warming and other environmental issues.

By highlighting its moral and religious aspects, Pope Francis brings American environmentalism back to its roots. *Laudato Si’* may help ease the divisions that have blocked any major environmental legislation since 1990.
But encyclicals avoid politics and cannot make up for the political force and righteous urgency that once flowed out of Calvinism. Calvinist denominations have been melting away for decades. Nevertheless, opponents of selfish greed and avarice, the common enemies of nature and mankind, would welcome Francis’s powerful words.

*This opinion piece is by Mark Stoll, associate professor of history and director of the Environmental Studies program at Texas Tech. He is author of “Inherit the Holy Mountain.”*


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**June 17, 2015**

Pope Calls for Moral Campaign on Climate Crisis

By Kieran Cooke
Climate News Network

**Hard-hitting message from the Vatican warns of the threat global warming poses to the world’s ecosystems – and to everyone on the planet.**

*LONDON* – Pope Francis has challenged climate change deniers by declaring that the destruction of the ecosystem is a moral issue that has to be tackled, or there will be grave consequences for us all.

Pointing to human activity as the main cause for the increasing concentrations of climate-warming greenhouse gases, he praises ecological movements – and, in exceptionally strong language, rounds on those who are obstructing progress in the fight against climate change.

“The attitudes that stand in the way of a solution, even among believers, range from negation of the problem to indifference, to convenient resignation or to blind faith in technical solutions,” the Pope says.

**Meant for everyone**

His message is contained in an encyclical, a document on Catholic teaching that is traditionally addressed to bishops. But, in this case, he says his words are aimed not only at an estimated 1.2 billion Catholics around the world – they are meant for everyone.

“Faced with the global deterioration of the environment, I want to address every person who inhabits the planet,” the Pope says.

The encyclical – entitled *Laudato Si*, or *Be Praised*, and nearly 200 pages long – is the first such document issued by the Vatican dealing specifically with the environment.
It was due to have been released tomorrow, but parts of a draft appeared early in the Italian magazine, *L’Espresso* – much to the annoyance of Vatican officials.

Unlike many of his predecessors, Pope Francis has shown a desire, since he became pontiff in 2013, to enter into debate about economic and environmental matters, as well as spiritual issues.

“If we destroy Creation, *Creation will destroy us* – never forget that,” he told a gathering in St. Peter’s Square, Rome, earlier this year.

The Pope says in the draft of the encyclical that the poor are trapped by environmental and financial degradation, and that the world’s resources cannot continue to be looted by humankind.

“Heavy is called to take note of the need for changes in lifestyle and changes in methods of production and consumption to combat this warming, or at least the human causes that produce and accentuate it,” he says.

The impact of the Pope’s message is likely to be considerable. Although the number of church-going Catholics has dropped in Europe and many other parts of the industrialised world, the influence of the church is growing in many areas, particularly in Africa.

The encyclical is also likely to give added momentum to the need for a climate agreement at the UN Conference on Climate Change in Paris at the end of the year.

John Grim, who lectures in world religions at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale University in the US, says the Pope’s teachings give a significant moral voice to climate change issues.

He says: “What we have lacked in many settings is the moral voice of religious leadership informing congregations, denominations and different religions of the depth of the science and the impact on human communities of widespread climate change.”

Repeated warnings

The encyclical is likely to attract criticism from sceptics seeking to deny that there is any such thing as climate change, and who in the past have accused the Pope of straying into areas he knows little about.

Conservatives in the US have branded the Pope’s repeated warnings about growing inequality as the talk of a communist and a Marxist.

In September, Pope Francis is due to go to New York to address the United Nations, and will also speak to the US Congress in Washington.

Vatican officials say the pontiff will continue to speak out on issues linked to poverty and climate change. – *Climate News Network*
June 17, 2015

How Pope encyclical could affect more than just Catholics

By Kelsey Dallas
Desert News National

In a highly anticipated encyclical on the environment, Pope Francis this week condemned widespread disengagement with the issue of global warming, using both scientific and theological arguments, and creating an opportunity for leaders from all faiths to address what their religion teaches about caring for creation.

The encyclical, titled "Laudato Si (Praised Be), On the Care of Our Common Home," is directed at Catholics around the world, but its political and religious implications could be felt far beyond Catholic circles.

The encyclical enters a heated political climate, and people who engage with the pope's words should be careful to read it on its own terms, said Susannah Tuttle, director of North Carolina Interfaith Power & Light, an organization that works to put faith into action to improve the environment by reducing the carbon footprint of congregations and lobbying policymakers.

"This is a holistic document," she said. "We have to give it a little room and space to breathe."

Tuttle, along with other leaders of faith-based environmental groups, called the encyclical — the official version of which is expected Thursday after an early version in Italian leaked Monday — an opportunity to ask all people of faith to consider what religion teaches about the environment, expanding a dialogue that has existed for decades.

The Pope's arguments aren't revolutionary, theologically speaking, because "the environmental movement has deep religious roots," Tuttle said. "But there is a certain awesomeness about Pope Francis that can engage folks from all communities of faith."

She added, "It has been challenging to get pastors and state leaders to talk about (environmental) issues. I hope this can change that."

The disconnect

Tuttle said the "call to care for creation" is central to many of the world's religions, citing biblical teachings that instruct humans to be stewards of the earth. Interfaith Power & Light counts Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Muslims, Hindus, Baptists, Quakers, Catholics and a variety of other people of faith among its membership.
And yet surveys have repeatedly shown that believers don't feel particularly called by their religious practice to be active in the environmental movement.

A new study from Pew Research Center, released Tuesday, found that 48 percent of Catholics, 39 percent of Protestants and 56 percent of religiously unaffiliated Americans "say global warming is a very serious problem." Although support has grown since Pew asked the same question in 2013, only among the unaffiliated does a majority see it as a serious problem.

This relatively low engagement with the issue persists in spite of the fact that dozens of faith-based environmental groups have been active for more than a decade, and that people of faith initiated the environmental movement in the U.S., as Deseret News National reported this week.

Mark Stoll, an associate professor of history and director of environmental studies at Texas Tech University, said in the article that religion is likely divorced from the environmental movement in many people's minds because climate change is a highly politicized issue in the U.S.

In Pew's study, 21 percent of Republicans said global warming is a "very serious problem" compared with 67 percent of Democrats. And religious people, the data show, are much more likely to identify as Republicans.

However, environmental group leaders are optimistic the encyclical will be a turning point in efforts to get everyday believers involved in climate change initiatives, because it emphasizes a faithful response to climate change rather than a political one.

"Pope Francis makes (the issue) more accessible to people," said Lonnie Ellis, associate director of the Catholic Climate Covenant.

"He's bringing it home for people," he added. "It's not about parts per million or charts and graphs. It's about our sisters and brothers around the world."

And because the encyclical is being covered widely by the media, it opens a door for pastors to preach about the environment, which can be difficult to address given the politics that surround it, said the Rev. Mitch Hescox, president and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network.

In November, Public Religion Research Institute reported only 36 percent of Americans who regularly attend religious services hear their clergy leader address climate change "often" or "sometimes," including only 20 percent of white Catholics.

"This brings the dialogue to the surface again, helping people feel free to talk about (the environment) whether they're evangelical or mainline Protestant or Catholic," he said. By focusing on a moral framework to motivate care for creation, the pope takes some of the politics out of the discussion, he said.

The people's pope
Beyond his emphasis on the moral reasons to address climate change, the pope benefits the environmental movement simply by being himself: an incredibly popular public figure who was named Time's Person of the Year in 2013, the Rev. Hescox said.

"Most people recognize him as a Christian leader," which means his fan base extends far beyond the Catholic Church, he said.

Pew's survey found that 86 percent of Catholics, 69 percent of white mainline Protestants, 51 percent of white evangelical Protestants and 58 percent of religiously unaffiliated Americans have a "favorable view" of Pope Francis.

However, the pope's popularity also complicates the encyclical's release, especially when people fail to acknowledge its grounding in Catholic tradition and misrepresent the pope's work as politically motivated, Tuttle noted.

"We all sort of feel like we own the pope now, but he's (the Catholics') pope," she said. "He didn't write the encyclical so that he could speak in front of the United Nations."

Instead, he drew on the work of previous popes, mining Catholic teachings to motivate people to be more mindful about their relationship to their environment.

"From a Catholic perspective, (the encyclical) is something he's channeling from God," Tuttle said.

Ellis echoed her, noting that the work "is first and foremost a faith document."

"Faith has social consequences and it has political consequences," and those will come with the encyclical, he said. "But we first root (the pope's words) in faith and spirituality."

Interfaith partnerships will be essential when faith-based environmental groups respond to the encyclical, because Catholics can add context to the theological and social claims made by the pope, said the Rev. Brian Sauder, executive director of Faith in Place, an interfaith environmental group based in Illinois.

"The key (in interfaith work) is to be comfortable with each other and to learn from each other how to be stronger in our own faith traditions," he said.

Catholics can describe how the encyclical affects them spiritually, motivating people of other faiths to look at their religious texts for teachings about caring for creation.

"We can inspire each other to take better care of our common home," he said.

Looking toward the future

The Rev. Sauder and Tuttle said their organizations will encourage Catholic partners to play a leading role in discussions about the pope's message.
"We want to highlight what some parishes have already done and lift those stories up, as well as engage with more parishes," he said, noting that dozens of their Catholic partners have "green teams," or groups dedicated to addressing climate change from within the church by raising money to make community buildings more energy-efficient or recruiting congregants to lobby local and state lawmakers to pass environmentally friendly policies.

Faith in Place will also produce resources to guide people's engagement with the encyclical, which is too long and complex to allow for casual reading.

Ellis said he expected the impact of the pope's message to happen in stages. The encyclical's initial release will inspire hundreds of headlines and commentaries, but it will take longer for Catholic priests to decide how best to engage with the document in their parishes.

"Priests will have to read and reflect for a couple weeks (before they're) able to preach on it," he said.

Although the encyclical is cause for rejoicing for everyone involved in interfaith environmental initiatives, there is still much work to be done before the faith community will be active enough in sustainability efforts to make a real difference in climate change, the Rev. Sauder noted.

As Deseret News National reported last year, few denominations have shown growth in environmental concern over the last two decades, in spite of high-profile commitments from leaders to "go green."

The pope's encyclical can only make a lasting impact if pastors commit to addressing the environment from the pulpit more frequently, and if faith-based environmental groups capitalize on press coverage to teach more believers about their work, the Rev. Sauder said.

"It's wonderful to look at the groundwork (for a faith-based response) we've laid and see it amplified" through the pope's message, he said. "But at the end of the day, protecting the environment will happen from the pews."

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June 18, 2015

How to Read Pope Francis on the Environment

Interviewee: Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, co-directors, The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University
Interviewer: Robert McMahon, Editor Council on Foreign Relations
The new encyclical from Pope Francis about the environment, *Laudato Si*, sharply criticizes man-made abuses of the environment and lays out the church's most detailed case for urgent moves to mitigate climate change. The encyclical, a long, formal letter that conveys the pope's teachings, is both a call to action on the global stage and new guidance for how Catholics should regard ecology, say Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim of Yale University's Forum on Religion and Ecology, in a written Q&A. "While discussions about social justice have been robust in Catholic and Christian contexts, this encyclical marks the first time social and environmental concerns are brought together," write Tucker and Grim.

**The pope's encyclical faults human behavior for deforestation, overfishing, pollution of the world's water supply, and global warming. Why is his pronouncement on these issues significant?**

In linking human behavior to these environmental issues, the encyclical provides a Catholic statement on environmental ethics. Most importantly, this ethical position will not be simply anthropocentric, namely, that we need to protect the environment for our own welfare and for future human generations.

While human concerns are not neglected, especially regarding the adverse effects of environmental degradation on the poor, this encyclical brings two potent religious criteria to bear on this ethical discussion: namely, the earth as God's creation, and the scientific story of evolution as opening new cosmological understandings of who the human is in relation to creation.

This encyclical is significant in providing new insight into the nature of the human as emerging out of universal processes that are seen theologically as God's creation. That is, the divine presence working in and through creation by means of evolution is a teaching in Catholicism.

**Is this what he means by the term "integral ecology"?**

In this encyclical, Pope Francis gives expression to that phrase in four points: 1) The call to all peoples to be protectors of the environment is integral and all-embracing; 2) Care for creation is a virtue in its own right; 3) It is necessary to care for what we cherish and revere; 4) A new global solidarity is a key value to direct our search for the common good.

What seems crucial for understanding Francis' usage of this phrase is his effort to integrate ecological thinking into the whole of life and not separate it out as a science, or an ethical teaching, or environmental behavior such as recycling. Rather, and this is where Francis stands in a powerful and insightful lineage, ecology is a living reality in the human that marks our interdependence with all biotic and abiotic reality.

**The pope calls climate change one of the principal challenges facing humanity today and criticizes attempts at solutions like carbon credits, which he said "may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors." What practical approaches does he accept for minimizing fossil fuel consumption?**
I see a fundamental resistance in Pope Francis's thinking to unbridled market capitalism that reduces everything to a commodity that is traded for profit. This resistance to carbon credits is an effort to call for moral force in the market itself to search out ways to diminish carbon dioxide and heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere by social and individual will and sacrifice.

**What have previous popes had to say about the environment?**

Neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI delivered an encyclical on the environment, but they made statements in related encyclicals that have bearing on human-nature relations. John Paul II's 1991 *encyclical Centesimus Annuus* celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII, which focused on labor, property, and the right of workers to form legal protective associations.

John Paul II continued the Enlightenment separation of humans from nature, emphasizing the dignity of cooperative human labor as making something productive of God's gift of nature.

"The pope is saying that the challenge of climate disruption and environmental deterioration will require ethical responses."

In his 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict moved away from domination language and toward a sense of the protection of nature. He described a view of creation as in balance differing from the more dynamic understandings of ecological sciences. There is much in Benedict's sense of a "grammar of nature" or inherent patterning of use and reciprocity within nature itself. Following that inherent "grammar" Benedict recommends responsible human use of, and appropriate ends for, God's gift of nature. Benedict also offered some guidance on alternative energy sources and was known to have installed solar panels at Vatican. He had a sense of both the economics and scientific understanding of climate issues and the broader environmental issues.

**The Vatican says this is a religious rather than a political document but isn't it intended as a call to environmental activism?**

The encyclical is a call to environmental activism as well as a religious statement that reaches across simply Catholic doctrinal boundaries. Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and formerly an Archbishop in Ghana, has spoken of the encyclical as an expression of Pope Francis's long-standing attention to mercy/misericodia and what Francis calls, "a revolution of tenderness, a revolution of the heart," in which the church makes room in its interior life for the poor.

**Some Catholic faithful, including prominent politicians in the United States, disagree sharply with the pope's stance on climate change. Is there a risk of this encyclical intensifying divisions within the church rather than galvanizing action?**

There is always a risk of exacerbating divisions with the church with change that requires moral transformation. But there is also the hope that by highlighting common concerns for the earth and for future generations the pope will bring about a new unity among the faithful.
With all such large changes controversy arises. There were many divisions in the Christian churches regarding segregation in the United States. Eventually with leadership, as with Martin Luther King's, the moral voice emerged clearly. This is a similar moment when the pope is saying that the challenge of climate disruption and environmental deterioration will require ethical responses. He is asking: "How can we not think of the well-being of our children and all future generations?" This appeal to long-term thinking is the contribution of a religious, spiritual, and ethical perspective such as the pope is articulating.

To what extent have encyclicals been persuasive in guiding the actions of Roman Catholics? Could this one be persuasive to both Catholics and non-Catholics?

Earlier encyclicals focused on social justice issues have been influential throughout the twentieth century. For example, encyclicals have affirmed special concerns for the poor, as well as the rights of labor for just working conditions, wages, and the capacity to organize. On the other hand, [Pope Paul VI's 1968] encyclical regarding birth control, *Humanae Vitae*, has had mixed reception, especially among the laity.

While discussions about social justice have been robust in Catholic and Christian contexts, this encyclical marks the first time social and environmental concerns are brought together. This perspective of eco-justice has traction with other Christian communities as well as non-Christian religions.

What happens next in guidance for Catholics? Will there be more consistent appeals for environmental awareness from church pulpits? A greater move toward using alternative energies?

One option is the introduction of new waves of "retrieval," "reevaluation," and "reconstruction" within religious traditions broadly considered. For example, in Catholic seminaries will the curriculum for the training of priests actually be affected? Will Catholic priests learn how to think theologically about integral ecology and Catholic doctrines?

If seminaries and Catholic education undertake these curricular considerations it will mean a resurgence of attention to human-earth interactions in scripture, commentaries (theology), and church history. This is what we call "retrieval." The act of reflecting on its implications for the present is "reevaluation"—a dialogue across all the positions, schools, factions within a religion. Finally, if insight emerges that indeed we are connected and interdependent with the abiotic and biotic systems of the planet, religions need to "reconstruct" themselves so that values of flourishing life are apparent in rituals, teachings, trainings, and actions.

Have leaders of other religions released any equivalent documents on the environment?

Many religious leaders from around the world have issued statements on the environment, including Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, leader of the world's Eastern Orthodox Christians, who is mentioned in the pope's encyclical, and the Dalai Lama. There have also been recent discussions in China that have brought Confucianism into ecological civilization. Over the last two decades the world's religions have moved forward with environmental statements,
theological reflections, and engaged ecological projects. This process of retrieving, reevaluating, and reconstructing environmental ethics within the religious traditions will be an ongoing process.

On several occasions religious groups have held meetings and issued joint statements on the need for interreligious cooperation regarding environmental protection and care for creation. In September 2014 many religious leaders gathered for the People’s Climate March in New York. At the upcoming Paris United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change talks in December, this growing movement of the need for moral response to climate change will be even more visible.

http://www.cfr.org/holy-seevatican/read-pope-francis-environment/p36665

June 18, 2015

What you need to know about Pope Francis’s environmental encyclical

By Christiana Z. Peppard
Washington Post

How does one read an encyclical? Even as an expert on Catholic social teaching, the answer to that question still eludes me.

Anyone who has glimpsed Laudato Si’: On the Care of our Common Home, released today by Pope Francis, can see that the genre is unique. It’s dramatically different from our habitual scans of texts and tweets and the sorts of messages sent with thumbs. Yet even while it requires different dexterities, reading the encyclical — the whole thing, yes — is within our grasp. Francis himself says, bluntly: “I wish to address every person living on this planet … I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.”

This bounces us to a second question: what does it mean? To enter into a dialogue is not the same thing as to decree from on high a particular course of action. Laudato Si’ is an ethically nuanced, often gripping analysis of our contemporary moral and environmental predicaments — and an invitation to articulate and embrace an ecological humanism worthy of our best efforts.

Fossil fuels are part of the point, but not all of it

Many commentators in the United States are tempted to equate the meaning of this document with the policy upshot — the pithy sound bite that takes a side in the bizarre partisan debacle of U.S. climate and fossil fuel policy.

Yes, Francis has some upshots regarding fossil fuels: Greenhouse gases have been emitted by industrialized nations (such as ours) at a disproportionate rate. Rates of consumption of non-renewable resources are profoundly imbalanced worldwide. Differentiated responsibilities
between developing and super-developed nations (i.e., the United States) in any future climate agreements are both necessary and ethically appropriate.

And — because of his skepticism of technological and economic utopianisms (see below) — Francis is wary of cap-and-trade or carbon-pricing proposals that would merely maintain the underlying systems of environmental exploitation, without the “radical change which present circumstances require” (171). There is, he maintains, an “ecological debt” that industrialized nations owe towards the planet and to nations less developed than our own.

Skeptics and pundits take note: Renewable energy sources are a necessary goal for a morally significant transition away from fossil fuel-based energy sources. This transition should occur with due attention to transparent environmental impact assessments, the precautionary principle, and full-cost accounting that attends to the well-being of future generations. But make no mistake: This is not partisanship of an American electoral sort.

This transition is a preferential option for the poor and for the planet. It is also the pursuit of an “integral ecology,” or an expansive humanism, that realigns human actions within the frame of our ecological contexts, and our distinctive capacities for reason and self-reflection.

**The goods of the earth: Pollution, climate change, water**

*Laudato Si’* is, in Francis’ own words, a “lengthy reflection which has been both joyful and troubling” (246), structured in six movements or chapters.

**Chapter one: “What is happening to our common home?”** admits of several answers that sum up to this: we are degrading it, especially through pollution and climate change, deterioration and overuse of water, loss of biodiversity, and the breakdown of society through global inequality, among other signs.

The problems are both spiritual and structural. The rest of the encyclical unpacks those notions, in a dance of levels of scale between that ranges from the individual to the civic, national, regional, and planetary.

**Chapter two: “The Gospel of Creation,”** turns to Biblical sources to illuminate the mandate to care for creation as a fundamental tenet of faith, attested in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament as stewardship. It is this perspective on our responsibility to God and to creation — that modern human beings have forgotten, says Francis.

Indeed, citing John Paul II as well as the Canadian Bishops and the Bishops Conference of Japan, Francis points out that Creation itself reveals God: Along with Scripture, “there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of sun and the fall of night,” as John Paul II put it at the turn of the millennium (85). Or, in St. Francis’ “Canticle of Creation”—the hymn of praise to which Francis recurs in *Laudato Si’*, “Praised be [You, O Lord],” through Brother Wind and Sister Water, and all the many beings of the earth.
The goods of the earth, continues Francis, are not meant for abuse and exploitation, but rather for sharing and inclusiveness of the least among us. And it points out that Biblical narratives demonstrate the truth that “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: With God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself …. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations” (66).

Moreover, “the natural environment is a collective good”—not something to be held privately or exclusively for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many, now or in the future (93-95).

**Chapter three** is the most sustained and acosting indictment of contemporary humanity’s values and practices. Here, in “The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” Francis (along with many so-called “secular” environmentalists) — says that it is humanity’s outsized technological and economic domination over the planet’s natural bounty that is at the root of many social and environmental ills.

The rapid rise of human technological and economic prowess outpaces evolution, and “our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values, and conscience” (105).

It may be impossible to overstate the severity and incisiveness of Francis’ call to consider, and then constrain, technological and economic ideologies — or what he calls the “technocratic paradigm” (106 and following), in which technology, efficiency, and profit are seen as ends in themselves.

But, Francis warns, while this kind of framework may be a convenient default, it “ends up conditioning lifestyles and shaping social possibilities along the lines dictated by the interests of certain powerful groups.” In this way, decisions that may seem incidental or instrumental “are in reality decisions about the kind of society we want to build” (107). Humanity is lost, says Francis, between hyperconsumptive and superdeveloped contexts, and regions where people lack the most fundamental of goods and opportunities.

Much blame lies with speculative finance and the contemporary economy, whose values and functions are not inherently able to protect the most vulnerable members of society or to avoid environmental degradation. A new way is needed.

To be human is to be in relationship, and all life must be respected

**Chapter four** describes what is needed “for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution” (95). With typical Francis aplomb, the pope says: “Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and take a look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur” (114).

Laying the blame on the “modern anthropocentrism” critiqued in chapters 2 and 3, Francis elaborates that Christian views of the human being have been wrong to see humans as righteous
domineers. (This humility — and ability to admit that Christian history has been wrong — is perhaps one of the reasons that Francis feels both trustworthy and relevant to a flock beyond the pews of confessing Catholics.)

“Integral ecology,” for Francis, means an attention to the necessary interaction and wholeness of relationships: with God, with other people, with Creation and with ourselves. His consistent reasoning of respect for vulnerable life finds articulation here: “When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities—to offer just a few examples—it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected.” (117; see also 120).

Everything is connected, but population per se is not the main cause of environmental degradation, says Francis. Instead, a more complex metric is necessary, one that looks at the disordered habits of human beings and societies.

In one of the strongest paragraphs in the entire document, Francis identifies the problem as having to do with humans’ misguided and hyper-consumptive habits. These reveal the implicit assumption that we can technologically and economically dominate each other and the natural world. The same logic that “leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly,” he says, “justifies buying the organs of the poor for resale … or eliminating children because they are not what their parents wanted. This same use and throw away logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to consume more than what is really necessary” (123).

Ecological and social ills are connected. “We are faced not with two separate crises,” he says at the start of chapter four, “but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (139).

For all its distressing details about environmental and social degradation, Laudato Si’ manages to avoid dousing the reader in despair. This is no small accomplishment.

Any solution, he says—and he does give positive examples throughout the encyclical—“demand[s] an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (139). And he is clear that there is no one-sized-fits-all solution: While there may be a universal mandate to care for the poor and creation, how this looks will vary depending on the particularities of context.

This point is worth emphasizing. Francis, head of the largest organized body of religious observers in the world, consistently in Laudato Si’ takes recourse to the wisdom of people other than himself.

Sure, he draws on previous popes (especially John Paul II and Benedict XVI); but he also draws heavily on the many insights from regional bishops’ conferences — in the Philippines, the United States, Brazil, and many more. In so doing, Francis makes a subtle case for the wisdom of particular places and cultures: “there is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures,” and
not to propose uniform solutions to problems that are many-layered and particular to given places (even as there may be universal elements, as in the case of climate change).

“In this case,” he continues, “it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed” (146). The Church with Francis has come a long way from the colonial, hegemonic mentality of a universal truth articulated by European pontiffs.

**Chapter five, “Lines of Approach and Action,”** identifies contemporary mechanisms for attaining the common good — making mention of the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro and successful conventions on hazardous wastes, while also stating rather bluntly that at present “with regard to climate change, the advances have been regrettably few.

Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most” — presumably, one infers, with the recalcitrant U.S. Congress foremost among them (169). (“We believers,” Francis admonishes, “cannot fail to ask God for a positive outcome to the present discussions, so that future generations will not have to suffer the effects of our ill-advised delays.”)

**The need for both conversion and renewal**

It is in **chapter six, “Ecological Education and Spirituality,”** that the pastoral tone and spiritual content of the encyclical returns. Here, as in chapters two and four, Francis is at his most constructive: identifying the multiple dimensions by which humans can understand “ecology,” and inviting readers to consider our own histories, experiences of beauty, and attachments to particular places in order to envision a better world for ourselves, our children, and distant future generations. He writes:

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. … A great cultural, spiritual, and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.” (202)

This last chapter is Francis’ prognosis, his call to spiritual discernment, and where his distinctive pastoral style shines through most clearly: the need for ecological conversion or rebirth of moral perspective—an “integral ecology” that is also an “authentic humanism.”

Above all, it is an invitation to consider how after the abundant facts of environmental and social degradation, the ultimate question is what values we want to guide our lives. “The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make,” he claims (216).

Catholic tradition, while distinctive and distinctly evident throughout this encyclical, is neither exhaustive nor exclusionary. With collaborative spirit and humility about the ways in which God manifests in cultures and nature, Francis draws heavily upon the teachings of the Ecumenical
Patriarch Bartholomew I, as well as the Muslim mystic ‘Ali al Khawas and the non-religious Earth Charter as he makes a series of points about humility, gratitude, patience, responsibility, and attentiveness. These are among the ecological virtues that are also part of attaining social and environmental justice, now and in the future.

So what does this encyclical mean, given its sweeping scope and 246 paragraphs of scientific citations and spiritual calls to conversion?

The question is open. And that, of course, is precisely the point. While Francis is willing to point the way — through Scripture and tradition, through science and ethical reasoning — he offers precious few concrete answers. The task of making “integral ecology” real is left to all who would consider what he has to say—that is, all of us whose lives depend on earth and on each other.

A quick scan for keywords, or a search for simple answers, will not yield much. The encyclical is not a checklist of how to save the planet and, in so doing, each other. Instead, *Laudato Si’* is a call to renewed, ecological humanism and moral vision in a world beset by technological and economic temptation.

This opinion piece is by Christiana Z. Peppard, assistant professor of theology, science, and ethics at Fordham University.


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**June 18, 2015**

Papal Encyclical Heartens Proponents of Fossil-Fuel Divestment

By John Schwartz
New York Times

The word “divestment” is nowhere to be found in the nearly 200 pages of the papal encyclical released Thursday, but by addressing the threat of climate change in such a forceful way, Pope Francis is likely to add momentum to the movement by big institutions to sell holdings tied to fossil-fuel stocks.

“For activists who have been laboring for decades to elicit a courageous response from the world’s governments and leading institutions, the pope’s statement is a godsend,” said Bob Massie, a longtime environmental activist and proponent of divestment who is also an Episcopal priest.

The divestment effort first emerged at universities in 2012. Many religious institutions, including the Church of England and the United Church of Christ, have announced divestment plans, as
have a number of religious educational institutions, including Union Theological Seminary in New York.

Others are likely to follow, said Richard W. Miller, an associate professor of theology at Creighton University, a Jesuit school in Omaha. “Regardless of whether he says ‘divestment,’ I think it puts enormous pressure on Catholic universities,” Professor Miller said. “I think it puts pressure on all universities.”

The United Church of Christ announced its resolution to begin divestment of church funds and pension money two years ago, becoming the first major religious body in the United States to vote for divestment. (“It’s not a competition,” said the Rev. Jim Antal, the conference minister of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ and an environmental leader in the denomination.)

The encyclical casts climate change as an issue that not only is scientifically important but also has moral and spiritual implications. It also ties the issue to others, such as caring for the poor, who are expected to bear the brunt of more extreme weather and rising sea levels. Depicting climate change as a moral issue resonates deeply with many climate activists.

Union Theological Seminary officials see divestment of its $108 million endowment from stocks linked to fossil fuels as a moral act more than a political or economic one, said the Rev. Serene Jones, the seminary’s president. “We don’t think that divesting our little endowment is going to change what the oil companies do,” she said. “We did it because it was the right thing to do.”

Kareena Gore, director of the seminary’s new Center for Earth Ethics, said the moral approach could help people understand that even if actions like divestment do not have a profound effect on the fortunes of fossil-fuel companies, “it makes it a matter of personal integrity and institutional integrity.”

“We don’t say, ‘Don’t recycle a can because it makes no difference,’ ” she said.

Mr. Antal, who said he was inspired by the work of the climate activist Bill McKibben and his group 350.org, said his early efforts had been arduous.

He said he had spent 200 hours negotiating with the director of United Church Funds and the church’s pension board, which initially opposed the resolution calling for divestment. And when it was done, he recalled, he came under attack from the columnist and Yale Law School professor Stephen L. Carter, who accused the church of hypocrisy, writing, “Once we get supply and demand straight, the coal miner is a lot less ‘responsible’ for greenhouse gases than the suburban family that crowds into the S.U.V. to attend Sunday services.”

In an interview, Mr. Antal acknowledged that he and others advocating changes in energy production were still using fossil fuels. “Here I am sitting in an airport,” he noted.

But the goal, he said, was to work for the kinds of changes that will limit global warming and head off its worst effects.
In a written response to Professor Carter, Mr. Antal said that the denomination’s churches did call for changing personal habits of consumption and had “long known that when engaging in social critique, the first place to look is at our own complicity.”

He and his colleagues, he said, “are doing everything we can to leverage the release of the encyclical.”

Tomás Insua, a graduate student at Harvard who is involved with the Global Catholic Climate Movement, a coalition of nearly 100 Catholic organizations, said he expected a wave of divestment demands. In the future, he said, “it will be very hard for Catholic universities to counter divestment asks quoting the encyclical.”

William Patenaude, who has written the blog Catholic Ecology since 2004, said that whether or not institutions changed their policies or divested, the encyclical would have an effect by “inspiring people to talk about issues that they may not have felt comfortable talking about.”

The discussion might get “a little hot,” Mr. Patenaude said, and no one knows where that may lead. But, he added, “I’m glad we’re having that conversation.”


June 18, 2015

ELCA issues statement on Pope Francis’ encyclical on climate change

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

CHICAGO (ELCA) – The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), released a statement June 18 on behalf of this church in response to Pope Francis’ encyclical on climate change and the deteriorating global environment. The full text of the statement follows:

As members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we share a deep concern with our Catholic brothers and sisters for the well-being of our neighbors and of God's good creation. "Humans, in service to God, have special roles on behalf of the whole of creation. Made in the image of God, we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth" (ELCA social statement, "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope and Justice").

Daily we see and hear the evidence of a rapidly changing climate. At the same time, we also witness in too many instances how the earth's natural beauty, a sign of God's wonderful creativity, has been defiled by pollutants and waste.

An accounting of climate change that has credibility and integrity must name the neglect and carelessness of private industry and the failure of government leadership that have contributed to
these changes. However, it also must include repentance for our own participation as individual consumers and investors in economies that make intensive and insistent demands for energy.

Yet we find our hope in the promise of God's own faithfulness to the creation and humankind. We serve in concert with God's creative and renewing power, understanding that we have the resources and responsibility to act together for the common good, especially for those who are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Today we join with Pope Francis in calling on world leaders to embrace our common responsibility as work continues toward a global agreement on climate change. We urge leaders to support an ambitious agreement that reduces greenhouse gas emissions, encourages development of low-carbon technologies, and supports the ability of countries to cope with the effects of a changing climate and build resiliency for a sustainable future.

The present moment is a critical one, filled with both challenge and opportunity to act as individuals, citizens, leaders and communities of faith in solidarity with God's good creation and in hope for our shared future.


About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:
The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.8 million members in nearly 10,000 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer, Martin Luther.

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June 18, 2015

Pope Francis, in Sweeping Encyclical, Calls for Swift Action on Climate Change
VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis on Thursday called for a radical transformation of politics, economics and individual lifestyles to confront environmental degradation and climate change, as his much-awaited papal encyclical blended a biting critique of consumerism and irresponsible development with a plea for swift and unified global action.

The vision that Francis outlined in the 184-page encyclical is sweeping in ambition and scope: He described a relentless exploitation and destruction of the environment, for which he blamed apathy, the reckless pursuit of profits, excessive faith in technology and political shortsightedness. The most vulnerable victims are the world’s poorest people, he declared, who are being dislocated and disregarded.

The first pope from the developing world, Francis, an Argentine, used the encyclical — titled “Laudato Si’,” or “Praise Be to You” — to highlight the crisis posed by climate change. He placed most of the blame on fossil fuels and human activity while warning of an “unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequence for all of us” if swift action is not taken. Developed, industrialized countries were mostly responsible, he said, and were obligated to help poorer nations confront the crisis.

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods,” he wrote. “It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.”

The Vatican released the encyclical at noon on Thursday, following a heavily attended news conference and amid widespread global interest. Vatican officials were infuriated after an Italian magazine on Monday posted a leaked draft of the encyclical online — one that almost exactly matched the final document. The breach led to speculation that opponents of Francis inside the Vatican wanted to embarrass him by undermining the planned rollout.

But on Thursday, religious figures, environmentalists, scientists, elected officials and corporate executives around the world were awaiting the official release of the encyclical, with many of them scheduling later news conferences or preparing statements to discuss it. Media interest was enormous, partly because of Francis’ global popularity, but also because this was the first time that a pope had written an encyclical about environmental damage — and because of the intriguing coalition he is proposing between faith and science.

“Humanity is faced with a crucial challenge that requires the development of adequate policies, which, moreover, are currently being discussed on the global agenda,” Cardinal Peter Turkson said during the morning news conference at the Vatican. “Certainly, Laudato Si’ can and must have an impact on important and urgent decisions to be made in this area.”

In the news conference, Cardinal Turkson said that Francis had already noted that humanity had played a role in climate change. He said that there was “heated debate” on the topic and that Francis was not trying to intervene in that.
Francis has made clear that he hopes the encyclical will influence energy and economic policy and stir a global movement. He calls on ordinary people to pressure politicians for change. Bishops and priests around the world are expected to lead discussions on the encyclical in services on Sunday. But Francis is also reaching for a wider audience when in the first pages of the document he asks “to address every person living on this planet.”

Even before the release, Francis’ unflinching stance against environmental destruction, and his demand for global action, had already thrilled many scientists. In recent weeks, advocates of policies to combat climate change have expressed hope that Francis could lend a “moral dimension” to the debate, because winning scientific arguments was different from moving people to action.

“Within the scientific community, there is almost a code of honor that you will never transgress the red line between pure analysis and moral issues,” said Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, founder and chairman of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and a leading European climate scientist. “But we are now in a situation where we have to think about the consequences of our insight for society.”

Yet Francis has also been sharply criticized by those who question or deny the established science of human-caused climate change and also by some conservative Roman Catholics, who have interpreted the document as an attack on capitalism and as unwanted political meddling at a moment when climate change is high on the global agenda.

Governments are now crafting domestic climate change plans before December’s United Nations summit meeting on climate change in Paris. The goal of the meeting is to achieve the first sweeping global accord in which every nation on earth would commit to enacting new policies to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Many governments have yet to present plans, including major emitters like Brazil, which also has a large Catholic population. The encyclical is seen as an unsubtle nudge for action, even as it provides support for leaders faced with tough choices in countries with large numbers of Catholics.

“It gives a lot of cover to political and economic leaders in those countries, as they make decisions on climate change policy,” said Timothy Wirth, vice chairman of the United Nations Foundation.

Catholic theologians say the overarching theme of the encyclical is “integral ecology,” which links care for the environment with a notion already well developed in Catholic teaching — that economic development, to be morally good and just, must take into account the need of human beings for things such as freedom, education and meaningful work.

“The basic idea is, in order to love God, you have to love your fellow human beings, and you have to love and care for the rest of creation,” said Vincent Miller, who holds a chair in Catholic theology and culture at the University of Dayton, a Catholic college in Ohio. “It gives Francis a very traditional basis to argue for the inclusion of environmental concern at the center of Christian faith.”
He added: “Critics will say the church can’t teach policy, the church can’t teach politics. And Francis is saying, ‘No, these things are at the core of the church’s teaching.’”

Francis has drawn from a wide variety of sources, partly to buttress his arguments, partly to underscore the universality of his message. He regularly cites passages from his two predecessors, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, even as he also draws prominently from his religious ally, Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, leader of the world’s Eastern Orthodox Christians. He also cites a Sufi Muslim mystic, Ali al-Khawas.

Francis begins the encyclical with a hymn written by St. Francis of Assisi, the 13th-century friar who is the patron saint of animals and the environment. Francis cites the Bible’s book of Genesis to underpin his theological argument, though in a passage certain to rankle some Christians, he chastises those who cite Genesis as evidence that man has “dominion” over earth and therefore an unlimited right to its resources. Some believers have used this biblical understanding of “dominion” to justify practices such as mountaintop mining or fishing with gill nets.

“This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church,” Francis wrote. The Bible teaches human beings to “till and keep” the garden of the world, he said: “‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, plowing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving.”

His most stinging rebuke is a broad economic and political critique of profit-seeking and the undue influence of technology on society. He praised the progress achieved by economic growth and technology, singling out achievements in medicine, science and engineering. But, he added, “Our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.”

Central to Francis’ theme is the linkage between the poor and the fragility of the planet. He rejects the belief that technology and “current economics” will solve environmental problems or “that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth.” He cites finance as having a distorting influence on politics and calls for government action, international regulation and a spiritual and cultural awakening to “recover depth in life.”

Amid the broad themes, Francis also touches on a wide range of specific topics, from urban planning (calling for better neighborhoods for the poor) and agricultural economics (warning against the reach of huge agribusinesses that push family farmers off their land) to conservation and biodiversity (with calls to protect the Amazon and Congo basins), and even offers up small passages of media and architecture criticism.

“A huge indictment I see in this encyclical is that people have lost their sense of ultimate and proper goals of technology and economics,” said Christiana Z. Peppard, an assistant professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University in New York. “We are focused on short-term, consumerist patterns, and have allowed technological and economic paradigms to tell us what our values ought to be.”
Encyclicals are letters to clergy members and laity of the church that are considered authoritative papal teaching documents. Catholics are expected to try to sincerely embrace the teaching and moral judgments within. But while broad moral principles are widely considered to be binding, more specific assertions can be categorized as “prudential judgments” — a phrase some critics have invoked to reject Francis’ positions on hot-button issues like climate change or economic inequality.

Many conservatives will be pleased, however, because Francis also included a strong criticism of abortion while also belittling the argument that population control represented a solution to limited resources and poverty. However, he sharply criticized carbon credits — the financial instruments now central to the European Union’s current climate change policy — as a tool that “may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors.”

Above all, Francis has framed the encyclical as a call to action, imbuing environmental protection with a theological and spiritual foundation. He praises the younger generations for being ready for change and said “enforceable international agreements are urgently needed.” He cited Benedict in saying that advanced societies “must be prepared to encourage more sober lifestyles, while reducing their energy consumption and improving its efficiency.”

“All is not lost,” he wrote. “Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start.”

Jim Yardley reported from Vatican City, and Laurie Goodstein from New York. Gaia Pianigiani contributed reporting from Rome, Coral Davenport from Washington, and Justin Gillis from New York.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/19/world/europe/pope-francis-in-sweeping-encyclical-calls-for-swift-action-on-climate-change.html?_r=1

June 18, 2015

Pope Francis: The Cry of the Earth

By Bill McKibben
The New York Review of Books

The old conceit that the president has a “bully pulpit” needs updating; it’s clear that the pulpit at St. Peter’s Basilica is now the bulliest of all. Pope Francis may lack legions, but he has 6.3 million followers on Twitter, and for a week now the world has been following leaks of his new encyclical on climate change and the environment.

Laudato Si’, finally released Thursday morning in Rome, is a remarkable 183-page document, incredibly rich—it’s not dense, but it is studded with aphorisms and insights. It will take time to fully digest it, but a few things are immediately evident.
First, simply by writing it, the pope—the single most prominent person on the planet, and of all celebrities and leaders the most skilled at using gesture to communicate—has managed to get across the crucial point: our environmental peril, and in particular, climate change, is the most pressing issue of our time. We face, he says, “desolation,” and we must turn as fast as we can away from coal, oil, and gas. Most thinking people knew this already, but since dealing with global warming would mean standing up to the most powerful forces in the status quo, most world leaders have never fully engaged the question. (President Obama, for instance, the earth’s most powerful politician, made it to the closing days of his 2012 reelection campaign without mentioning climate change—until Hurricane Sandy finally made it impossible not to.) It’s been a side issue, but no more: Francis has made it clear that nothing can be more important.

More, he’s brought the full weight of the spiritual order to bear on the global threat posed by climate change, and in so doing joined its power with the scientific order. Stephen Jay Gould had the idea that these two spheres were “non-overlapping magisteria,” but in this case he appears to have been wrong. Pope Francis draws heavily on science—sections of the encyclical are very nearly wonky, with accurate and sensible discussions of everything from genetic modification to aquifer depletion—but he goes beyond science as well. Science by itself has proven empirically impotent to force action on this greatest of crises; now, at last, someone with authority is explaining precisely why it matters that we’re overheating the planet.

It matters in the first place, says Francis, because of its effect on the poorest among us, which is to say on most of the population of the earth. The encyclical is saturated with concern for the most vulnerable—those who, often in underdeveloped countries, are breathing carcinogenic air, or are being forced from their land by spreading deserts and rampant agribusiness. This comes as no surprise, for concern—rhetorical and practical—for those at the bottom of the heap has been the hallmark of his papacy from the start. “A true ecological approach,” he writes, “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.”

Less expected, perhaps—at least for those who haven’t understood why Francis chose his papal name—is how seriously he takes that cry of the earth. Though he’s no tree-worshipping pagan (it’s clear throughout the encyclical that the world belongs to God), there’s a celebration of nature and the natural world that undergirds the document. He rails at the destruction of the Amazon and the Congo, of aquifers and glaciers. Speaking of coral reefs, he writes: “who turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?”

But the heart of the encyclical is less an account of environmental or social destruction than a remarkable attack on the way our world runs: on the “rapidification” of modern life, on the way that economic growth and technology trump all other concerns, on a culture that can waste billions of people. These are neither liberal nor conservative themes, and they are not new for popes: what is new is that the ecological crisis makes them inescapable. Continual economic and technological development may have long been isolating, deadening, spiritually unfulfilling—but it has swept all before it anyway, despite theological protest, because it has delivered the goods. But now, the rapidly rising temperature (and new data also released Thursday showed we’ve just lived through the hottest May since record-keeping began) gives the criticism bite. Our way of life literally doesn’t work. It’s breaking the planet. Given the severity of the
situation, Francis writes, “we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing, and limiting our power.”

Neither liberal nor conservative—but definitely radical. Francis calls for nothing less than the demotion of individualism and a renewed concern for what we hold in common as humans (the encyclical is explicitly directed to all of us, Catholic or not, since the environmental crisis is more universal than any challenge before it). “The rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption [is] essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment,” he writes. Get your nose out of your iPhone (“When media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously”) and join in the fight for a livable world.

Because a fight it is. The pope may have combined the orders of science and spirituality, but he knows they must battle a third magisteria: money, which so far has usually won. He’s caustic about the failures of international conclaves and national politicians, rightly isolating the cause as the ongoing triumph of those for whom accumulation is the only god. “Whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market,” he has written, adding knowingly today that, “consequently the most one can expect [from our leaders] is superficial rhetoric, sporadic acts of philanthropy, and perfunctory expressions of concern.” Indeed, an hour or two after the release of his encyclical, the House voted to give the president “fast-track” authority to negotiate a free trade agreement with Pacific Rim nations, over the protests of advocates for both environmentalists and workers that it would only worsen the problems the encyclical describes.

It will take a while to see what power the pope’s letter ultimately possesses. Usually, as Francis writes, “any genuine attempt by groups within society to introduce change is viewed as a nuisance based on romantic illusions or an obstacle to be circumvented,” which certainly describes how many American politicians reacted to the encyclical. But one would perhaps be unwise to bet against Pope Francis, who has a wily sense of how to pressure, expose, and prod. At any rate, the battle is joined, more fully than ever before.

My own sense, after spending the day reading this remarkable document, was of great relief. I’ve been working on climate change for a quarter century, and for much of that time it felt like enduring one of those nightmarish dreams where no one can hear your warnings. In recent years a broad-based movement has arisen to take up the challenge, but this marks the first time that a person of great authority in our global culture has fully recognized the scale and depth of our crisis, and the consequent necessary rethinking of what it means to be human.


June 18, 2015

Top Ten Takeaways from 'Laudato Si'
Pope Francis’ revolutionary new encyclical calls for a “broad cultural revolution” to confront the environmental crisis. “Laudato Si” is also quite lengthy. Can it be summarized? In other words, what are the main messages, or “takeaways” of this encyclical?

1) The spiritual perspective is now part of the discussion on the environment.

The greatest contribution of “Laudato Si” to the environmental dialogue is, to my mind, its systematic overview of the crisis from a religious point of view. Until now, the environmental dialogue has been framed mainly with political, scientific and economic language. With this new encyclical, the language of faith enters the discussion—clearly, decisively and systematically. This does not mean that Pope Francis is imposing his beliefs on those concerned about the environment. “I am well aware,” he says, that not all are believers (No. 62). Nonetheless, the encyclical firmly grounds the discussion in a spiritual perspective and invites others to listen to a religious point of view, particularly its understanding of creation as a holy and precious gift from God to be reverenced by all men and women. But the pope also hopes to offer “ample motivation” to Christians and other believers “to care for nature” (No. 64). This does also not mean that other popes (and other parts of the church) have not spoken about the crisis—Francis highlights the teachings of his predecessors, particularly St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. But in its systematic spiritual approach, this is a groundbreaking document that expands the conversation by inviting believers into the dialogue and providing fresh insights for those already involved.

2) The poor are disproportionately affected by climate change.

The disproportionate effect of environmental change on the poor and on the developing world is highlighted in almost every section of the encyclical. Indeed, near the beginning of “Laudato Si,” the pope states that focus on the poor is one the central themes of the encyclical, and he provides many baneful examples of the effects of climate change, whose “worse impacts” are felt those living in the by developing countries. This is not simply the result of the power of the rich to make decisions that do not take the poor into account, but because the poor themselves have fewer financial resources that enable them to adapt to climate change. Additionally, the natural resources of those poorer countries “fuel” the development of the richer countries “at the cost of their own present and future” (No. 52). Throughout the encyclical, the pope appeals to the Gospels, to Catholic social teaching and to the statements of recent popes to critique the exclusion of anyone from benefits of the goods of creation. Overall, in decisions regarding the environment and the use of the earth’s common resources, he repeatedly calls for an appreciation of the “immense dignity of the poor” (No. 158).

3) Less is more.

Pope Francis takes aim at what he calls the “technocratic” mindset, in which technology is seen as the “principal key” to human existence (No. 110). He critiques an unthinking reliance on
market forces, in which every technological, scientific or industrial advancement is embraced before considering how it will affect the environment and “without concern for its potential negative impact on human beings” (No. 109). This is not the view of a Luddite—in fact, Francis goes out of his way to praise technological advances—but of a believer who resists the idea that every increase in technology is good for the earth and for humanity. “Laudato Si” also diagnoses a society of “extreme consumerism” in which people are unable to resist what the market places before them, the earth is despoiled and billions are left impoverished (No. 203). That is why it is the time, he says, to accept “decreased growth in some part of the world, in order to provide recourse for other places to experience healthy growth” (No. 193). In contrast with the consumerist mindset, Christian spirituality offers a growth marked by “moderation and the capacity to be happy with little” (No. 222). It is a matter nothing less than a redefinition of our notion of progress.

4) Catholic social teaching now includes teaching on the environment.

Against those who argue that a papal encyclical on the environment has no real authority, Pope Francis explicitly states that “Laudato Si” "is now added to the body of the Church’s social teaching” (No. 15). By the way, an encyclical is a type of teaching that enjoys the highest level of authority in the church, second only to the Gospels and church councils like Vatican II. As such, it continues the kind of reflection on modern-day problems that began with Leo XIII’s “Rerum Novarum,” on capital and labor, in 1891. Pope Francis uses some of the traditional foundations of Catholic Social Teaching, particularly the idea of the “common good,” to frame his discussion. In keeping with the practices of Catholic social teaching, the pope combines the riches of the church’s theology with the findings of experts in a variety of fields, to reflect on modern-day problems. To that end, he explicitly links St. John XXIII’s “Pacem in Terris,” which addressed the crisis of nuclear war, with “Laudato Si,” which addresses this newer crisis.

5) Discussions about ecology can be grounded in the Bible and church tradition.

Wisely, Pope Francis begins the encyclical not with a reflection on Scripture and tradition (the two pillars of Catholic teaching), which might tempt nonbelievers to set aside the letter, but with an overview of the crisis—including issues of water, biodiversity and so on. Only in Chapter Two does he turn towards “The Gospel of Creation,” in which he leads readers, step by step, through the call to care for creation that extends as far back as the Book of Genesis, when humankind was called to “till and keep” the earth. But we have done, to summarize his approach, too much tilling and not enough keeping. In a masterful overview, Pope Francis traces the theme of love for creation through both the Old and New Testaments. He reminds us, for example, that God, in Jesus Christ, became not only human, but part of the natural world. Moreover, Jesus himself appreciated the natural world, as is evident in the Gospel passages in which he praises creation. The insights of the saints are also recalled, most especially St. Francis of Assisi, the spiritual lodestar of the document. In addition to helping nonbelievers understand the Scripture and the church’s traditions, he explicitly tries to inspire believers to care for nature and the environment.

6) Everything is connected—including the economy.
One of the greatest contributions of “Laudato Si” is that it offers what theologians call a “systematic” approach to an issue. First, he links all of us to creation: “We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it” (No. 139). But our decisions, particularly about production and consumption, have an inevitable effect on the environment. Pope Francis links a “magical conception of the market,” which privileges profit over the impact on the poor, with the abuse of the environment (No. 190). Needless to say, a heedless pursuit of money that sets aside the interests of the marginalized and leads to the ruination of the planet are connected. Early on, he points to St. Francis of Assisi, who shows how “inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace” (No. 10). Far from offering a naïve condemnation of capitalism, Pope Francis provides an intelligent critique of the limits of the market, especially where it fails to provide for the poor. “Profit,” he says, “cannot be the sole criterion” of our decisions (No. 187).

7) **Scientific research on the environment is to be praised and used.**

Pope Francis does not try to “prove” anything about climate change in this document. He frankly admits that the church does not “presume to settle scientific questions” (No. 188). And while he clearly states that there are disputes over current science, his encyclical accepts the “best scientific research available today” and builds on it, rather than entering into a specialist’s debate (No. 15). Speaking of the great forests of the Amazon and Congo, and of glaciers and aquifers, for example, he simply says, “We know how important these are for the earth…” (No. 38: my italics.) As the other great Catholic social encyclicals analyzed such questions as capitalism, unions and fair wages, “Laudato Si” draws upon both church teaching and contemporary findings from other fields—particularly science, in this case—to help modern-day people reflect on these questions.

8) **Widespread indifference and selfishness worsen environmental problems.**

Pope Francis reserves his strongest criticism for the wealthy who ignore the problem of climate change, and especially its effect on the poor. “Many of those who possess more resources seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms…” (No. 26). Why, he asks, are so many of the wealthy turning away from the poor? Not only because “some view themselves as more worthy than others,” but because frequently decisions makers are “far removed from the poor,” physically, with no real contact to their brothers and sisters (No. 90, 49). Selfishness also leads to the evaporation of the notion of the common good. This affects not simply for those in the developing world, but also in the inner cities of our more developed countries, where he calls for what might be termed an “urban ecology.” In the world of “Laudato Si” there is no room for selfishness or indifference. One cannot care for the rest of nature “if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (No. 91).

9) **Global dialogue and solidarity are needed.**

Perhaps more than any encyclical, Pope Francis draws from the experiences of people around the world, using the insights of bishops’ conferences from Brazil, New Zealand, Southern Africa, Bolivia, Portugal, Germany, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Australia and
the United States, among other places. (In this way, he also embodies the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, which, in part, looks to local experience and local solutions.) Moreover, the “new dialogue” and “honest debate” he calls for is not simply one within the Catholic Church (No. 14, 16). Patriarch Bartholomew, the leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, enters into the encyclical, as does a Sufi poet. In fact, the pope calls into dialogue and debate “all people” about our “common home” (No. 62, 155). A global dialogue is also needed because there are “no uniform recipes.” What works in one region may not in another (No. 180). The encyclical’s worldwide scope (as opposed to a more Eurocentric cast) makes it an easier invitation for a worldwide community.

10) A change of heart is required

At heart, this document, addressed to “every person on the planet” is a call for a new way of looking at things, a “bold cultural revolution” (No. 3, 114). We face an urgent crisis, when, thanks to our actions, the earth has begun to more and more like, in Francis’ vivid language, “an immense pile of filth” (No. 21). Still, the document is hopeful, reminding us that because God is with us, we can strive both individually and corporately to change course. We can awaken our hearts and move towards an “ecological conversion” in which we see the intimate connection between God and all beings, and more readily listen to the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (No. 49).

To use religious language, what the pope is calling for is conversion.

*James Martin, S.J.*, is editor at large of *America* and author of *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*. Twitter: [@JamesMartinSJ](http://americamagazine.org/issue/top-ten-takeaways-laudato-si)

*June 18, 2015*

*Operation Noah welcomes 'timely' climate encyclical*

*Independent Catholic News*

Operation Noah has welcomed Pope Francis' 'bold stance on climate change ahead of the critical COP21 UN climate negotiations this December'.

"His concerns for people and the planet resonate loud and clear at a time of increasing climate instability affecting the world's poor and vulnerable and threatening the integrity of God's creation. His council urges us to take seriously the complex moral and social issues that climate change poses."

Operation Noah, an ecumenical Christian charity that campaigns on climate change, has long been calling on the Church to see the environment and climate change as an urgent theological priority.
Responding to the encyclical, Nicky Bull, Chair of Operation Noah, said: "The climate crisis offers us a unique opportunity to change the way we do things on a global scale - to create a fairer, safer and more sustainable world for all. We hope that the Pope’s moral guidance will catalyse the faith community around the world to speak out and take urgent, radical action on one of the most pressing social justice issues of our time. His call for a “new and universal solidarity” to work together as one human family cannot come at a more important moment for the protection of the Earth, its creatures and future generations to come."

Operation Noah's Bright Now campaign urges the Church to align its investment policies with the duty to care for God's creation and act on climate change. Ellie Roberts, divestment campaigner, said: "We hope the Pope's call for climate justice will inspire Catholic communities around the world to look at how their own investments might be financing climate change, and to commit to disinvesting from fossil fuels as a matter of faith. This is essential for building the political will we need for governments to produce a strong climate deal in Paris at the end of this year."

Operation Noah anticipates that the immense impact of this papal encyclical on broader society and governments during the build-up to the COP21 will help to anchor our hopes for a fair and meaningful outcome. It will add enormous gravitas to faith communities’ planned activities including the People's Pilgrimage, the Pilgrimage to Paris and people's mobilisations across the globe.

For more information on Operation Noah see: [http://www.operationnoah.org](http://www.operationnoah.org)

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**June 18, 2015**

**Church of England Welcomes Climate Encyclical**

Church of England

The Church of England's lead on the environment, Bishop of Salisbury the Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam, has given a wholehearted welcome to today's Papal Encyclical on climate change.

Bishop Nicholas said:

"I wholeheartedly welcome the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si*, a major contribution to tackling climate change, which is one of the great moral challenges of our times. It has been much anticipated and lives up to our hopes that it would be a very substantial and compelling document not just for Roman Catholics but for the whole Church and all people who live together in our common home."
"Pope Francis highlights the iniquitous way in which the enormous consumption of some wealthy nations has repercussions in the poorest places on the planet. What is bad for our neighbours is also bad for us.

"We are seeing significant ecumenical and interfaith convergence on climate change. The Papal Encyclical is a substantial development of themes very much in line with statements made by the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Churches, the Letter on Climate Change from the Swedish Lutheran bishops as well as by the Church of England and the Anglican Communion’s Environmental Network and others. As we saw yesterday with the launch of the Lambeth Declaration, the moral gravity of the challenge of climate change is also recognised by all the world faiths present in the UK.

"The transition to a low carbon economy is urgent. Churches and other faith communities have a unique power to mobilise people for the common good and change attitudes and behaviours. We also need to strengthen our politicians to achieve ambitious, accountable and binding climate change agreements, nationally and internationally.

"The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted how important this is when he spoke at the Vatican Summit on climate change in April. If people of faith and all people of goodwill work together, there is hope that we can meet the challenges posed by climate change."

[Office of the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town] People of faith need to focus on the moral and spiritual elements of the crisis brought about by rapid climate change, Archbishop of Cape Town Thabo Makgoba, chair of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, said today in response to Pope Francis's encyclical on the issue.

In a statement issued from Cape Town, the Archbishop said:

“I would like to thank Pope Francis for this historic, ground-breaking letter. I look forward to studying it in more detail.

“Across Africa and in other developing countries, we are already suffering the impacts of climate change, and the people hit hardest by severe droughts or storms are in our most vulnerable communities.

“In our own church province in Southern Africa, the people of Mozambique have recently been
hit by floods. In Namibia, drought has forced the livestock industry – upon which seven in 10 Namibians depend for their livelihoods – to declare a state of emergency, and the government is pressing farmers to sell their cattle.

“Our sister churches in the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa have similar stories they can tell. And at a recent consultation of bishops from the most vulnerable parts of the world, we heard of changes to seasons, rising sea levels, the acidification of seawater, depleted fishing grounds and of 'climate refugees' – people displaced by the changes.

“While not discounting the political, economic, social and scientific considerations, as people of faith we need to focus on the moral and spiritual elements of the crisis. The secular and the religious concerns are not mutually exclusive.

“The values of dignity and fairness are at the heart of how we respond to the crisis. How we look after the environment is at its core about how we value our fellow human beings.

“Not only that, it is about how we value the rest of God's creation and treat the resources God has entrusted to us. Pope Francis evokes this beautifully when he cites how St Francis of Assisi communed with all creation, preaching to even the flowers, and in addressing the Lord, how he referred to our planet as 'our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us...'

“I welcome especially the way in which Pope Francis has underlined the attention that has been drawn to what he calls 'the ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems' by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, requiring 'that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a change of humanity; otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms.'

“In drawing attention to the high levels of consumption, greed and wastefulness in our world – which we see both in developed countries and among the wealthy in developing countries – the encyclical makes clear that we need to adopt simpler, more wholesome lifestyles.

“If, in response to the current crisis, we take action commensurate with the problem, it could improve not only our spiritual lives – whether we are materially poor or wealthy – but deliver huge practical benefits for the poorest in developing countries.

“I join Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, when he challenges leaders at the climate talks in Paris in December to show the same inspired moral and ethical leadership.”


June 18, 2015
Pope Francis sounds the alarm on the environment and he wants everyone to listen

By Matthew Bell
PRI's The World

The head of the Roman Catholic Church released an official document in Rome on Thursday that has been creating buzz for months. It’s called an encyclical, the highest form of teaching issued by a pope, and it is addressed to everyone — literally — in the whole world.

“I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home,” Francis writes.

1. What is Pope Francis saying about the environment?

The encyclical runs nearly 200 pages and it contains some pretty blunt language about the state of affairs in the natural world. “The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth,” the Pope writes. Much of the blame goes to wealthy nations. Francis names “unfettered greed” and “a selfish lack of concern” as root problems and he argues that “radical action” is needed to “escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us.”

On climate change, Pope Francis embraces the scientific consensus that says the Earth is warming mostly because of human activity, that the effects of global warming are wreaking environmental havoc on communities, especially the global poor, and that developed nations must take the lead to phase out use of carbon emitting fossil fuels. “Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods,” Francis writes. “It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.”

2. What kind of action does the papal encyclical call for?

Francis mentions specific things he thinks need to be done to avert environmental catastrophe. He wants average citizens to pressure their elected leaders to implement new policies. Fossil fuels, he says, “especially coal, but also oil,” need to be phased out in favor of renewable sources of energy. The pope wants to see more environmental education and honest dialogue about these issues. He says this is a global problem, but that the international response has been too weak. “The failure of global summits on the environment make it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance,” the encyclical reads.

The Pope’s teaching links the human and natural worlds, indeed the words ‘human’ and ‘humanity’ appear throughout the document. As he has talked about in relation to other contemporary issues, Francis points to what he calls “throwaway culture” that fails to recognize the importance of humans as one of the causes of environmental degradation. This needs to change, he urges.
3. Who is Pope Francis speaking to with this encyclical?

Well, everybody, in a word. On page one of this encyclical, Francis explains: “[F]aced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet.” But there are some distinct audiences the pope would clearly like to win over with his message on the environment.

Fellow Catholics is one of them. This is the first-ever papal encyclical written solely on environmental issues. Francis builds his case, however, on Christian tradition, scripture and the teachings of popes that came before him.

Observers say this Pope is a savvy political figure with his eye on the international climate talks taking place in Paris in December. “There’s no doubt that Francis wants to influence the global debate,” says Mark Hersgaard, author of "Hot: Living Through the Next Fifty Years on Earth."

In September, Francis is coming to the United States and will speak to a joint session of Congress, where many Republicans these days have their doubts about climate change. Indeed, several of the top GOP presidential hopefuls are both Catholic and non-believers when it comes to global warming. One of them is Jeb Bush, who was asked about the forthcoming encyclical and seemed decidedly unimpressed.

“I don’t get economic policy from my bishops or my cardinals or my pope. I’d like to see what he says about climate change,” Bush said. “But I think religion ought to be about making us better as people and less about things that end up getting into the political realm. So, I’m a little skeptical about this.”

Francis is also hoping his message on the environment resonate with Catholic bishops, including those in the US who help teachings from the Vatican filter down to parish priests, Sunday sermons and people in the pews. US bishops recently held a national meeting in St. Louis and discussed the Pope’s ideas in the eco-encyclical. “Unanimously, we were all behind the serious issues that he raises regarding the environment and God’s creation,” says Bishop Christopher Coyne of Burlington, Vermont. There were some concerns, however, Coyne says, “especially in some of the more conservative states.”

“The topic of global warming was kind of a third-rail topic for a lot of people in their states,” Coyne says.

4. What have previous popes said about the environment?

In 1971, Pope Paul VI warned of a looming, “ecological catastrophe under the effective explosion of industrial civilization.” In his eco-encyclical, Francis quotes from the first encyclical issued by Pope John Paul II, who warned that human beings seem “to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption.” The current pontiff also mentions his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who called for “eliminating the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment.”
5. How have other religious leaders weighed in on environmental issues?

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople has been talking about “green” issues since the 1990s. Since the release of the encyclical, Bartholomew is praising Pope Francis for his leadership, “[t]he truth is that, above any doctrinal differences that may characterize the various Christian confessions and beyond any religious disagreements that may separate the various faith communities, the Earth unites us in a unique and extraordinary manner.”

Clergy from the other mainstream Western faith traditions have all started to talk more about the relationship between people and the environment as God’s creation, says John Grim of Yale University’s Forum on Religion and Ecology. “In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, you find these powerful statements about these relationships and the responsibility of the human,” Grim says.

“With Francis as pope, he brings the discussion to a whole new level,” Grim says.

Listen to the interview with John Grim on the encyclical at [http://www.pri.org/programs/pris-world/pris-world-06182015](http://www.pri.org/programs/pris-world/pris-world-06182015) (Note: Hit the play button at the top of the page for the audio. The whole segment, including the piece on Francis, starts at 13:23. The interview with John Grim is at 17.50 – 21.17.)


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June 2015

World View of Global Warming: The Photographic Documentation of Climate Change

By Gary Braasch

World View of Global Warming

"The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth," warns Pope Francis. “Bring the whole human family together,” he urges, “redefine our notion of progress, move forward in a bold cultural revolution.”

With words that read in many places as a textbook of ecology and economics, using phrases that often ring with spiritual power, Pope Francis calls on all people to cease despoiling the Earth, stop human-made climate change, care much more for poor and indigenous cultures, and begin “redefining our notion of progress.”

In detailed exposition as well as direct statements in an Encyclical issued June 18, the Pope urges us to change our ways now:

• "We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those
which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world. The effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now.

• "It is not enough to balance, in the medium term, the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the environment with progress. Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress.”

• “God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone….This calls into serious question the unjust habits of a part of humanity.”

• "What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis.”.

• "Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility.”

Far more than what some thought would be only a direct statement about fighting climate change, the 182-page Encyclical Letter ranges across ecology, economics, science, sociology, history, urbanization, technology, world politics, ethics and theology and, of course, the beliefs of Catholicism. The Pope warns of damage not only to the climate systems, but also to ecosystems, water, and human social networks. He urges not only deeper personal responsibility but also “one world with a common plan,” writing that “a global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries.”

In the Encyclical, entitled “Praise Be … On Care for Our Common Home," Francies criticizes "wasteful and consumerist” industrial development, and quotes from the Rio Declaration of 1992 that the protection of the environment is “an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.” "We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics,” he writes, "in the service of a more integral and integrating vision.”

This papal letter sent to all bishops of the Roman Catholic Church but expected to be widely read and influential because of its subject, comes during a year of increased expectation of international action to limit global warming emissions. Frances details the science and technologies involved in understanding, causing and reducing climate change: "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all,” is one of his first statements. "We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay,” he writes. “The emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy. Worldwide there is minimal access to clean and renewable energy.”

Pope Francis, the former Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina, chose his papal name in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi, and is the first Pope named after the saint. In his early life the Pope was a chemical technician, running tests in a food laboratory. Before becoming a Jesuit priest in 1960, he also worked as a bouncer and janitor. "I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically,” writes Francis. "He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area
of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God’s creation and for the poor and outcast…”

The Pope’s call for environmental, economic and social action will be heralded by many world leaders and used as encouragement to action for governments, including in the United States where some conservative leaders who oppose climate change action and defend freer business economics are Roman Catholics. Also likely to be controversial is Francis’s sidestepping of population limitation as a cause of some environmental problems: “To blame population growth instead of extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some, is one way of refusing to face the issues. It is an attempt to legitimize the present model of distribution, where a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized, since the planet could not even contain the waste products of such consumption.”

Rich information and interpretation of the Encyclical may be found at the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. Additional coverage and analysis is in the NY Times, here and here.

For photos, see: http://worldviewofglobalwarming.org/

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**June 18, 2015**

Wisconsin Islamic Group Ties Green Initiatives to Spirituality

By Susan Bence
Milwaukee Public Radio

Among faith groups, a ground swell of environmental concern has been building. This includes within the Muslim community, which begins Ramadan – their sacred month of fasting – today.

In Milwaukee, a group called the Islamic Environmental Group of Wisconsin has been at work for a decade. It will be honored next week by a national interfaith environmental group, GreenFaith, for its programs.

WUWM Environmental Reporter Susan Bence visited with two people instrumental in the Islamic group’s green initiatives.

Nabil Salous says the Qur’an stresses the importance of caring for the earth. He serves on the board of directors for the Islamic Society of Milwaukee, or ISM.

And, Huda Alkaff created the Islamic Environmental Group of Wisconsin. She says its efforts boil down to tying awareness and action to spirituality.
Alkaff works with mosques in Madison and the Fox Valley, but most of her energy is spent in Milwaukee. Every month, she promotes a different environmental theme - from energy consumption to urban farming.

ISM's South 13th Street location holds classrooms for middle and high school students as well as a mosque. A number of green projects have been spearheaded there, including a green roof and special faucets to help cut water consumption.

Nabil Salous is especially proud of the green roof; he says, "the students will be able to see what it’s all about, so it’s a good educational experience for them."

Five blocks east, a large stormwater control system has been installed in the building that serves as ISM's community center and elementary school.

"We have a large parking lot, so we built bioswales," Salous says. "...When rainwater comes, it will naturally flows to those swales and that will do filtration and get cleaned up. It has been very successful."

Inside the women’s bathroom, Huda Alkaff says faucets have been installed especially designed for ritual washing before prayer. "It’s called ablution station. So, we have to wash, make ourselves pure before praying," she says.

Alkaff says the sensor-activated faucet serves as a reminder that conservation folds into faith. "There is a saying by the Prophet Mohammed (to) conserve water even if you are on the banks of a flowing river. Only use what you need," she says.

Alkaff says that this dedication to conservation of all kinds, water and energy, is built into the foundation of the Islamic faith. "There are more than 500 verses in the Qur'an that have environmental aspects," she says. "...That's our mission really is to bring out what's already there and tie it with things we can do."

A green space and playground equipment outside of the elementary school replaced a huge parking lot.

"If there is a hard surface we don't need, we just get rid of it," Nabil Salous says. Alkaff adds that projects that benefit children and their health are of utmost importance to the community.

Alkaff says consensus building and education have led to the Islamic Society of Milwaukee’s buildings greener and more sustainable, but much work remains.

"We need to do a lot more, we have a long way to go...but we celebrate everything that we have done...we know that we have to do more," she says. Salous chimes in, "Our water bills substantially went down...so it’s also good for business as well. It's not only doing the right thing to do morally, but financially I've seen a difference."
Today as fasting begins, the Islamic Society of Milwaukee joins more than two dozen mosques around the country embracing “Greening Ramadan.”

http://wuwm.com/post/wisconsin-islamic-group-ties-green-initiatives-spirituality

June 18, 2015

Pope Francis and Integral Ecology

By Sam Mickey
Becoming Integral

The new encyclical by Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On the Care of our Common Home*, contains many references to “integral ecology,” including an entire chapter by that title.

It’s relatively clear that Francis is working with the integral ecology proposed by the Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, who draws on the general ecology of Félix Guattari and the integral ecology proposed by the cultural historian Thomas Berry. Regarding Boff’s influence, consider the Pope’s allusion to Boff’s *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. “Today, however, we have to realize 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*” (# 49). The Pope’s sense of integral ecology is also clearly influenced by the ecological sensibility of St. Francis of Assisi, whose phrase “Laudato Si’” (from his Canticle of the Creatures) provides the title and opening line for the encyclical.

The following are the selections from the encyclical that explicitly mention integral ecology. There are also many other references to integral and integrative approaches, including integral development, progress, and education. Moreover, the Pope does not intend integral ecology to be an exclusively or primarily Catholic endeavor. The encyclical is addressed to “every person living on this planet” (#3).

“I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. […] Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human.” (#10-11)

“We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.” (#141)

Any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour. (#124)
“An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us…” (#225)

“An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness.” (#230)

“Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: “The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next”. An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision.” (#159)

http://becomingintegral.com/2015/06/18/pope-francis-and-integral-ecology/

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June 18, 2015

Pope Francis’ Encyclical: Clean Energy and the Moral Case for Climate Solutions

By Gabe Elsner, Executive Director, Energy and Policy Institute
Huffington Post

Today, Pope Francis officially released his encyclical, "Laudato Si ("Be Praised"), On the Care of Our Common Home", calling on “every person living on this planet” to urgently address climate change, reduce the use of fossil fuels, and transition to clean energy.

An encyclical is a message sent to all the Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church to help inform Catholic teachings. But, Pope Francis made clear that this message is for “all men and women of good will” to “cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.” The Pope cited climate change as a moral crisis we must address to protect the world’s poor from the impacts of climate change such as rising seas, drought, and floods.

The Pope acknowledged that the “bulk of global warming” is caused by human activity and issued a call for our global society to rapidly address this crisis by reducing and ultimately eliminating the use of fossil fuels.

In order to answer Pope Francis’ call for sustainable development, we need solutions that can compete in the economic system and rapidly transform our relationship how we use natural resources. Fortunately, the economics of energy sector continue to move towards sustainable economic development and away from dirty energy sources.

The transformation away from dirty energy has already started in the electricity sector and will accelerate as more investors and politicians assess the real costs of fossil fuels. Here are just a
few recent developments demonstrating that an economy powered by clean electricity is possible, and in society’s best interest.

Coal is one of the poorest performing sectors of the global economy, and clean technology is one of the most productive, fastest growing sectors. In April, at the Bloomberg New Energy Finance Conference, Michael Liebrieich described how additions of renewable energy have overtaken the additions of coal, natural gas and oil combined and the growth of clean energy will continue to accelerate in the future.

Bloomberg reported, “Solar, the newest major source of energy in the mix, makes up less than 1 percent of the electricity market today but could be the world’s biggest single source by 2050, according to the International Energy Agency.”

In addition, coal companies, Peabody Energy, Arch Coal, and Alpha Natural Resources, are all struggling to compete due to cheap clean energy and natural gas. Since last year, Peabody Energy’s stock price is down 86%, Arch Coal is down 88%, and Alpha Natural Resources stock price is down 89%. The trends all point to the end of coal and the rapid deployment of clean energy sources.

On the microeconomic level, the Southern Mississippi Electric Power Association, an electric cooperative in Mississippi had originally planned to buy 15% of the Kemper Project, a coal fired power plant attempting to implement advanced coal technology. Instead, the co-op recently announced it’s decision to purchase up to 250 MW of wind power, amidst missed deadlines and cost overruns plaguing the Kemper project - making it one of the most expensive power plants per kilowatt in the United States. In response, the State Director of Sierra Club Mississippi, Louie Miller, said, "The record low price of wind energy makes it a good investment that will save customers money and protect the environment at the same time."

**How to Continue the Clean Energy Transition**

However, in order to hasten the transition to a sustainable economy, we must urgently tackle two priorities: **actively confront the economics of fossil fuels** (by challenging the political power of the fossil fuel industry worldwide), and **take bold action to scale solutions to climate change**.

First, regarding the economic reality, the fossil fuel industry continues to benefit from trillions of dollars in subsidies every year. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently reported that fossil fuel companies are receiving subsidies worth $14.5 billion every day, or $5.3 trillion ($5,300,000,000,000.00) in 2015. The cost estimate from the IMF includes the health impacts of pollution, and the costs of floods, droughts, and other disasters caused by climate change pollution.

The Guardian reported that Nicholas Stern, an eminent climate economist at the London School of Economics, said: “This very important analysis shatters the myth that fossil fuels are cheap by showing just how huge their real costs are. There is no justification for these enormous subsidies for fossil fuels, which distort markets and damages economies, particularly in poorer countries.”
That said, politicians and governments will still need to change the legal system to account for these hidden costs of fossil fuels, and once these costs are factored in, fossil fuel energy sources will have a very difficult time competing with clean energy technology. This won’t be easy because of the entrenched political power of fossil fuel special interests. During the debate over the climate bill in the United States in 2009 and 2010, the fossil fuel lobby was estimated to have spent over $500 million on lobbying members of Congress.

Yet, even with all these subsidies for fossil fuels, the clean energy industry is becoming cost competitive in more places around the world. Last year, one-third of all of the European Union's electricity came from renewable energy sources. Deutsche Bank recently estimated that solar electricity may be cost competitive with natural gas, coal, and other forms of electricity in 47 U.S. states by 2016 and many countries have regions already at grid parity, when solar is cost competitive with traditional energy sources.

Second, the world must take bold action and move quickly to meet mitigation goals to avoid the worst impacts of global climate change. The Pope’s message to address this moral crisis adds additional weight to solve the problem, and given the economics of clean energy, we can see a path towards stopping climate change.

However, Michael Liebreich also noted at the Bloomberg New Energy Finance that even though investments in clean energy technology are booming, they still fall short of what’s needed to solve the climate change crisis.

Liebreich stated that cleantech investment must double from the approximately $300 billion invested in 2014 to over $600 billion by 2020 in order to stave off run-away climate change.

We can answer the call to action on climate change, but will take a monumental effort by our social, economic, and political systems to “protect our common home.” The Pope’s message is a call to action for all people on the planet to make haste and implement solutions to solve the climate crisis.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gabe-elsner/pope-francis-encyclical-c_b_7613666.html

June 18, 2015

The Magna Carta of integral ecology: Cry of the Earth, Cry of the poor

By Leonardo Boff, theologian and ecologist

Earth Charter International

Before making any comment it is worth highlighting some peculiarities of the Laudato Si' encyclical of Pope Francis.

It is the first time a Pope has addressed the issue of ecology in the sense of an integral ecology (as it goes beyond the environment) in such a complete way. Big surprise: he elaborates the
subject on the new ecological paradigm, which no official document of the UN has done so far.

He bases his writing on the safest data from the life sciences and Earth. He reads the data affectionately (with a sensitive or cordial intelligence), as he discerns that behind them hides human tragedy and suffering, and for Mother Earth as. The current situation is serious, but Pope Francis always finds reasons for hope and trust that human beings can find viable solutions. He links to the Popes who preceded him, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, quoting them frequently.

And something absolutely new: the text is part of collegiality, as it values the contributions of dozens of bishops' conferences around the world, from the US to Germany, Brazil, Patagonia-Comahue, and Paraguay. He gathers the contributions of other thinkers, such as Catholics Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Romano Guardini, Dante Alighieri, the Argentinian maestro Juan Carlos Scannone, Protestant Paul Ricoeur and the Sufi Muslim Ali Al-Khawwas. The recipients are all of us human beings, we are all inhabitants of the same common home (commonly used term by the Pope) and suffer the same threats.

Pope Francis does not write as a Master or Doctor of faith, but as a zealous pastor who cares for the common home of all beings, not just humans, that inhabit it.

One element deserves to be highlighted, as it reveals the "forma mentis" (the way he organizes his thinking) of Pope Francis. This is a contribution of the pastoral and theological experience of Latin American churches in the light of the documents of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Medellin (1968), Puebla (1979) and Aparecida (2007), that were an option for the poor against poverty and in favor of liberation.

The wording and tone of the encyclical are typical of Pope Francis, and the ecological culture that he has accumulated, but I also realize that many expressions and ways of speaking refer to what is being thought and written mainly in Latin America. The themes of the "common home", of "Mother Earth", the "cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor", the "care" of the "interdependence of all beings", of the "poor and vulnerable", the "paradigm shift," the "human being as Earth" that feels, thinks, loves and reveres, the "integral ecology" among others, are recurrent among us.

The structure of the encyclical follows the methodological ritual used by our churches and theological reflection linked to the practice of liberation, now taken over and consecrated by the Pope: see, judge, act and celebrate.

First, he begins revealing his main source of inspiration: St. Francis of Assisi, whom he calls "the quintessential example of comprehensive care and ecology, who showed special concern for the poor and the abandoned" (n.10, n.66).

Then he moves on to see "What is happening in our home" (nn.17-61). The Pope says, "just by looking at the reality with sincerity we can see that there is a deterioration of our common home" (n.61). This part incorporates the most consistent data on climate change (nn.20-22), the issue of water (n.27-31), erosion of biodiversity (nn.32-42), the deterioration of the quality of human life and the degradation of social life (nn.43-47), he denounces the high rate of planetary inequality,
which affects all areas of life (nn.48-52), with the poor as its main victims (n. 48).

In this part there is a phrase which refers to the reflection made in Latin America: "Today we cannot ignore that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach and should integrate justice in discussions on the environment to hear both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor "(n.49). Then he adds: "the cries of the Earth join the cries of the abandoned of this world" (n.53). This is quite consistent since the beginning he has said that "we are Earth" (No. 2; cf. Gen 2.7). Very much in line with the great singer and poet Argentine indigenous Atahualpa Yupanqui: "humans beings are the Earth walking, feeling, thinking and loving."

He condemns the proposed internationalization of the Amazon that "only serves the interests of multinationals" (n.38). There is a great statement of ethical force, "it is severely grave to obtain significant benefits making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay for the high costs of environmental degradation" (n.36).

He acknowledges with sadness: "We had never mistreated and offended our common home as much as in the last two centuries" (n.53). Faced with this human offensive against Mother Earth that many scientists have denounced as the beginning of a new geological era -the anthropocene- he regrets the weakness of the powers of this world, that deceived, "believed that everything can continue as it is, as an alibi to "maintain its self-destructive habits" (n.59) with "a behavior that seems suicidal" (n.55).

Prudently, he recognizes the diversity of opinions (nn.60-61) and that "there is no single way to solve the problem" (n.60). However, "it is true that the global system is unsustainable from many points of view because we have stopped thinking about the purpose of human action (n.61) and we get lost in the construction of means for unlimited accumulation at the expense of ecological injustice (degradation of ecosystems) and social injustice (impoverishment of populations). Mankind simply disappointed the divine hope"(n.61).

The urgent challenge, then, is "to protect our common home" (n.13); and for that we need, quoting Pope John Paul II, "a global ecological conversion" (n.5); "A culture of caring that permeates all of society" (n.231). Once the seeing dimension is realized, the dimension of judgment prevails. This judging is done in two aspects, the scientific and the theological.

Let´s see the scientific. The encyclical devoted the entire third chapter to the analysis "of the human root of the ecological crisis" (nn.101-136). Here the Pope proposes to analyze techno-science, without prejudice, recognizing what it has brought such as "precious things to improve the quality of human life" (n. 103). But this is not the problem, it is independence submitted to the economy, politics and nature in view of the accumulation of material goods (cf.n.109). Techno-science nourishes a mistaken assumption that there is an "infinite availability of goods in the world" (n.106), when we know that we have surpassed the physical limits of the Earth and that much of the goods and services are not renewable. Techno-science has turned into technocracy, which has become a real dictatorship with a firm logic of domination over everything and everyone (n.108).

The great illusion, dominant today, lies in believing that techno-science can solve all
environmental problems. This is a misleading idea because it "involves isolating the things that are always connected" (n.111). In fact, "everything is connected" (n.117), "everything is related" (n.120), a claim that appears throughout the encyclical text as a refrain, as it is a key concept of the contemporary paradigm. The great limitation of technocracy is "knowledge fragmentation and losing the sense of wholeness" (n.110). The worst thing is "not to recognize the intrinsic value of every being and even denying a peculiar value to the human being" (n.118).

The intrinsic value of each being, even if it is minuscule, is permanently highlighted in the encyclical (N.69), as it is in the Earth Charter. By denying the intrinsic value we are preventing "each being to communicate its message and to give glory to God" (n.33).

The largest deviation of technocracy is anthropocentrism. This means an illusion that things have value only insofar as they are ordered to human use, forgetting that its existence is valuable by itself (n.33). If it is true that everything is related, then "we humans are united as brothers and sisters and join with tender affection to Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother river and Mother Earth" (n.92). How can we expect to dominate them and view them within the narrow perspective of domination by humans?

All these "ecological virtues" (n.88) are lost by the will of power and domination of others to nature. We live a distressing "loss of meaning of life and the desire to live together" (n.110). He sometimes quotes the Italian-German theologian Romano Guardini (1885-1968), one of the most read in the middle of last century, who wrote a critical book against the claims of the modernity (n.105 note 83: Das Ende der Neuzeit, The decline of the Modern Age, 1958).

The other side of judgment is the theological. The encyclical reserves an important space for the "Gospel of Creation" (nos. 62-100). It begins justifying the contribution of religions and Christianity, as it is global crisis, each instance must, with its religious capital contribute to the care of the Earth (n.62). He does not insists in doctrines but on the wisdom in various spiritual paths. Christianity prefers to speak of creation rather than nature, because "creation is related to a project of love of God" (n.76). He quotes, more than once, a beautiful text of the Book of Wisdom (21.24) where it is clear that "the creation of the order of love" (n.77) and God emerges as "the Lord lover of life "(Wis 11:26).

The text opens for an evolutionary view of the universe without using the word, but through a circumlocution referring to the universe "consisting of open systems that come into communion with each other" (n.79). It uses the main texts that link Christ incarnated and risen with the world and with the whole universe, making all matters of the Earth sacred (n.83). In this context he quotes Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955, n.83 note 53) as a precursor of this cosmic vision. The fact that Trinity-God is divine and it related with people means that all things are related resonances of the divine Trinity (n.240).

The Encyclical quotes the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Orthodox Church who "recognizes that sins against creation are sins against God" (n.7). Hence the urgency of a collective ecological conversion to repair the lost harmony.

The encyclical concludes well with this part "The analysis showed the need for a change of
course ... we must escape the spiral of self-destruction in which we are sinking" (n.163). It is not a reform, but, citing the Earth Charter, to seek "a new beginning" (n.207). The interdependence of all with all leads us to believe "in one world with a common project" (n.164).

Since reality has many aspects, all closely related, Pope Francis proposes an "integral ecology" that goes beyond the environmental ecology to which we are accustomed (n.137). It covers all areas, the environmental, economic, social, cultural and everyday life (n.147-148). Never forget the poor who also testify to the living human and social ecology ties of belonging and solidarity with each other (n.149).

The third methodological step is to act. In this part, the Encyclical observes the major issues of the international, national and local politics (nn.164-181). It stresses the interdependence of social and educational aspects with the ecological and sadly states the difficulties that bring the prevalence of technocracy, creating difficulties for the changes needed to restrain the greed of accumulation and consumption, that can be re-opened (n.141). He mentions again the theme of economics and politics that should serve the common good and create conditions for a possible human fulfillment (n.189-198). He re-emphasizes the dialogue between science and religion, as it has been suggested by the great biologist Edward O.Wilson (cf. the book Creation: How to save life on Earth, 2008). All religions "should seek the care of nature and the defense of the poor" (n.201).

Still in the aspect of acting, he challenges education in the sense of creating "ecological citizenship" (n.211) and a new lifestyle, based on caring, compassion, shared sobriety, the alliance between humanity and the environment, since both are umbilically linked, and the co-responsibility for everything that exists and lives and our common destiny (nn.203-208).

Finally, the time to celebrate. The celebration takes place in a context of "ecological conversion" (n.216), it involves an "ecological spirituality" (n.216). This stems not so much from theological doctrines but the motivations that faith arises to take care of the common home and "nurture a passion for caring for the world" (216). Such a mystical experience is what mobilizes people to live in ecological balance, "to those who are solidary inside themselves, with others, with nature and with all living and spiritual beings and God" (n.210). It appears to be the truth that "less is more" and that we can be happy with little. In the sense of celebrating "the world is more than something to be solved, it is a joyous mystery to be contemplated in joy and with love" (n.12).

The tender and fraternal spirit of St. Francis of Assisi is present through the entire text of the encyclical Laudato Si'. The current situation does not mean an announced tragedy, but a challenge for us to care for the common home and for each other. The text highlights poetry and joy in the Spirit and indestructible hope that if the threat is big, greater is the opportunity for solving our environmental problems.

The text poetically ends with the words "Beyond the Sun", saying: "let’s walk singing. That our struggles and our concerns about this planet do not take away our joy of hope “(n.244).

I would like to end with the final words of the Earth Charter which the Pope quotes himself (n.207): “Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm
resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”

http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1149/1/Article-by-Leonardo-Boff-on-the-Popes-Encyclical/Page1.html

June 18, 2015

Laudato Si' and Water: The Vatican's Encyclical Letter and Global Water Challenges

By Peter H. Gleick, President, Pacific Institute
Huffington Post

The official text of the much-anticipated Vatican's Encyclical Letter, "Laudato Si" ("On Care for our Common Home") was released today. While considerable attention is being devoted to the sections of Pope Francis's new Encyclical related to the threats of climate change, the letter also tackles many other environmental challenges, including biodiversity, food, and especially the critical issue of freshwater. Woven throughout is attention to the social and equity dimensions of these challenges and a deep concern for the poor.

The water sections of the Encyclical Letter focus on the disparities in access, quality, and use of water between the wealthier, industrialized parts of the world and poorer populations. It notes that in many parts of the world, exploitation of water is exceeding natural resource limits - the problem of "peak water" - while still failing to satisfy the needs of the poorest.

"The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty." (Section 27)

The Encyclical identifies several key water problems including the lack of access to clean drinking water "indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems" (section 28), the challenges for food production due to droughts and disparities in water availability and "water poverty" (section 28), the continued prevalence of water-related diseases afflicting the poor (section 29), contamination of groundwater (section 29), and the trend toward privatization and commodification of a resource the Vatican describes as an "basic and universal human right" (section 30).

The Letter also expresses concern for the inefficient and wasteful use of water in both rich and poor regions:

"But water continues to be wasted, not only in the developed world but also in developing countries which possess it in abundance"

and it decries the risk that the
"control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century" (section 31).

In the context of climate change, the Letter notes the clear links between a warming planet and threats to water resources and other environmental conditions:

"It [warming] creates a vicious circle which aggravates the situation even more, affecting the availability of essential resources like drinking water, energy and agricultural production in warmer regions, and leading to the extinction of part of the planet's biodiversity." (section 24)

Consistent with the overall theme of the Encyclical is the observation that the poorest suffer the most from water problems:

"One particularly serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances. Dysentery and cholera, linked to inadequate hygiene and water supplies, are a significant cause of suffering and of infant mortality." (Section 29)

The Encyclical goes further and notes:

"Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity. (Section 30, italics in original)."

This framing is consistent with the formal human right to water declared by the United Nations in 2010, linking the right to water with the right to life and well-being. Today, the UN estimates that around 2.5 billion people on the planet still lack access to safe sanitation and 750 million do not have safe drinking water. Worldwide, more people die from unsafe water annually than from all forms of violence, including war.

While progress has been made in cleaning up some water pollution, especially in richer industrialized nations, many water-quality indicators are worsening, not improving, and as populations grow, exposure to some forms of water pollution affects larger and larger numbers of people and watersheds. Even in places like California, hundreds of thousands of people - mostly in low-income communities - are at risk of exposure to water with high concentrations of nitrates because of the failure to protect and clean up groundwater systems contaminated by agricultural chemicals, animal feeding operations, and poor sewage systems.

In order to tackle these challenges, the Encyclical Letter identifies several priorities, but especially for water:

"some questions must have higher priority. For example, we know that water is a scarce and indispensable resource and a fundamental right which conditions the exercise of other human rights. This indisputable fact overrides any other assessment of environmental impact on a region." (section 185)
It also calls for reducing waste and inappropriate consumption, increasing funding to ensure universal access to basic water and sanitation, and increased education and awareness, especially in the "context of great inequity."

The world's water challenges are technical, economic, political, and social issues, but the Vatican Encyclical reminds us that ultimately they are ethical and moral issues as well. This is a valuable and timely reminder.


June 18, 2015

Why Pope Francis' encyclical matters

By Thomas Reese
National Catholic Reporter

Some of the most frequently asked questions I have gotten from journalists this week: Why does the encyclical matter? What impact will it have? Why is it getting all this attention?

Let's start with the last question: Why is it getting all this attention?

The encyclical, "Laudato Si', On Care for our Common Home [1]," is getting lots of attention for two reasons.

First, there is a growing consensus around the world that we need to take better care of the environment. Scientific consensus exists that climate change is happening, and human activity is causing it. People are growing in their awareness of environmental problems, but they also see that so far, the world has done little to respond to the crisis.

The second reason the encyclical is getting so much attention is because it is from Pope Francis. The pope is admired, respected, and even loved all over the world by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Everyone is fascinated by this pope, and he has an ability to communicate in simple language that average people can understand.

It is true that previous popes spoke or wrote about the environment and global warming, but their message rarely got through to the public for two reasons.

First, the media were much more interested in writing stories about popes and condoms than stories about popes and the environment.

Second, in the last two papacies, papal statements tended to read like academic dissertations. The church has never been very good at communicating Catholic social teaching, whether it has been on justice, peace or the environment.
Francis, on the other hand, writes more like a journalist than an academic. Anyone who can read a newspaper can read this encyclical and get something out of it.

In other words, the encyclical is getting so much media attention because it is on the right topic, at the right time, by the right person.

**Why does the encyclical matter?**

The encyclical matters because it is an authoritative message by one of the world's great religious leaders. The encyclical will stimulate homilies and discussions in parishes around the world. It will become a source of inspiration and ideas for activists, preachers, teachers, theologians and authors who will echo and develop the pope's message.

In his encyclical, the pope begins with looking at the facts: What have we been doing to the earth? He then argues that how we treat the earth, how we respond to climate change, are moral questions -- in fact, some of the most important moral issues of our time.

Those who argue that the pope should stick to faith and morals and not political issues don't seem to think there are any Catholic moral issues outside the bedroom. What can be a more important moral issue than one that could cause the death and displacement of millions of people?

The encyclical is also an invitation to dialogue. The pope does not claim to have all the answers. The more specific his policy recommendations, the less authoritative he becomes. He is inviting economists, business people, public officials, environmentalists, inventors and religious leaders to all come together for a conversation on how to protect the environment. Anyone with a good idea is welcome.

The encyclical also matters because it puts the Catholic church firmly behind the environmental movement. With the pope's embrace, the environmental movement goes mainstream. They can no longer be denigrated as tree-huggers and Gaia worshippers.

Despite its efforts, the environmental movement has had only limited success. Frankly, people are not going to change their lifestyles to protect polar bears. But if history shows us anything, it is that religion can motivate people to do extraordinary things. Religious motives can move people to self-sacrifice, to give up their own self-interest for a greater good. The environmental movement needs believers of every faith who are motivated by their religious convictions to protect God's creation.

**What impact will the encyclical have?**

The pope is calling the world to a conversion that will have a huge impact on how we live, how our economy works, and how governments operate. "Revolutionary" is almost too weak a word. It will require an extraordinary change in human vision and behavior to accomplish this peaceful revolution. It will require sacrifice from everyone, especially those who are rich and powerful, who are enjoying the fruits of the status quo.
Doing what the pope asks will not be easy, but the pope encourages us to trust in a loving God and a powerful Spirit that can renew the face of the earth. His encyclical is remarkable in that it does not depend primarily on fear to motivate people to care for the earth. Rather, he emphasizes love as the motivating force.

We cannot expect the encyclical to miraculously change human attitudes and behavior overnight. Rather, the encyclical is the beginning of a process that will go on for years. It requires that each of us get involved for the long haul. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

As a social scientist, I am very pessimistic that we can avoid an environmental catastrophe, but as a Christian, I have to have hope. Francis' encyclical strengthens that hope.

[Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is a senior analyst for NCR and author of Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church. His email address is treesesj@ncronline.org [2]. Follow him on Twitter: @ThomasReeseSJ [3].]

Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time Thomas Reese's column, Faith and Justice [4], is posted. Go to this page and follow directions: Email alert sign-up [5].

Links:
[2] mailto:treesesj@ncronline.org


June 18, 2015

The Guardian view on Laudato Si’: Pope Francis calls for a cultural revolution

Editorial
The Guardian

The pope links the destruction of the environment with the exploitation of the poor. The world should pay attention

Pope Francis’s encyclical on climate change, Laudato Si’, is the most astonishing and perhaps the most ambitious papal document of the past 100 years, since it is addressed not just to Catholics, or Christians, but to everyone on earth. It sets out a programme for change that is rooted in human needs but it makes the radical claim that these needs are not primarily greedy and selfish ones.
We need nature, he says, and we need each other. Our need for mutuality, and for giving, is just as real as the selfish aspects of our characters; the need for awe and stillness in front of nature is just as profound as any other human need. The care of nature and the care of the poor are aspects of the same ethical commandment, and if we neglect either one we cannot find peace. The environment, in the pope’s use of the word, is not something out there: nature as opposed to the human world. The term describes the relationship between nature and humans, who are inextricably linked and part of each other. It is that relationship that must be set right.

Starting from that premise, he launches a ferocious attack on what he sees as the false and treacherous appetites of capitalism and on the consumerist view of human nature. For Francis, there is a vital distinction between human needs, which are limited but non-negotiable, and appetites, which are potentially unlimited, and which can always be traded for other satisfactions without ever quite giving us what we most deeply want. The poor, he says, have their needs denied, while the rich have their appetites indulged. The environmental crisis links these two aspects of the problem.

This criticism attacks both kinds of defenders of the present world order: the deniers and the optimists. The document is absolutely unequivocal in backing the overwhelming scientific consensus that anthropogenic global warming is a clear and present danger. It blasts the use of fossil fuels and demands that these be phased out in favour of renewable energy. But it is also explicitly opposed to the idea that we can rely on purely technological solutions to ecological problems. This may be the most explicit break with the liberal and broadly optimistic consensus of the consuming world. There will never be a technological fix for the problem of unrestrained appetite, the pope claims, because this is a moral problem, which demands a moral solution, a turn towards sobriety and self-restraint and away from the intoxications of consumerism.

In this he is drawing partly on the tradition of Catholic social teaching, and partly on moral thinking popular in the 1960s, when moral philosophers were first grappling with the implications of nuclear weapons and the sense that humankind had not grown up but reached its toddler stage, where the capacity for destruction far outweighed our capacity for judgment.

Once again we find that we possess the power to destroy the planet and most of the multicellular life on it, but this time there is no argument from enlightened self-interest that is as clear as the argument against nuclear warfare was in the days of the cold war. The balance of terror no longer exists in the same form as it did when the use of nuclear weapons would be punished by nuclear retaliation: the poor world will now pay for the crimes of the rich, and our children and grandchildren must pay for their parents’ self-indulgence. This is what he means by an “ecological debt”. The sometimes apocalyptic tone, with the threats of resource wars as well as the more obvious forms of ecological catastrophe, arises from the sense that this debt must at some time be terribly repaid.

Will anyone listen? The pope is scathing, and rightly so, about the lack of action that has followed high-minded declarations in the past. Why should this time be different? The answer, not entirely reassuring, is that we cannot go on as we are. Self-interest alone will not avert the catastrophe. Without a moral and imaginative structure that links our wellbeing to that of others, so that their suffering feels as urgent as ours, or is at least measured on the same scales, we will
render our planet uninhabitable. The pope is trying to change our understanding of human nature. Many people will disagree with his understanding. But he is right that no smaller change will do.

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jun/18/guardian-view-on-laudato-si-pope-francis-cultural-revolution

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June 18, 2015

Metropolitan John Zizioulas: Laudato Si’ give Orthodox ”great joy”

Vatican Radio

(Vatican Radio) The presentation of the Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis Laudato Si’ included a presentation by Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

“The issuing of the Encyclical Laudato Si’ is, therefore, an occasion of great joy and satisfaction for the Orthodox,” said Metropolitan John. “On behalf of them I should like to express our deep gratitude to His Holiness for raising his authoritative voice to draw the attention of the world to the urgent need to protect God’s creation from the damage we humans inflict on it with our behavior towards nature.”

He said the Encyclical comes at a “critical moment in human history” and will “undoubtedly have a worldwide effect on people’s consciousness.”

The full text of Metropolitan John’s intervention is below

POPE FRANCIS’ ENCYCICAL LAUDATO SI’

A COMMENT

By Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon

Introduction

I should like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude for the honour to be invited to take part in this event of launching the new Encyclical of His Holiness Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’. I am also honoured by the fact that His All-Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, has asked me to convey to you his personal joy and satisfaction for the issuing of the Encyclical. As some of you may already know, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has been the first one in the Christian world to draw the attention of the world community to the seriousness of the
ecological problem and the duty of the Church to voice its concern and try to contribute with all
the spiritual means at its disposal towards the protection of our natural environment. Thus, back
already in the year 1989, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios issued an Encyclical to the faithful
Christians and to all people of good will, in which he underlined the seriousness of the ecological
problem and its theological and spiritual dimensions. This was followed by a series of activities,
such as international conferences of religious leaders and scientific experts, as well as seminars
for young people, Church ministers etc. under the auspices of the present Ecumenical Patriarch
Bartholomew, aiming at the promotion of an ecological consciousness among the Christians in
particular and more widely in the community of men and women.

The issuing of the Encyclical *Laudato Si’* is, therefore, an occasion of great joy and
satisfaction for the Orthodox. On behalf of them I should like to express our deep gratitude to
His Holiness for raising his authoritative voice to draw the attention of the world to the urgent
need to protect God’s creation from the damage we humans inflict on it with our behavior
towards nature. This Encyclical comes at a critical moment in human history and will
undoubtedly have a worldwide effect on people’s consciousness.

Those who read the Encyclical will be impressed by the depth and the thoroughness
with which the ecological problem is treated and its seriousness is brought out, together with
concrete suggestions and proposals on how to act in order to face its consequences. There is in its
pages food for thought for all: the scientist, the economist, the sociologist and above all the
faithful of the Church. My own comments will be limited to the richness of theological thought
and spirituality of the Encyclical. Time and space prevent me from doing full justice to the
treatment of these aspects. I shall limit myself to the following points:

The theological significance of ecology;
The spiritual dimension of the ecological problem; and
The ecumenical significance of the Encyclical.

1. Theology and Ecology

What does ecology have to do with theology? In the traditional manuals of theology,
there is hardly any place for ecology and the same is true for the academic curricula of the
theological schools, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. The Encyclical devotes a whole chapter
(ch. 2) to show the profound ecological implications of the Christian doctrine of creation. It
points out that according to the Bible “human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely
intertwined relationships with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself” (par. 66). This
third relationship, i.e. with the earth, has been very often ignored by Christian theology to such
an extent that the American historian Lynn White, in a now famous article in the periodical
Scientist (1967), would accuse Christian theology for being responsible for the modern
ecological crisis. For it is true that in Christian theology the human being has been so exalted
above material creation as to allow humans to treat it as material for the satisfaction of their
needs and desires. The human being has been de-naturalized and in its abuse and misuse of the
biblical command to the first human couple – “increase and multiply and subdue the earth” (Gen.
1.28) – humanity was encouraged to exploit the material creation unrestrictedly with no respect for its integrity and even sacredness.

This attitude to creation did not only lead to a misuse of the biblical doctrine but at the same time contradicted fundamental principles of Christian faith. One of them is the faith in the Incarnation of Christ. In assuming human nature, the Son of God took over material creation in its entirety. Christ came to save the whole creation through the Incarnation, not only humanity; for according to St. Paul (Rom. 8.23) “the whole creation groans in travail and is suffering” awaiting its salvation through humanity.

The other fundamental principle of Christian faith that has important ecological implications relates to the very heart of the Church, which is the Holy Eucharist. In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church offers to God the material world in the form of the bread and the wine. In this Sacrament space, time and matter are sanctified; they are lifted up to the Creator with thankfulness as His gifts to us; creation is solemnly declared as God’s gift, and human beings instead of proprietors of creation act as its priests, who lift it up to the holiness of the divine life. This brings to mind the moving words of St. Francis of Assisi with which the Encyclical opens: “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth.” As St. Gregory Palamas and other Greek Fathers would put it, the whole of creation is permeated by God’s presence through His divine energies; everything declares God’s glory, as the Psalmist says, and the human being leads this cosmic chorus of glorification to the Creator as the priest of creation. This way of understanding the place and mission of humanity in creation is common to both Eastern and Western Christian tradition, and is of particular importance for the cultivation of an ecological ethos.

2. The Spiritual Dimension

As it emerges clearly from the Encyclical, the ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual problem. The proper relationship between humanity and the earth or its natural environment has been broken with the Fall both outwardly and within us, and this rupture is sin. The Church must now introduce in its teaching about sin the sin against the environment, the ecological sin. Repentance must be extended to cover also the damage we do to nature both as individuals and as societies. This must be brought to the conscience of every Christian who cares for his or her salvation.

The rupture of the proper relationship between humanity and nature is due to the rise of individualism in our culture. The pursuit of individual happiness has been made into an ideal in our time. Ecological sin is due to human greed which blinds men and women to the point of ignoring and disregarding the basic truth that the happiness of the individual depends on its relationship with the rest of human beings. There is a social dimension in ecology which the Encyclical brings out with clarity. The ecological crisis goes hand in hand with the spread of social injustice. We cannot face successfully the one without dealing with the other.

Ecological sin is a sin not only against God but also against our neighbor. And it is a sin not only against the other of our own time but also – and this is serious – against the future generations. By destroying our planet in order to satisfy our greed for happiness, we bequeath to
the future generations a world damaged beyond repair with all the negative consequences that this will have for their lives. We must act, therefore, responsibly towards our children and those who will succeed us in this life.

All this calls for what we may describe as an ecological asceticism. It is noteworthy that the great figures of the Christian ascetical tradition were all sensitive towards the suffering of all creatures. The equivalent of a St. Francis of Assisi is abundantly present in the monastic tradition of the East. There are accounts of the lives of the desert saints which present the ascetic as weeping for the suffering or death of every creature and as leading a peaceful and friendly co-existence even with the beasts. This is not romanticism. It springs from a loving heart and the conviction that between the natural world and ourselves there is an organic unity and interdependence that makes us share a common fate just as we have the same Creator.

Asceticism is an unpleasant idea in our present culture, which measures happiness and progress with the increase of capital and consumption. It would be unrealistic to expect our societies to adopt asceticism in the way St. Francis and the Desert Fathers of the East experienced it. But the spirit and the ethos of asceticism can and must be adopted if our planet is to survive. Restraint in the consumption of natural resources is a realistic attitude and ways must be found to put a limit to the immense waste of natural materials. Technology and science must devote their efforts to such a task. There is a great deal of inspiration and help that can be drawn from the Encyclical itself in this respect.

Finally, spirituality must penetrate our ecological ethos through prayer. The Encyclical offers some beautiful examples of how to pray for the protection of God’s creation. From the prayers cited at the end of the Encyclical, I find the following extract moving:

O God, bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor of the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.

At this point I should like to mention that the Ecumenical Patriarchate decided as early as 1989 to devote the 1st of September of each year to praying for the environment. This date is according to the Orthodox liturgical calendar, going back to the Byzantine times, the first day of the ecclesiastical year. The liturgical service of the day includes prayers for creation and the Ecumenical Patriarchate commissioned a contemporary hymnographer from Mount Athos to compose special hymns for that day. The 1st of September each year is now devoted by the Orthodox to the environment. Might this not become a date for such prayer for all Christians? This would mark a step towards further closeness among them.

This brings me to my last comment on the Papal Encyclical, namely its ecumenical significance.

3. The Ecumenical Significance of the Encyclical

There are in my view three dimensions to ecumenism. The first we may call ecumenism in time, an expression frequently used by one of the greatest Orthodox theologians of the last century, the late Fr. Georges Florovsky. By this we mean the effort of the divided Christians to unite on the basis of their common Tradition, the teaching of the Bible and the Church Fathers. This is the object of the theological dialogues which are taking place in the Ecumenical Movement of our time and it seems to be the predominant form of ecumenism.

At the same time an ecumenism in space is also practiced through various international institutions, such as the World Council of Churches and similar ecumenical bodies which bring together the divided Christians so that the different cultural contexts in which they live may be taken into consideration in the search for unity. This has brought together Christians from Asia, America, Europe, Latin America etc – an expression of the universality of the Christian Church.

To these two dimensions which have dominated the ecumenical scene for the last hundred years we must add, I think, a third one which is usually neglected, namely what I would call an existential ecumenism. By that I mean the effort to face together the most profound existential problems that preoccupy humanity in its entirety – not simply in particular places or classes of people. Ecology is without doubt the most obvious candidate in this case.

I believe that the significance of the Papal Encyclical Laudato Si’ is not limited to the subject of ecology as such. I see in it an important ecumenical dimension in that it brings the divided Christians before a common task which they must face together. We live at a time when fundamental existential problems overwhelm our traditional divisions and relativize them almost to the point of extinction. Look, for example, at what is happening today in the Middle East: do those who persecute the Christians ask them to which Church or Confession they belong? Christian unity in such cases is de facto realized by persecution and blood – an ecumenism of martyrdom.
The threat posed to us by the ecological crisis similarly bypasses or transcends our traditional divisions. The danger facing our common home, the planet in which we live, is described in the Encyclical in a way leaving no doubt about the existential risk we are confronted with. This risk is common to all of us regardless of our ecclesiastical or confessional identities. Equally common must be our effort to prevent the catastrophic consequences of the present situation. Pope Francis’ Encyclical is a call to unity – unity in prayer for the environment, in the same Gospel of creation, in the conversion of our hearts and our lifestyles to respect and love everyone and everything given to us by God. We are thankful for that.

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/06/18/metropolitan_john_zizioulas_laudato_si_give_orthodox_grea/1152356

June 19, 2015

Climate Change and Moral Responsibility

By Bartholomew and Justin Welby
New York Times

On Tuesday, the British medical journal The Lancet will publish a landmark report highlighting the inalienable and undeniable link between climate change and human health. We warmly welcome the report’s message of hope, which confirms the fact that climate change is more than just a technical or financial challenge (as Pope Francis did in his encyclical letter on June 18) and confirms the voice of health in the discussion on climate change. Indeed, the central premise of the Lancet commission’s work is that tackling climate change could be the single greatest health opportunity of the 21st century.

It is no surprise that climate change has the potential to set back global health. The greenhouse gas emissions that are warming our planet come from industrial activity that pollutes our air and water, and the temperature changes may lead to drought that brings malnutrition. Those with little or no access to health care — children and the elderly in particular — are more vulnerable to such predicaments.

However, health is symptomatic of a larger problem, which undermines and fragments our broader worldview. In addition to highlighting the effects of climate change, we must address the root of the problem. In so doing, we will discover how the benefits of assuming moral responsibility and taking immediate action — not just on matters related to health, but also world economy and global policy — far outweigh the cost of remaining indifferent and passive.

It is this vital link that The Lancet’s report conclusively and authoritatively demonstrates. In short, it proves that our response to climate change — both in terms of mitigation and adaptation — will reduce human suffering, while preserving the diversity and beauty of God’s creation for our children. God’s generous and plentiful creation, which we so often take for granted, is a gift to all living creatures and all living things. We must, therefore, ensure that the resources of our planet are — and continue to be — enough for all to live abundant lives.
The report could not appear at a more significant and sensitive time in history. This year, as all eyes look ahead to the Paris climate negotiations and as governments prepare to sign a universal commitment to limit global temperature rises, we have reached a critical turning point. We are — as never before — in a position to choose charity over greed and frugality over wastefulness in order to affirm our moral commitment to our neighbor and our respect for the Earth. Basic human rights — such as access to safe water, clean air and sufficient food — should be available to everyone without distinction or discrimination.

Because of our faith in God as creator, redeemer and sustainer, we have a mission to protect nature as well as human beings. The obligation of all human beings is to work together for a better world, one in which all human beings can flourish; our Christian vocation is to proclaim the Gospel inclusively and comprehensively.

To this purpose, as early as the mid-1980s, when the faith-based environmental movement that has come to be known as creation care was neither political nor fashionable, the Ecumenical Patriarchate initiated pioneering environmental initiatives. In 1989, it established a day of prayer for the protection of the natural environment and, from 1991 to this day, instigated a series of symposia and summits on an international, interfaith and interdisciplinary basis. Its ecumenical and ecological vision has been embraced in parishes and communities throughout the world.

In 1984, the Anglican Consultative Council adopted the Five Marks of Mission, the fifth of which is: “To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.” In 2006, the Church of England started a national environmental campaign, Shrinking the Footprint, to enable the whole church to address — in faith, practice and mission — the issue of climate change. In 2015, a clear direction has been set for the Church of England’s national investing bodies in support of the transition to a low-carbon economy that brings its investments into line with the church’s witness.

As representatives of two major Christian communions, we appeal to the world’s governments to act decisively and conscientiously by signing an ambitious and hopeful agreement in Paris during the United Nations’ climate conference, COP 21, at the end of this year. We hope and pray that this covenant will contain a clear and convincing long-term goal that will chart the course of decarbonization in the coming years. Only in this way can we reduce the inequality that flows directly from climate injustice within and between countries.

The Lancet report is further proof that all of us must act with generosity and compassion toward our fellow human beings by acting on climate change now. This is a shared moral responsibility and urgent requirement. Civil society, governmental authorities and religious leaders have an opportunity to make a difference in a way that bridges our diverse opinions and nationalities.

_Bartolomew, the archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and ecumenical patriarch, is the spiritual leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Justin Welby, archbishop of Canterbury and primate of the Church of England, is the spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion._

In a brief article in an unassuming 1967 edition of *Science*, a medieval historian from the University of California argued a now infamous thesis in my own field of religion and ecology. “Christianity,” Lynn White wrote, “is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.” The notion of “dominion,” he argued, allowed human beings to exploit the ecological world in unprecedented ways.

White’s argument set off a decades-long firestorm, engaging activists, environmental ethicists, and Christian theologians alike.

But what most people generally forget about that now-canonical article is in the final eight paragraphs. After charging the cultural influence of Western Christian thought, White then argues for an equally religious response. “Possibly,” he offers, “we should ponder the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ: Saint Francis of Assisi.” The 13th century saint, who preached to birds and wolves, who referred to cosmic and elemental entities like fire as “Sister” might serve as a model, White argued, for a different kind of Christianity, a kind that can care for the earth seriously, in humility.

Like many scholars in my own field of religion and ecology, I woke up yesterday morning with another Francis—this one a Pope—on my mind. The Vatican had just officially released *Laudato si*, Praise Be to You—the first official papal encyclical to address the reality of climate change.

Pope Francis’ letter, of course, appears in the midst of a great cloud of witnesses on religiously-motivated ecological justice. The Patriarch of Constantinople, spiritual head of the Orthodox Church, known by many as the “Green Patriarch,” appears several times in the encyclical. Catholic liberation theologians like Ivone Gebara and Leonardo Boff’s work is unparalleled. Many leaders from other Christian denominations and world religions are discussing global warming and now the encyclical in earnest. Lutheran theologians like myself are using this letter in acts of ecclesial and planetary solidarity to prepare for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Scholars and environmental activists speculated for months (and not wildly) about the contents of the letter: its portrayal of climate change, its reflection on the human causes of climate change, its reflection on planetary science, its depiction of human life and sexuality, its understanding of everything from fossil fuels to water to biodiversity. (Yale’s Forum for Religion and Ecology assembles some of the best of that content [here].)
As I read through *Laudato si* I saw much of the speculation confirmed. Pope Francis reflects on our various ecological ills. He reflects on anthropogenic/human-caused global warming, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, the dangers of unlimited consumerism, the dangers of unlimited and overused technology, “a misguided anthropocentrism,” economic growth, and the list goes on. (For an excellent summary of the chapters, check out Christiana Z. Peppard’s piece at *The Washington Post*.)

We hear those litanies of devastation often these days and simple reflection on global warming can send anyone into a spiral of ethical helplessness and moral ambiguity. But there’s something in the rhetorical feel, the affective language of this letter that might help pull a reader through.

The letter’s laments are couched in the language of praise. Francis the pope lures the reader in with the poetry of Francis the saint. The encyclical reads,

Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us… This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.

The gendering of language in this letter deserves its own extended reflection. But as I woke yesterday and read these opening words, Lynn White’s article came tumbling back into my imaginative world. And White’s argument for Saint Francis appears oddly, historically prescient (or at least influential) when a Pope takes the name of that ecological saint and creates one of the most influential texts on religious environmentalism to date. Even if, we might say, the encyclical isn’t perhaps as environmentally radical as White (or even I) might have wanted.

Still, what I’m haunted by most in reading this letter is its poetic genius in connecting seemingly disparate realms of life. Not a few have remarked to me about the encyclical’s balance of tragedy and human sin alongside love, hopefulness, joy, and possibility. It seems that the letter is nothing less than a love letter, an invitation to love God and the creation in which human beings live out their lives in ecological interaction. The rhetoric and prose itself lends Pope Francis’ vision to that very human context of learning appropriate loving communion, joy, and beauty.

Beauty carries a lot of ethical weight in this encyclical. Despite the vast ecological devastations, the letter evokes the beauty of our ecological contexts in its descriptions and its logic argues that seeing that beauty urges respect of other creatures. Learning to see beauty in the everyday is an intrinsic part of an ecological conversion to the earth. (Think of it this way: By my count the word “ecology” occurs thirty-three times in the encyclical. The word “beauty” occurs twenty-seven times).

Another point of connection is the theme of integral ecology. In a nod to liberation theology and Leonardo Boff in particular it seems, *Laudato si* refuses to make the choice between human and ecological life a zero sum game. Pope Francis writes,
Today, however, we have to realize 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.

The letter is concerned throughout with poverty. The Pope goes so far as to say that the earth is one of those marginalized and demanding moral attention: “the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.”

Many popular dialogues about social justice and ecological justice pit these concerns against each other, this letter argues them to be of mutual, related concern.

Finally, as a constructive practice of hope, the encyclical argues time and time again for earth as a kind of “commons”—the encyclical itself is subtitled “On Care for Our Common Home.” The letter urges disparate communities—geographical, intellectual, and religious—to dialogue together for the sake of planetary action. The common home theme incorporates all of creaturely life—animal, plant, human, elemental. And such a perspective urges intergenerational ethical reflection on all who will compose the planet before and after us—how do we work together, planetarily, for the sake of our commons?

I’m bringing out these themes quickly because of a kind of moral and desire these connections tease out. When folks in the United States aren’t mired in distracting debates on climate change denial and politically-motivated refusals of science, we tend to talk about ecological crisis in terms that are hard to assimilate. We talk about the vast structural powers of atmosphere and anthropogenic change. We talk about the complicate ocean acidification that dissolves away at livable ecologies. We talk about the swirls of energy from fossilized fuels and various structural oppressions that energize climatological change.

The problems overwhelm our imaginative creativity to respond. Nothing can be done, the earth is doomed. Or, even, “the earth will go on without us, so what?”

I think what the message like Pope Francis’ does is remind us of the deeply ordinary human and moral dimensions of ecology and climate change.

The words remind us of our responsibility. By connecting the affective themes of love or beauty, the integrally human and ecological, and passion for our common home, powerful ecological treatises like this one remind us that global warming is just as much about the abstract oppressive and climatological power as it is about the intimate oppressive and climatological powers that shape our everyday lives. And that working within everyday structures can help in creating justice and navigating the future.

I’ve come to believe that our climate crises are crises of planetary intimacy. I don’t mean that we’ve lost a romantic relationship with nature that we need to recover. (That kind of imagination is just another anthropocentric misconstrual of creaturely life.) What I do mean is that everything of our contemporary crises also occurs in the intimate, and risky relations of everyday life. Learning to address that intimate enfolding of life and creatureliness is one of our best hopes. Learning how to love the earth, how to build homes together in precarious climates, how to
reconsider daily lives, how to daily protest structural economic systems, how to consider our animal interactions—all that is what creating a planetary resilience is about. This encyclical, as I read it, is simultaneously an act of love, an act of protest, and a hope for resilience.

Perhaps in bringing our crises of climate down to earth, to the very intimacies, desires, and relations of our bodies, Pope Francis’ encyclical offers a way forward. Perhaps when we feel earth, affectively, lovingly in the everyday—in all of its vibrancy and tragic beauty—we’ll be better able to do the work we so desperately need to do.


June 19, 2015

“Ridiculous” to tell pope to butt out of climate change debate

By Douglas Todd
The Vancouver Sun

Those who claim Pope Francis should keep quiet about the disastrous consequences of climate change are, in effect, trying to silence almost half the Canadian population, says a Jesuit scientist.

“The Pope feels the volume needs to be turned up on the climate change discussion. And it’s a ridiculous anti-democratic statement to say he should butt out,” says Father Rob Allore, a Jesuit priest who works for a University of B.C. science laboratory and teaches at adjacent St. Mark’s College.

Noting that roughly 14 million Canadians profess loyalty to the Catholic Church, Allore said the Pope’s historic letter on the environment on Thursday reflects how Catholics and others “should be allowed to participate in civil society. To say they should have no voice in the public conversation doesn’t make sense.”

The Jesuit priest was responding to conservatives’ criticism of Francis’ groundbreaking public letter on the environment, which lamented humanity’s “unrestrained delusions of grandeur,” while calling for the phasing out of fossil fuels and their replacement with sustainable energy sources.

Acknowledging that churches should be “cautious” about making specific policy recommendations, the Jesuit priest nevertheless opposed fossil-fuel industry lobbyists and U.S. Republican presidential contender Jeb Bush, a Catholic anti-abortion activist, for saying the pope and other religious leaders should keep away from economic and political issues.

In a clear sign that the Pope was trying to spread his message about the devastating consequences of human-made climate change beyond the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics, Francis released his
letter Thursday in the presence of a top cleric of the Eastern Orthodox church and a leading non-religious climate scientist.

Ian Bruce, who speaks on science policy for Canada’s David Suzuki Foundation, said the pope’s 192-page letter, titled Praise Be: On Care for Our Common House, will have a “huge impact” on the rapidly evolving climate-change debate.

“It’s a scientific and morally valid call for action. This will reach beyond the church to a wide audience. I think we’re going to see this conversation pop up at a lot more dinner tables and a lot more water coolers across the country.”

The pope’s statement on the environment will give encouragement to once-recalcitrant Canadian politicians and oil-industry officials, Bruce said, many of whom in the past year have started to acknowledge the future requires a sharp turn to renewable energy.

Bruce appreciated that the Argentine pontiff, who studied chemistry and has long expressed concern for the vulnerable, spelled out how climate change is leading to catastrophic droughts in the developing world, which not only cause starvation, but create refugees and even armed conflict.

John Bennett, Ottawa-based director of the Sierra Club Foundation of Canada, said he’s pleased to see “the Pope talk about climate change and environmental degradation as the result of an exploitive economic system that punishes the poor for the sins of wealthy. It is a pretty sweeping indictment.”

The Pope’s letter adopts an urgent tone as it calls for “a cultural revolution” in thinking.

It is making international headlines at the same time as Francis’s popularity is soaring — as he plays down controversies over sexual morality and instead emphasizes matters of the common good.

More than two out of three Canadians now approve of Pope Francis, according to a recent Angus Reid Institute poll. The pope’s approval ratings are even higher, according to Pew Research, in other strongly Catholic countries such as the U.S., Poland, Italy, France and the Philippines.

In condemning a global “culture of waste,” the pontiff stressed that abortion is not the answer to population growth or climate change, while urging “an open and honest debate” on what exactly is leading the planet to the precipice.

“Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age,” Francis writes in his letter.

“But we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur.”
The pope particularly called upon climate-change doubters to wake up. “Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. We require a new and universal solidarity.”

The pontiff’s letter, published in seven languages, criticizes “a structurally perverse” economic system in which rich countries are guilty of a “disproportionate use of natural resources” — while the worst impact of climate change is on fragile developing countries.

Allore, who belongs to the same Jesuit order in which Pope Francis was once a leader, said the pontiff is making clear in his letter that God is interested in providing more than “individual salvation” for people of faith in some sort of afterlife.

“God came into the world (in Jesus) for the benefit of the whole of Creation, not just individual human beings,” Allore said.

“The world is filled with the grandeur of God. I don’t understand anyone who would say, ‘The Earth doesn’t matter.’”


June 19, 2015

Pope Francis’ Encyclical: Hearing the Cry of the Earth

By Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
Huffington Post

The Earth "now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her." So begins Pope Francis in his powerful and long-awaited encyclical on ecology. "The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor."

Pope Francis chose to be called after a saint for whom love for all of God's creation was central to his life, and all creatures were his brothers and sisters. Speaking in the voice of this saint "who loved and protects creation," he calls for a moral response to prevent the "unprecedented destruction of the ecosystem,"--that we urgently need to recognize the consequences of, and changes required in our way of life. He reflects on our abuse, the violence creating "the symptoms of illness that we see in the Earth, the water, the air and in living things." And describing how climate change most adversely affects the poor, he combines ecological and social justice, that we "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

The state of the Earth is our most pressing concern. Our present ecological crisis is the greatest man-made disaster this planet has ever faced: the signs of global imbalance, climate change, and species depletion are all around us. The monster of materialism is ravaging the Earth, its
rapacious greed destroying the ecosystem, the fragile web of life that supports and nourishes all of life's myriad creatures. We are part of a world of wonder and beauty which we are systematically sacrificing to feed our ever-increasing desires. We need to remember the simple wonder of the natural world around us, which St. Francis celebrated in his beautiful Canticle of Brother Sun:

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Yesterday, when I went to my small vegetable patch to pick a few zucchinis for supper, I was once again amazed at the Earth's generosity, how one plant could give so many vegetables. I had to look carefully under the spreading leaves to discover a zucchini unexpectedly growing almost too large. This is the sacred life that sustains us, part of the creation we desperately need to "love and protect," just as it loves and protects us.

A central but rarely addressed aspect of this crisis is our forgetfulness of the sacred nature of creation, and how this affects our relationship to the environment. Pope Francis speaks of the pressing need to articulate a spiritual response to this ecological crisis and to "feel intimately united with all that exists." Today's world is dominated by a divisiveness that encourages exploitation and greed, and we need to return to a sense of wholeness, reflecting the living unity of all of creation and its myriad inhabitants.

The Earth needs both physical and spiritual attention and awareness, our acts and prayers, our hands and hearts. Life is a self-sustaining organic whole of which we are a part, and once we reconnect with this whole we can find a different way to live—one that is not based upon a need for continual distraction and the illusions of material fulfillment, but rather a way to live that is sustaining for the whole.

Each in our own way we can turn away from the patterns of consumerism that drain our money and our life energy. We can aspire to live a simpler life, learning how to live in a more sustainable way, and not be drawn into unnecessary materialism—filling our life with love and care rather than "stuff." A simple meal of vegetables and grains cooked with love and attention can nourish our body and soul.

But, to speak more with the voice of St. Francis, the Earth also needs our prayers, our spiritual attention. Many of us know the effectiveness of prayers for others, how healing and help is given, even in the most unexpected ways. It can be helpful first to acknowledge that the Earth is not "unfeeling matter," but a living being that has given us life. And then we can "hear its cry," sense its suffering: the physical suffering we see in the dying species and polluted waters—the deeper suffering of our collective disregard for its sacred nature.

Pope Francis ends his encyclical with two prayers for our Earth. There is also the simple prayer of placing the world as a living being within our hearts when we inwardly offer our self to the Divine. In this prayer we remember the sorrow and suffering of the Earth in our hearts, and ask that that the world be remembered, that divine love and mercy flow where it is needed; that even
though we continue to treat the world so badly, divine grace will help us and help the world--help to bring the Earth back into balance. We need to remember that the power of the Divine is more than that of all the global corporations that continue to make the world a wasteland, even more than the global forces of consumerism that demand the life-blood of the planet. We pray that the Divine of which we are all a part can redeem and heal this beautiful and suffering world.

Sometimes it is easier to pray when we feel the earth in our hands, when we work in the garden tending our flowers or vegetables. Or when we cook, preparing the vegetables that the Earth has given us, mixing in the herbs and spices that give us pleasure. There are many ways to pray, and we will each find our own way of tending the Earth within our own hearts. Just as the song of St. Francis calls us to praise the Earth, and to praise God "through all your creatures."

As Pope Francis's message reminds us, we each need to be the person who "loves and protects creation," who remembers its sacred nature. We need to bring this song of love into our hearts and hands. Through our love for the Earth we can honor the call to climate action that comes from all faiths and from the single voice that is within all of humanity. We are all part of one living being we call the Earth and it desperately needs our love and attention.


June 19, 2015

Francis' Momentous Encyclical: On Care for Our Common Home

By Dave Pruett
Huffington Post

"We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are between stories." -- Father Thomas Berry

I'm not Catholic. Nevertheless, fond of this pope, I've eagerly awaited the release of Laudato Si', Francis' encyclical on ecology and climate. Immediately after its June 18 release, I paged wildly through it and was blown away. Laudato Si' is absolutely stunning in sweep, depth, and wisdom. It is exactly the right document, at the right moment, by the right person.

Humanity now faces existential crises on multiple fronts: extremes of economic disparity, a severely degraded global ecosystem, competition for dwindling natural resources including land and water, constant warfare, failed states, and a climate on the verge of spinning out of control. Worse, many of us -- especially those with young children or grandchildren -- teeter on the edge of hopelessness, fearing the planet and the future may not be salvageable.

It seems then almost folly to suggest, as does Thomas Berry in the quotation above, that our collective ills somehow stem from a flawed or incomplete "story." And yet, read between the lines of Laudato Si' and this is exactly the conclusion you'll reach.
When Berry uses the word "story," he means "mythology" -- the overarching story that guides us individually and collectively in our relationships to the Creator, the creation (including fellow creatures), and one another.

For millennia, our mythology derived primarily from religious traditions, many if not most of which taught that we humans were created by divine fiat, that we occupy the center of the cosmos, that we are superior to the rest of creation, that the earth was created expressly for our needs, and that we are free to use the earth pretty much as we damn well please.

In 1543, with the publication of Copernicus' *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*, a new story began to unfold: the scientific story. The scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, the industrial age, the space age, and the information age followed in rapid succession. But, more to the point, the scientific story largely supplanted the religious one.

As commonly interpreted, the scientific story goes like this: we humans are not the center of the cosmos. Moreover, we're here by random accident rather than divine act. Furthermore, in the view of the late evolutionary biologist Stephen J. Gould, "Evolution is purposeless, nonprogressive, and materialistic."

These competing mythologies have created a modern dilemma. According to Ilya Prigogine, Nobel laureate in chemistry: "We are faced with a tragic choice between an alienating science and an antiscientific philosophy." Seemingly diametrically opposed, science and religion have been at loggerheads virtually since science's inception. As a result, most humans choose to align with one camp or the other. No issue has revealed the tragedy of this dichotomous choice more clearly than the climate. In the U.S., for example, meaningful climate action has been blocked largely by evangelical Christians whose distrust of the scientific story blinders them to the poignance of the scientific data.

In one aspect, however, science and religion have acted in cahoots: both stories have contributed to the degradation of the earth that now threatens our undoing. Some, misconstruing *Genesis'* exhortation "to have dominion over the earth," take license to abuse the earth. Similarly, scientific materialism reinforces an attitude that the earth is merely an inanimate rock to be exploited.

The offspring of this unholy union is a valueless economic system -- based on mindless consumption, "a seedbed for collective selfishness" -- that runs roughshod over the earth and exploits those who labor, all in idolatry to the golden calf. Moreover, we've created a technological Frankenstein: the prowess to bring nature to her knees by clear-cutting forests, damming rivers, monoculture agribusiness, and extreme methods of resource extraction such as mountain top removal, tar sands mining, and hydraulic fracturing.

The stunning -- and immensely hopeful -- aspect of Francis' encyclical is that, like Berry, he calls for a new "integral" story. He begins by correcting the fallacies in the religious and scientific stories. First, in Chapter Two, he takes religion to the woodshed:
... we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination ... . The biblical texts ... tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (Gen 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature.

Then, in Chapter Three, it's science's turn for a whupping:

Still stuck in the discredited scientific materialism of the past, "the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order." The materialistic paradigm fosters an "I-It" relationship to nature rather than an "I-Thou" relationship, to appropriate the theology of Martin Buber. This author has at least twice argued in Huffington Post (3/29/2013 and 10/1/2014) that the materialistic paradigm is neither necessary nor helpful for science. Neither is it helpful for humanity according to the pope, because that paradigm "tends to dominate economic and political life."

Having carefully laid out the problems in Chapters One to Three, Francis begins to address solutions in Chapter Four: Integral Ecology. Integral ecology recognizes that one cannot compartmentalize the problems of the world into environmental, economic, and social. The spheres are closely interlinked, and the problems in each sphere stem from the same flawed mythology. Time and again, he reiterates that "everything is connected," "everything is interrelated," sounding more like a Native American wisdomkeeper or an Eastern mystic than a dualistic Westerner.

In Chapter Five, he advocates transparent problem solving and open dialogue: international dialogue, dialogue between national and local constituencies, dialogue between politics and economics, and especially dialogue between religions and science. By such dialogue we collectively shape a new myth of meaning that sees the world as a "communion of subjects, not a collection of objects," again to quote Thomas Berry. By dialogue we think outside the boxes of growth-obsessed capitalism or soul-crushing communism to create new -- sustainable and just -- economic models, sacred economies that reflect our values and distinguish "quality of life" from "standard of living."

Francis, a boxer in his youth, pulls no punches: "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth."

"Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning."

Love will save us. Ultimately, Francis calls for a revolution in love, by which we humans push the boundaries of love outward -- beyond our family, beyond our clan, beyond our nation, beyond our species -- to embrace the earth as "a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."
Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), the Jesuit priest-paleontologist who spent his life crafting and articulating the new story, envisioned a time in which science and faith would join forces in this very labor of love: "Some day, after mastering the winds the waves, the tides, and gravity," he wrote, "we shall harness for God the energies of love. And then, for the second time in the history of the world, [humans] will have discovered fire."

(With gratitude to brothers-in-arms Doug Hendren and Charles Finn.)

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dave-pruett/francis-momentous-encycli_b_7620554.html

June 20, 2015

For Faithful, Social Justice Goals Demand Action on Environment

By Justin Gillis
New York Times

For an earnest young Christian named Ben Lowe, revelation came on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, in Africa. A relentless warming of the lake was reducing the catch of fish, the people were going hungry — and he had learned of scientific evidence that climate change was to blame.

For the Rev. Brian Sauder, who grew up attending a small Anabaptist church in rural Illinois, the moment came in a college classroom. Studying the fallout from environmental degradation, he learned of poor people who had to walk hours longer each day to gather firewood from depleted forests.

For both men, Christian duties that their upbringing had led them to regard as separate — taking care of the earth and taking care of the poor — merged into a morally urgent problem. “Why haven’t I ever made this connection before?” Mr. Sauder recalled asking himself.

It is a connection that many people of faith all over the world are starting to make.

The sweeping pastoral letter issued by Pope Francis on Thursday may prove to be a watershed, highlighting the issues of social justice at the heart of the environmental crisis. But the pope’s encyclical is, in a sense, simply an exclamation mark on a broad shift in thinking that has been underway for decades and extends far beyond the Roman Catholic Church.

Many faith traditions are awakening to the burden that climate change is placing on poor people, and finding justification for caring for the environment in their scripture. The pope’s urgent call is likely to intensify this discussion, provoking what could be one of the most important dialogues between science and religion since the days of Charles Darwin.

Environmental scientists who are themselves people of faith are in rising demand, valued as translators between two camps that have often seen the world in radically different ways. These
scientists have known for a long time that the facts and data produced by their research colleagues would not be sufficient to rouse the public to act. For that to happen, the science had to be reframed in moral terms, they said.

“The science is critical, but it’s not enough,” said Nathaniel P. Hitt, a fisheries biologist who is active in a Presbyterian church in Shepherdstown, W.Va. “Science is like a compass. It can tell us where north is, but it can’t tell us if we want to go north. That’s where our morality comes in.”

Dr. Hitt and the congregation to which he belongs are, to borrow his phrase, heading north. They recently put solar panels on the roof of their church and linked their home water heaters into a network that can help balance the grid fluctuations from renewable power, and they are avidly studying other ways to tackle the emissions causing global warming.

Hundreds of other churches, mosques and synagogues across the country have put up solar panels in recent years or retrofitted their buildings to cut energy use, or both. With the cost of renewable energy falling, that number could soon be in the thousands.

Politicians who try to reduce incentives for renewable power can find themselves contending with a new force: upset preachers packing the front row of the hearing room. A pastor in Fort Wayne, Ind., Brian Flory, recently helped stall such a bill in his state, citing the right of churches to “generate electricity from God’s free sunshine.”

For a long time, people of faith who felt a sense of urgency about the environment were outnumbered in their congregations by parishioners who disagreed with them on the issue or simply saw more immediate concerns. That is still true in many churches, perhaps in most of them, but the evidence suggests that the priorities are starting to change.

Polls show that a majority of American Christians view climate change as real, but fewer than a third of them understand the point, thoroughly documented in scientific studies, that poor people are already being harmed by it.

Men like Mr. Lowe and Mr. Sauder have dedicated their lives to helping other people of faith grasp the connection.

Mr. Sauder, ordained in the Mennonite denomination, is the executive director of Faith in Place, an interfaith group in Illinois that helps houses of worship with energy retrofits, solar panel installations and other steps that cut planet-warming emissions. Similar groups have sprouted across the country under the banner of a national organization called Interfaith Power and Light.

Mr. Lowe traveled as a college student, nearly a decade ago, to Lake Tanganyika, where he studied with an environmental scientist named Catherine O’Reilly. Dr. O’Reilly had documented that rising temperatures in the lake were depleting the surface waters of nutrients. That, in turn, was damaging fish populations that historically helped feed millions of people.

“I realized that climate change was already having impacts, and not just on God’s creation, but on many of my brothers and sisters around the world,” Mr. Lowe said.
The situation has grown only worse since, with overfishing being a possible factor, said Dr. O’Reilly, now an assistant professor at Illinois State University. She visited the lake again last year, and “the price of a small pile of fish has gone up 10 times, which is huge for people who are living day to day,” she said.

After college, Mr. Lowe helped found, and is now the spokesman for, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, a national organization that has allied with other faith and environmental groups to push for change.

Despite shifting public opinion, Mr. Lowe and others who employ the slogan “creation care” are still viewed with suspicion by many fellow evangelicals.

Polls suggest that evangelicals are the American religious group least likely to believe that global warming is real or caused by humans. Many of them are politically conservative and are influenced by groups that question established climate science and defend the rising use of fossil fuels.

Among Christians and Jews, theological discussion sometimes centers on exactly what God meant in the first chapter of Genesis when he granted human beings “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

Does this passage — in Christian theology, it is called the dominion mandate — mean that people can do no ecological wrong? Some conservative politicians do seem to interpret the verse, and related ones, as a promise that God would not let humans wreck their only home.

“My point is, God’s still up there,” Senator James M. Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican who is one of the leading climate-science doubters in Congress, said on a Christian radio program in 2012. “The arrogance of people to think that we, human beings, would be able to change what he is doing in the climate is, to me, outrageous.”

In his encyclical, Francis disputed this view, declaring not only that humans are altering the climate but that the dominion mandate encompasses a duty to care for creation. Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist at Texas Tech University who is an evangelical Christian, lines up with the pope on the issue.

If God granted humanity free will, she sometimes asks audiences, why would that not include the capacity to harm the planet?

Religious conservatives who oppose environmentalism profess a deep concern for the plight of the poor. But they point out that economic success has historically been closely linked to the use of fossil fuels.

“The policies meant to mitigate global warming would oppress the poor by depriving them of the energy without which they cannot rise out of poverty,” E. Calvin Beisner, a leader of an
American group called the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, declared this year in Rome at a symposium held to pre-emptively counter Francis’ message.

Liberal groups often dismiss that view as tendentious, yet it is precisely the fear that preoccupies countries like India that have refused to commit to serious emissions limits.

The stated goal of the environmental movement is to break the link between fossil fuels and economic success.

Perhaps the biggest question now is whether rising concern about the environment among religious groups will translate into stronger political demands that governments find ways to reduce the cost of low-carbon energy supplies, improve their reliability and speed their deployment.

This month, more than 350 American rabbis issued a letter of their own, declaring that the time for action was at hand.

“The hope is that over and over in our history, when our country faced the need for profound change, it has been our communities of moral commitment, religious covenant and spiritual search that have arisen to meet the need,” the rabbis declared. “So it was 50 years ago during the civil rights movement, and so it must be today.”


June 21, 2015

The pope’s effect on politics

By Barrie Dunsmore
Rutland Herald

This past week Pope Francis inserted himself directly into the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. Whether or not that was the intent, it is a clear consequence of the pope’s new encyclical on the environment — because this document puts him on a collision course with the Republican Party.

The New York Times best summed up the pope’s broad global concerns and objectives. “Pope Francis on Thursday called for a radical transformation of politics, economics and individual lifestyles to confront environmental degradation and climate change.

“The vision that Francis outlined in the 184-page encyclical is sweeping in ambition and scope: He described a relentless exploitation and destruction of the environment, for which he blamed apathy, the reckless pursuit of profits, excessive faith in technology and political shortsightedness. The most vulnerable victims are the world’s poorest people, he declared, who are being dislocated and disregarded.”
With that latter point, the pope is making climate change a moral issue. A papal encyclical is meant to be a teaching document for Roman Catholics worldwide — and it ranks among the most authoritative statements a pope can make.

This encyclical is a major step in Pope Francis’ personal campaign to lead his church in the battle against global warming. As a prelude to the next major international environmental conference scheduled for Paris in December, the pope plans to address the subject during the United Nations General Assembly in September. And also on that trip he will speak to a joint meeting of the United States Congress.

House Speaker John Boehner insulted the White House when he invited Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to speak to Congress in opposition to the Iran nuclear talks. But the way things are shaping up, the speaker’s invitation to have the pope speak to Congress will be even more controversial.

That’s because most Republican members of Congress claim not to believe that global warming is largely man-made. And of the historic number of Republicans running, or thinking about running for the 2016 presidential nomination, none is so far willing to admit that climate change has been scientifically proven.

However, before the pope enters that lion’s den of climate change deniers called the American Congress, the Vatican also plans to have prominent bishops around the country deliver sermons, homilies and hold press conferences in support of the pope’s warnings and pleas.

Miami Roman Catholic Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski is one of those actively involved in that effort. The archbishop reportedly hopes the pope’s message will resonate with two members of his flock in particular: Florida’s junior senator, Marco Rubio, and former governor Jeb Bush, both Catholics and both Republican presidential candidates.

Like all of the Republican candidates, Mr. Bush and Mr. Rubio have refused to concede that humans are the main culprits responsible for global warming, and they oppose policies designed to tax or limit the burning of fossil fuels. In this they are in lockstep with the billionaire Koch brothers, who will be spreading their enormous campaign fund largess to Republican presidential wannabes according to those who completely toe their line.

When a leaked draft of the papal encyclical surfaced early this past week, candidate Jeb Bush was quick to try to inoculate himself against any notion that the pope might be able to sway his view.

At a campaign event in New Hampshire, Mr. Bush said, “I don’t get economic policy from my bishops or my cardinals or my pope ... I think religion ought to be about making us better as people and less about things that end up getting in the political realm.”

Senator Rubio takes the position that the climate is constantly changing, but insists that “humans are not responsible for climate change in the way some of these people out there are trying to
Governor Bush and Senator Rubio are immediately susceptible to pressure from billionaire campaign donors for whom protecting their investments in oil, coal and gas are paramount. But especially for Florida politicians, the politics of global warming could change. Thirteen federal agencies issued a 2014 National Climate Assessment, in which Miami was named as one of America’s cities most vulnerable to physical and economic damage due to human caused climate change.

This past week the PBS “News Hour” devoted a long segment to how rising sea levels caused by global warming threatened the Florida Everglades. As Judy Woodruff put it in her introduction, “The consequences aren’t just to hundreds of species of animals and plants that for centuries have called the Everglades home. It’s to the economy and way of life for millions in South Florida who depend on the vast and teeming water once dubbed ‘the river of grass’” Among the most troubling of the details in the report is that the Everglades, “a wild habitat once the size of Connecticut, has shrunk by more than a half.”

On a visit to Florida to mark Earth Day in April, President Barack Obama visited the Everglades and noted its vulnerability. “In terms of economic impact, all of this poses risks to Florida’s $82 billion tourist industry, on which so many good jobs and livelihoods depend.”

Republican energy lobbyist Michael McKenna, who says he’s a conservative Catholic, dismisses the pope’s message. “This pope is selling a line of Latin American-style socialism,” said McKenna. “This guy is not in sync with the American Catholics.”

Actually, according to a new poll by the Pew Research Center, 86 percent of American Catholics view Pope Francis positively, and 71 percent believe the planet is getting warmer. However only a quarter of Catholic Republicans believe climate change is man-made. As for the Congress, 30 percent of the members are Catholics, including Speaker Boehner. And they promise to be Pope Francis’ most skeptical audience.

Yet as the American people watch the network news, which virtually every night leads with historic and disastrous weather conditions in various parts of the country, they might finally begin to ask why? Pope Francis is providing credible answers.

*Barrie Dunsmore is a former foreign correspondent for ABC News. He lives in Charlotte.*

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**June 21, 2015**

Tell Us How Your Church Addressed the Pope’s Encyclical

New York Times
The encyclical by Pope Francis released on Thursday did not merely present a papal view on the environment and climate change. It was also an urgent call to action. The document appeared intended to persuade followers around the world to change their behavior, in hopes of protecting a fragile planet.

The Times wants to know how places of worship in the United States and around the world are responding to Francis’ message. Tell us how yours addressed the encyclical this weekend. We hope to hear from both congregation members and leaders. We may publish a selection of the responses.

Submit your response here:

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/world/europe/tell-us-how-your-church-addressed-the-popes-encyclical.html

June 21, 2015

Pope Francis’s important ecology lesson

Could the Pope’s climate change encyclical change the world?

By Stephen Bede Scharper
Toronto Star

Twenty years ago, I taught a course on religion and the environment at the University of Notre Dame.

When people heard this, they would often scrunch up their faces and ask, “What does faith have to do with ecology?”

In the past few years, teaching a similar course at the University of Toronto, this question is posed far less often, and the faces are far less scrunched.

And now, thanks to Pope Francis, I may not have to answer this question again for some time.

Last Thursday, Francis planted what Greenpeace founder Robert Hunter might have called a “mind bomb.” Promulgating the first papal encyclical on the environment, Francis sent shock waves across the speaking notes of climate change deniers worldwide and Republican presidential hopefuls in the U.S.

“The pope ought to stay with his job, and we'll stay with ours,” declared James Inhofe, the dean of climate change deniers in the U.S. Congress and chairman of the Senate environment and public works committee.
Roman Catholic Republican presidential aspirant Rick Santorum, perhaps forgetting Pope Francis’s graduate degree in chemistry, declared the church would be better off “leaving science to the scientists” and focusing on what the church is “good at, which is theology and morality.” And fellow Catholic Jeb Bush, also seeking to take up residence in the White House, told news reporters that he doesn’t take economic policy from “my cardinals or my pope.” He didn’t say where he does get it from.

These, sadly, are representative, rather than rogue, voices.

According to The Guardian, most Republicans in Congress deny the existence of climate change and actively resist legislation limiting greenhouse gas emissions. Among the uber-conservative Tea Party members, climate change skepticism runs near the 80-per-cent level, according to the Pew Research Center.

And of the nearly 20 Republicans in the presidential primary chorus, there is only one voice, South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham, who dares to sing of the perils of climate change.

When Pope Francis addresses the U.S. Congress this fall, the first pope in history to do so, he might well confirm that the emperors of climate change denial have no clothes. (Half of the legislators in attendance may indeed experience wardrobe malfunctions during the pope’s address.) But beyond the maelstrom of U.S. political discourse, Francis’s encyclical, as an authoritative teaching document to be used in Catholic schools and parishes throughout the world, will likely have a powerful impact for generations to come.

Affirming that climate change is both real and human-engendered, Francis takes aim at a “throwaway culture” of unbridled consumerism, challenging not only Catholics, but the entire human family, to fashion a new, integrated and sustaining relationship with the planet.

Beyond the fact that the detailed encyclical, entitled _Laudato Si_ (Praise Be), echoing a canticle of the pope’s namesake, St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226), is an authoritative teaching document that will be shared among the 1.2 billion Catholic faithful, it will, for several additional reasons, have special resonance beyond the Catholic world.

First, addressing not just Catholics, but “every living person on this planet,” the pope declares “nothing in the world is indifferent to us.” Echoing his sermon on the plight of thousands of desperate North African refugees when he spoke of the “globalization of indifference,” Francis here declares that not only human suffering, but the suffering of the earth, with rapid species extinction, coral reef destruction, and alarming climate change, must be embraced by Christian compassion.

Second, Francis directly links Catholic social teaching on poverty with an emerging concern for creation. The Pope invokes a book title by Leonardo Boff, the twice-Vatican-silenced Brazilian liberation theologian, who spoke of the Christian duty to respond to both “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” This brings together the two most important moral crises we now face.
Third, Francis advocates not just for a pastoral reorientation toward the planet, but a seismic shift away from “rapidification” and “irrational confidence in progress and human abilities” toward a culture of social and ecological inclusion, to protect, in the words of St. Francis, “Mother Earth.”

What does faith have to do with the fate of the earth?

Ask the pope.

He knows.

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http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/06/21/pope-franciss-important-ecology-lesson.html

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**June 22, 2015**

*Laudato Si’ — The Ecological Ethics and Systemic Thought of Pope Francis*

By Fritjof Capra

Earth Charter International

The title of the Pope’s new encyclical, *Laudato Si’* ("Praise Be to You"), dated May 24, 2015, and published in eight languages on June 18, is an Umbrian phrase from the famous religious song “Canticle of the Sun” by Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. The encyclical’s subtitle, “On Care for our Common Home,” refers to the Earth as oikos (“home”), the Greek root of the word “ecology,” while caring (curando in Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese) is a practice characteristic of the liberation theology of Latin America.

The text of the Papal encyclical, one year in the making and written with the help of a large team of theologians, philosophers, and scientists, reveals not only the great moral authority of Pope Francis, but also his complete familiarity with many concepts and ideas in contemporary science.

During the last thirty years, a new conception of life has emerged at the forefront of science — a unifying view that integrates life’s biological, cognitive, social, and ecological dimensions. At the very core of this new understanding of life we find a profound change of metaphors: from seeing the world as a machine to understanding it as a network. This new science of life is now being developed by outstanding researchers and their teams around the world. Their concepts and ideas are integrated into a grand synthesis in *The Systems View of Life*, a textbook I coauthored with Pier Luigi Luisi and which was published in 2014 by Cambridge University Press.
We call the new conception of life a “systems view” because it involves a new kind of thinking — thinking in terms of connectedness, relationships, patterns, and context. In science, this way of thinking is known as “systems thinking,” or “systemic thinking,” because it is crucial to understanding living systems of any kind — living organisms, social systems, or ecosystems.

The systems view of life will be the conceptual basis of my analysis of the Pope’s encyclical in this essay. I will show that the radical ethics championed by Pope Francis, expressed sometimes, but not always, in theological language, is essentially the ethics of deep ecology, the philosophical school founded by Arne Naess in the 1970s. I will also show with many examples that Pope Francis reveals himself in Laudato Si’ as a truly systemic thinker.

Ethics and the common good

From a systems perspective, ethical behavior is always related to community; it is behavior for the common good. In today’s world, there are two relevant communities to which we all belong. We are all members of humanity, and we all belong to the Earth Household, the global biosphere. As members of the human community, our behavior should reflect a respect for human dignity and basic human rights. As members of the Earth Household, our “common home,” we should not interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life. This is the essential meaning of ecological sustainability.

The defining characteristic of deep ecology is a shift from anthropocentric (human-centered) values to ecocentric (earth-centered) values. It is a worldview that acknowledges the inherent value of non-human life, recognizing that all living beings are members of ecological communities, bound together in networks of interdependencies. All these considerations, and the radically new system of ethics they imply, are clearly expressed in the Papal encyclical, as shown in the following passages.

156. Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics.

95. The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all.

157. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.

5. Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and “take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system.”

33. It is not enough…to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves… Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.
42. Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.

159. The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us… We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity… Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.

162. Our difficulty in taking up this challenge seriously has much to do with an ethical and cultural decline which has accompanied the deterioration of the environment.

The values of deep ecology and their implications for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful world are elaborated in terms of sixteen ethical principles in the Earth Charter, a unique document mentioned by Pope Francis explicitly as a source of inspiration:

207. The Earth Charter asked us to leave behind a period of self-destruction and make a new start, but we have not as yet developed a universal awareness needed to achieve this. Here, I would echo that courageous challenge: “As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning… Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”

Science and religion

It is impressive that throughout the document, Pope Francis uses contemporary scientific language with complete ease. Technical terms like “paradigm,” “reductionism,” “microorganisms,” “subatomic particles,” “quantum leap,” etc. appear again and again. To cite just one example, in paragraph 18 the Pope notes the contrast between the hectic pace of modern life and the much slower pace of evolution:

18. Although change is part of the working of complex systems, the speed with which human activity has developed contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution.

In view of the wide-spread questioning of evolution by Christian fundamentalists, especially in the United States, the Pope’s matter-of-fact reference to biological evolution, without any need for further comments, is truly remarkable. In fact, Pope Francis states at the outset of his analysis of the state of the world that it is based on solid science:

15. I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows.

In the history of Christianity, theological statements about the nature of the world, or about human nature, were often considered as literal truths, and any attempt to question or modify
them was deemed heretical. This rigid position of the Church led to the well-known conflicts between science and fundamentalist Christianity, which have continued to the present day. In these conflicts, antagonistic positions are often taken on by fundamentalists on both sides who fail to keep in mind the limited and approximate nature of all scientific theories, on the one hand, and the metaphorical and symbolic nature of the language in religious scriptures, on the other. Pope Francis seems to be well aware of this problem, and explicitly emphasizes the symbolic nature of religious language:

66. The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality.

In fact, Francis uses religious language mainly in connection with ethics, arguing that caring for the common good is valuable whether or not it is motivated by religious faith:

199. It would be quite simplistic to think that ethical principles present themselves purely in the abstract, detached from any context. Nor does the fact that they may be couched in religious language detract from their value in public debate. The ethical principles capable of being apprehended by reason can always reappear in different guise and find expression in a variety of languages, including religious language.

“Integral ecology”

The systems view of life, integrating life’s biological, cognitive, social, and ecological dimensions, is implicit in the conceptual framework of Laudato Si’. The Pope states explicitly that that solving our global problems requires a new way of thinking, and he makes clear that what he has in mind is thinking in terms of connectedness and relationships — in other words, systemic thinking:

215. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature.

79. In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation.

138. It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation.

Pope Francis uses the term “integral ecology” to refer to the systemic approach, and he emphasizes especially the interdependence of ecological and social issues, as well as the need to respect and honor local, indigenous cultures:

137. Since everything is closely interrelated, and today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions.
49. Today…we have to realize 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.

143. Together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat… Ecology, then, also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity in the broadest sense. More specifically, it calls for greater attention to local cultures.

146. In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed.

In his encyclical, the Pope not only emphasizes the values and ethics of deep ecology but also shows his “ecological literacy” — his understanding of the principles of organization of nature’s ecosystems — as, for example, in the following passages.

34. It may well disturb us to learn of the extinction of mammals or birds, since they are more visible. But the good functioning of ecosystems also requires fungi, algae, worms, insects, reptiles and an innumerable variety of microorganisms.

22. It is hard for us to accept that the way natural ecosystems work is exemplary: plants synthesize nutrients which feed herbivores; these in turn become food for carnivores, which produce significant quantities of organic waste which give rise to new generations of plants.

140. Although we are often not aware of it, we depend on these [ecosystems] for our own existence. We need only recall how ecosystems interact in dispersing carbon dioxide, purifying water, controlling illnesses and epidemics, forming soil, breaking down waste, and in many other ways which we overlook or simply do not know about… So, when we speak of “sustainable use,” consideration must always be given to each ecosystem’s regenerative ability in its different areas and aspects.

The state of the world

The encyclical is composed of six chapters. In the first chapter, Pope Francis presents his assessment of the state of the world — “what is happening to our common home,” as he puts it. Today, there is a broad consensus among scholars, community leaders, and activists that the major problems of our time — energy, environment, climate change, inequity, violence and war — cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are all interconnected and interdependent. Pope Francis fully agrees with this fundamental insight:

61. The world’s problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation.

139. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.
175. The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty.

The fact that the major problems of our time are systemic problems implies that they require corresponding systemic solutions — solutions that do not solve any problem in isolation but deal with it within the context of other related problems. Unfortunately, this is not understood by our political and corporate leaders, most of whom are unable to “connect the dots,” to use a popular phrase.

Instead of taking into account the interconnectedness of our major problems, their so-called “solutions” tend to focus on a single issue, thereby simply shifting the problem to another part of the system — for example, by producing more energy at the expense of biodiversity, public health, or climate stability. Pope Francis is very critical of this serious shortcoming:

20. Technology, which, linked to business interests, is presented as the only way of solving these problems, in fact proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others.

111. To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system.

The Pope also recognizes clearly that systems thinking — or “integral ecology,” in his words — is inherently multidisciplinary. Hence he strongly advocates a multidisciplinary approach for solving our major global problems:

110. The fragmentation of knowledge proves helpful for concrete applications, and yet it often leads to a loss of appreciation for the whole, for the relationships between things, and for the broader horizon, which then becomes irrelevant. This very fact makes it hard to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today’s world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor; these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests.

197. What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis.

63. Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality.

The illusion of perpetual growth

At the very heart of our global crisis lies the illusion that unlimited growth is possible on a finite planet. Economic and corporate growth are the driving forces of global capitalism, the dominant economic system today. In this economic system, the irrational belief in perpetual growth is
carried on relentlessly by promoting excessive consumption and a throw-away economy that is energy and resource intensive, generating waste and pollution, and depleting the Earth’s natural resources.

Moreover, these environmental problems are exacerbated by global climate change, caused by our energy-intensive and fossil-fuel-based technologies.

Pope Francis clearly recognizes the fatal flaw of the idea of perpetual growth, and he uses strong words to condemn it, calling it a lie rather than an illusion:

106. We are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us… This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.

The Pope also associates the illusion of unlimited growth with the linear, one-dimensional notion of progress:

194. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress.

It seems, then, that our key challenge is how to shift from an economic system based on the notion of unlimited growth to one that is both ecologically sustainable and socially just. Growth is a central characteristic of all life, but growth in nature is not linear and unlimited. While certain parts of organisms, or ecosystems, grow, others decline, releasing and recycling their components which become resources for new growth.

This kind of balanced, multi-faceted, or “qualitative” growth is well known to biologists and ecologists, and this is exactly what the Pope advocates:

193. We need also to think of containing growth by setting some reasonable limits and even retracing our steps before it is too late… That is why the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth.

More generally, Pope Francis pleads for an economics grounded in ecology and designed to mimic the ecological cycles we observe in nature:

141. Economic growth, for its part, tends to produce predictable reactions and a certain standardization with the aim of simplifying procedures and reducing costs. This suggests the need for an “economic ecology” capable of appealing to a broader vision of reality.

22. Our industrial system, at the end of its cycle of production and consumption, has not developed the capacity to absorb and reuse waste and by-products. We have not yet managed to
adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them.

Among the symptoms of our global crisis, climate change and economic inequality are perhaps the most urgent ones. Pope Francis addresses both of them in some detail in his encyclical. In addition, he discusses the dramatic rise in resource depletion and species extinction. He pays particular attention to the scarcity of fresh drinking water and unequivocally condemns the privatization of water:

30. Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.

**Climate change**

Climate change is discussed in paragraphs 23–26 and in paragraphs 165 and 169 of the text in a way that accurately reflects the broad scientific consensus existing today. This should not be surprising because one of our leading climate scientists, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, was a key scientific adviser to the Pope for many months during the drafting of Laudato Si’.

The section on climate change begins (in paragraph 23) with the moral exhortation that “the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.” This is followed by brief discussions of global warming, “due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity.” The intensive use of fossil fuels and deforestation for agricultural purposes are mentioned as two key sources of greenhouse gases.

The many consequences of climate change discussed include the constant rise in sea levels and the increase of extreme weather conditions (23); the decrease of the planet’s biodiversity and the acidification of the oceans, compromising the marine food chain (24); and the tragic rise in the number of climate refugees (25).

This analysis is followed by the Pope’s urgent appeal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, eventually, to phase out fossil fuels:

26. There is an urgent need to develop policies so that, in the next few years, the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases can be drastically reduced, for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy. Worldwide there is minimal access to clean and renewable energy.

165. We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay.
Finally, Pope Francis bemoans the slow progress in developing effective climate policies and clearly denounces the situation as a moral failure:

169. With regard to climate change, the advances have been regrettably few. Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most… International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility.

Economic inequality

Throughout the encyclical, Pope Francis emphasizes the interdependence of environmental and social degradation. He lists numerous signs of the devastating social impact of economic globalization, paying special attention to economic inequality:

48. 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.

46. The social dimensions of global change include the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity. These are signs that the growth of the past two centuries has not always led to an integral development and an improvement in the quality of life. Some of these signs are also symptomatic of real social decline, the silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion.

51. Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations. A true “ecological debt” exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time… “We note that often the businesses which operate this way are multinationals.”

Perhaps the only unconvincing section of the encyclical is paragraph 50 where Pope Francis tries to downplay the importance of stabilizing population. This is perhaps not surprising, given the Church’s staunch opposition to birth control. It is especially unfortunate, however, in view of the fact that demographers have documented again and again the strong correlation between declining birth rates and women’s rights, in particular access to education. This would have given the Pope another opportunity to emphasize the interdependence of ecological balance and social justice, which is one of the main themes of his encyclical.
Need for a global consensus

At the end of his wide-ranging systemic and ethical analysis of the state of the world, Pope Francis concludes that we need a global consensus for effective action:

164. A global consensus is essential for confronting the deeper problems, which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries. Such a consensus could lead, for example, to planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, developing renewable and less polluting forms of energy, encouraging a more efficient use of energy, promoting a better management of marine and forest resources, and ensuring universal access to drinking water.

The Pope decries the lack of political leadership to achieve the urgently needed global consensus, and he does not hesitate to name wide-spread political corruption, often institutionalized, as the main culprit:

54. It is remarkable how weak international political responses have been. The failure of global summits on the environment make it plain that our politics are subject to technology and finance. There are too many special interests, and economic interests easily end up trumping the common good and manipulating information so that their own plans will not be affected.

178. A politics concerned with immediate results, supported by consumerist sectors of the population, is driven to produce short-term growth. In response to electoral interests, governments are reluctant to upset the public with measures which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign investment. The myopia of power politics delays the inclusion of a far-sighted environmental agenda within the overall agenda of governments.

182. The forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project, in exchange for favours, usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and to allow for full debate.

Throughout his encyclical, Pope Francis praises the actions of the global network of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), known as the global civil society, to raise public awareness and develop systemic solutions in a variety of areas:

13. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest. Young people demand change.

14. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges.

38. We cannot fail to praise the commitment of international agencies and civil society organizations which draw public attention to these issues and offer critical cooperation, employing legitimate means of pressure, to ensure that each government carries out its proper
and inalienable responsibility to preserve its country’s environment and natural resources, without capitulating to spurious local or international interests.

166. Worldwide, the ecological movement has made significant advances, thanks also to the efforts of many organizations of civil society. It is impossible here to mention them all, or to review the history of their contributions. But thanks to their efforts, environmental questions have increasingly found a place on public agendas and encouraged more far-sighted approaches.

In the end, the Pope asserts unequivocally that the only effective way to develop appropriate environmental and social policies will be through political pressure of grassroots movements on governments at all levels:

179. Society, through non-governmental organizations and intermediate groups, must put pressure on governments to develop more rigorous regulations, procedures and controls. Unless citizens control political power – national, regional and municipal – it will not be possible to control damage to the environment.

With this encyclical Pope Francis has single-handedly brought the Catholic Church to the forefront of the ecology movement and has established himself as a true world leader in the mold of Václav Havel, Jimmy Carter, or the Dalai Lama. We can only hope that the wisdom and passion of Laudato Si’ will resonate strongly around the world.

http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1153/1/Fritjof-Capra-Laudato-Si--The-Ecological-Ethics-and-Systemic-Thought-of-Pope-Francis-/Page1.html

June 22, 2015

Ruud Lubbers comment on Laudato Si’

By Ruud Lubbers
Earth Charter International

In 2015, the U.N. will agree on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Conference of Parties to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change will offer nations the opportunity to make a choice for Our Common Future. Pope Francis has just gone on record with Laudato Si’; the Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home.

This gives me an immense joy. As a Roman Catholic, born in 1939, I have lived my life according to the teachings of Christ, my beliefs based on Love as His most important lesson. Also, I have been greatly influenced by Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit cited by the Pope in Laudato Si’, whose Le Phénomène Humain taught me in terms of science what our history and future is about.

During my life I have had the fortune to raise my children to become aware of our misbehavior in relation to nature. In that time, Europe - in particular the Rhine area with Rotterdam as its
main port - was recovering from the Second World War and industrializing thanks to the generous American Marshall Plan. While recovery was impressive, it came at the cost of the environment and nature. It was an important lesson for me to respect nature, Our Common Home.

Almost 50 years ago, the Club of Rome published Limits to Growth and I entered politics to contribute to sustainable growth, prioritizing the quality of life above simply growth as an end in itself. It was what I thought my children, then teenagers, deserved.

Shortly after, I met Gro Harlem Brundtland, then the Environment Minister (in Norway), while I was at the time the Minister for the Economy (in the Netherlands).

Later, the two of us became Prime Ministers of our respective countries and were together in Rio de Janeiro at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the Earth Summit in 1992, trying to give shape and substance to Our Common Future. It was there where NGOs and indigenous people convinced us to try and create the Earth Charter.

In the following years, people like Leonardo Boff, invited to go into silence by the Roman Catholic Church because of his Liberation theology, joined the effort, and now in 2015, the Pope, who chose to be named after Francis of Assisi, has written history with his Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’.

Only two generations after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Pope has made history by inviting mankind to the joyful celebration of life, contributing to the awareness needed to make a new start to achieve Our Common Future and to leave behind a period of self-destruction due to unsustainable growth and the lack of care for Our Common Home.

http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1156/1/Ruud-Lubbers-comment-on-Laudato-Si/Page1.html

June 23, 2015

Millennial Faith Leaders Offer A Vision For The Future Of The Environmental Movement

By Antonia Blumberg
Huffington Post

To many religious climate activists, caring for the environment isn't just a good idea -- it's a moral responsibility.

Pope Francis released an encyclical, or papal letter, on the environment last Thursday -- a move that has called attention to the role many faith leaders are playing in the battle against climate change. The pontiff has stood firm on ecological issues, calling the environment's decline "one of the greatest challenges of our time."
He is in good company among people of faith. On Sept. 21, 2014, some 10,000 people joined the interfaith contingent of the People's Climate March in New York City to demand that world leaders take action to protect the environment.

The Huffington Post spoke with six millennials who are helping to usher in a generation of faith leaders deeply involved in environmental activism. In their emailed responses, these six young people offered their stories, prayers and visions of the movement's future.

**Nana Firman, Islam**

*Firman initiated the Eco Fab Living campaign and runs Green Mosque Green Globe, a California-based program that provides environmental education to Muslim youth and the general public. She completed a fellowship in 2014 with GreenFaith, an environmental organization that trains religious communities to work on sustainability projects. Firman was also trained as a “climate leader” by former Vice President Al Gore through the Climate Reality Project.*

In early 2005, I was called upon by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature to aid a relief effort in Aceh, the northern tip of Sumatra Island [Indonesia], immediately after the earthquake and tsunami had struck in late December 2004. The initial mission lasted for about three months, but I ended up staying for four years, leading the development and implementation of [the] Green Reconstruction program during the post-tsunami recovery period from 2005 to 2008. Such challenges enhanced my awareness and increased my passion in the field of nature balance and ecological sustainability.

My passion in sustainability through ecological activism made me realize that I was practicing all along my own faith of Islam, which teaches that all human beings are the guardians of our planet and we should live with it in harmony. The very first verse that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), “I Q R A” (Qur’an 96:1), literally means to read, in the context of observation and exploration, the signs of the Creator not only written in the Qur’an but also painted in nature. Hence, there are qualitative principles within the Islamic tradition that outline environmental responsibility for the human family.

The current ecological degradation and climate crisis are moral issues. Thus, the faith-based environmental movement is about how we behave as human beings in regards not only to our relationship with each other but also with nature at large. So, let us be smart and active in our faith communities, as caring for the Earth, according to Islamic teaching, is an expression of worship!

**Sunil Kumar Yadav, Hinduism-Buddhism**

*Born and raised in a Hindu-Buddhist family in Nepal, Yadav is a master of divinity at the University of Chicago Divinity School. He holds a B.A. in environmental biology from Albion College and is currently investigating applications of interreligious engagements in conflict resolution and the reconciliation process within religiously plural societies.*
My Hindu-Buddhist faith and interfaith spiritual makeup highly inspire my ecological activism and passion. While my understanding of [the] science behind ecology is informed by my academic studies of environmental biology in college, I have realized that my passion for the environment originates from my Hindu-Buddhist upbringing. It comes from a very basic idea of dharma that translates to “a way of life.” As a being in this world, it is our dharma to peacefully coexist with other beings such that we can care, share and grow among each other. However, as humans, we are not coexisting. We are living at the expense of other creatures’ lives and habitats.

For me, a proper way to respond is with compassion. My notion of compassion is cultivated within Buddhist tradition. Compassion equips us with a perspective that allows us to appreciate other beings and to develop [a] deeper understanding of their existence in this world, which consequently can encourage us to stop corrupting and exploiting them.

There is need for regular and active efforts from all members of our society, not just scientists or activists, to learn, educate, practice and embrace environmental practices. Whether it may be a simple task like picking up a can and putting it in a recycling bin, or an arduous challenge of encouraging your state senator to vote for a bill that supports carbon reduction, we all need to act as one.

David Fisher, Judaism

Fisher is the founder of Interfaith Appalachia, a community development organization in eastern Kentucky. He is a 2011 alumnus of the Arava Institute, an environmental nonprofit organization, and a 2012 graduate of Oberlin College, where he pursued dual majors in environmental studies and Jewish studies.

One day each week, I follow the practice of Shabbat. The story of creation states that the world is incomplete without rest. Creation is not whole at the end of six days, when the physical world is complete. The only way to mend our environmental crisis, in a paradox, is to cease from affecting it. Climate change, the mass extinction of species, and other aspects of environmental destruction are at the hands of humanity. In all of the work that I do to help solve these problems, Shabbat is a holy reminder that the true response is in the limitation of human agency.

In the United States, where religious polarization runs parallel to political polarization, I think we need a language that transcends not only religion but also politics. Environmental values are certainly held across the aisle, but I think that the value of community development is significantly more universal.

I believe that the most important way for faith-based environmentalism to succeed is to translate our work into the language of community development, which I firmly believe is the strongest language for cooperation. I envision a robust movement where people work together across religion and politics to bring great change. I hope for a world defined by equality, sustainability, and opportunity.
Stacey Kennealy, Spiritual Humanism-Buddhism

*Kennealy directs the GreenFaith Certification and Shield programs, two innovative "greening" programs for congregations. She also writes "green guides" for faith-based communities, and provides consultation to sites that have environmental questions or need assistance. In 2013, she was named one of the year's "Top Ten Spiritual Heroes" by Spirituality and Health Magazine. Kennealy also owns a sustainable jewelry business.*

I have had a deep connection to animals and vulnerable communities from the time I was very young, and a desire to protect them. GreenFaith started as a short-term project after college -- it was to be a one-year grant working with religious schools -- and has evolved into a calling that has spanned nearly nine years. At a time when so many faith communities are struggling to keep their doors open, we are helping congregations grow in numbers, stay relevant, and care for the environment all at once.

One of the three jewels of Buddhism is the sangha, or the community, and that is where I draw inspiration. I view my sangha not just as those I meditate with, but as the entire world: inanimate, animate, humans, other animals and plants. There is such beauty, such grace, and such perfection all around, and I feel compelled to protect it. The natural world and all its inhabitants are teachers, if we only listen.

When I look to the future, I see faith-based environmentalism as the key force in solving the ecological crisis. Touching people’s hearts and values will shift the focus from unbridled consumption to sustainable living -- technology and science alone are not enough. The longer we wait for the science to save us, the closer we get to ecological collapse. We need to bolster the science with values, ethics, and in some cases, faith.

Gopal Patel, Hinduism

*Patel has worked with the Bhumi Project, a Hindu environmental organization, for the past five years. He currently serves as the organization’s director and lives in Oxford, England.*

I took a sabbatical a few years ago to India, where I lived in ashrams studying sacred Hindu texts. When I returned to England, I was looking for a way to align my professional and personal lives. When an opportunity came up to work at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies on their newly emerging Bhumi Project, it was something I couldn’t refuse. I’m excited about developing an informed and authentic Hindu voice on the global stage about environmental concerns.

My religious and spiritual beliefs inspire much of my life and work. "Trnad api sunicena" -- "be more humble than a blade of grass" -- is a teaching by the medieval Bengali spiritual leader Caitanya Mahaprabhu. By viewing the natural world with humility, one cannot avoid being ever-grateful to all Mother Earth provides us. With gratitude comes a desire to reciprocate with love and respect, which is how I feel we all need to treat the environment.

Faith-based movements have much to offer, and are increasingly becoming vocal about environmental concerns. Where governments, big business, and international organizations like
the U.N. have struggled, religions could succeed. With their combination of philosophy, spirituality and moral direction, meaningful engagement with the world’s faiths could yield significant positive changes in the world.

Tricia Bruckbauer, Lutheran Church

Bruckbauer is the program director at Creation Justice Ministries and served as a fellow with CJM through the Lutheran Volunteer Corps. She is a graduate of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, where she studied communications, sociology and religious studies. Bruckbauer is a self-proclaimed national park junkie, having grown up with Mount Rainier National Park as her backyard playground.

I believe that God has called us to be stewards of the Earth, and this means to be responsible caretakers in order to leave the next generations a hospitable planet on which to live. There are many passages in the Bible that inspire creation care, but the two that Christian communities generally use are the Genesis story and Matthew 25:40. We know that God created the Earth and all that is in it, and that it was good. God also placed man in the garden to "till it and keep it," which is where our stewardship call comes from.

In Matthew, Jesus says, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Here we understand that God calls us to care for our neighbors and poor and vulnerable communities. Many environmental problems like climate change, polluted air and water, and severe weather disproportionately impact marginalized communities, and these are the very people that we are called to serve.

One non-biblical quote that particularly influences my passion for this work comes from Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who wrote, "The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children." This can be applied to so many issues facing our world, but I think it creates a clear call for action on issues of creation care.

I think the faith-based environmental movement will continue to grow and become more diverse. Churches have been doing this work for decades, but I think that young people of faith will become more active in the movement. For most young people, caring for the Earth is a no-brainer since we will be living with the consequences of environmental actions (or lack of action) for a long time. The projected impacts on our Earth from climate change are really very frightening, but I think what the faith community can offer this discussion is hope. Christians are hopeful people, and if we start seriously caring for creation, there is hope for a bright future.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/22/religious-activists-climate-change_n_7454094.html

June 23, 2015

Laudato Si’ – Becoming Painfully Aware

By Chris Crews
State of Formation

This is the first in a multi-part series exploring the Laudato Si' Encyclical Letter on the environment by Pope Francis.

“Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.” - Pope Francis

On Thursday June 18th, Pope Francis released his much-anticipated Encyclical Letter on the environment, Laudato Si'. The Encyclical began making headlines months ago as the deadline for its release approached, with commentators on all sides of the political and religious aisle eagerly awaiting its release. The encyclical’s six chapters each deal with different themes, but all lead to the same conclusion—mankind is sinking deeper into sin and ecological destruction, we need to change our ways drastically, and the climate clock is running out of time.

There are a number of big themes that Francis is trying to tackle in this Encyclical, among them:

- the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet
- the conviction that everything in the world is connected
- the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology
- the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress
- the value proper to each creature
- the serious responsibility of international and local policy

One of the things that immediately stood out for me fairly early in the letter was the way Francis frames the age-old science vs religion question. Although he is clear that ultimately climate change is a theological issue for the Church, it struck me as noteworthy how much weight he gives to the science as theological justification.

“I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows.” (15)

Francis sees scientific, ethical and spiritual concerns as equally important, but I suspect some of his audience was surprised by his suggestion that the ethics and spirituality of climate change should be built on the “concrete foundation” of science. Francis, unlike some of his predecessors, seems to be more inclined to view science and religion as co-equals. This is encouraging for the success of ecotheology, and for Catholics hoping Rome will provide moral leadership on environmental issues.

As someone coming from an animist worldview, it was hard not to feel at times that the Pope had been drinking from the chalice of nature religion, especially when he talks about hearing the cry of our sister, Mother Earth. Even accounting for the St. Francis of Assisi influences on the language, I think this is more than flowery Franciscan poetics.
This view of the Earth as alive, or something close to it, can be traced to the growing influence of Earth System science and integral ecology. It's clear in the first chapter that Francis, or his scientific advisers, have integrated the view of the Earth as an interconnected and dynamic system derived from this synthesis.

“Still, we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation; these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises, for the world’s problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation. There are regions now at high risk and, aside from all doomsday predictions, the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view, for we have stopped thinking about the goals of human activity.” (61)

This more holistic approach makes this Encyclical extremely powerful, setting it apart from most environmental statements released by mainstream religious organizations. Instead of appeals for a greener economy and sustainable development, which often amount to little more than utopian calls for “green capitalism,” Francis questions the logic of neoliberal globalization and high-tech development, which he calls the “techno-economic paradigm.” It is precisely this paradigm that we need to be concerned with, Francis warns, because it is a root cause of our modern ecological crisis and the rise of “throwaway culture.”

Many religious critiques stop there, suggesting a mix of sustainability and renewables as the fix. Francis goes one step deeper. Throwaway culture, he suggests, has a darker shadow: Our ability to care for the world, both human and more-than-human, is vanishing. This lack of compassion manifests in a world that calls destruction progress, one that has become indifferent to life. One inevitable outcome is a human-driven unprecedented Sixth Extinction occurring on this planet.

Another outcome is the growing number of environmental refugees. Impoverished migrants fleeing the effects of climate change is a worrying new trend, as noted in recent reports. As Francis argues:

“They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded.” (25)

That last sentence is the crux. In order to be able to respond, that is, to be “responsible,” we need a framework to assign value or meaning. Those meanings in turn produce obligations, which we translate in ethical arguments about responsibility. But as Francis notes, we have lost this “sense of responsibility” for our fellow humans and the more-than-human world.

“It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know… Because of
us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right.” (33)

Theologically speaking, humans have given up the responsibility of stewardship but not the right of dominion. Francis suggests it is this willful turning away from our responsibilities that is the true evil we must face.

“As often occurs in periods of deep crisis which require bold decisions, we are tempted to think that what is happening is not entirely clear. Superficially, apart from a few obvious signs of pollution and deterioration, things do not look that serious, and the planet could continue as it is for some time. Such evasiveness serves as a license to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen.” (59)

Francis is challenging us to rethink individual and social responsibility, ultimately all the way to the highest level of international climate politics. We need a global revolution in our relationship with the Earth. As the Encyclical subtitle suggests, we must care for our common home. Hopefully the message of Laudato Si’ will play some small role in achieving that outcome.

*All quote references in () are to the paragraph numbers in the the Encyclical.

http://www.stateofformation.org/2015/06/laudato-si-becoming-painfully-aware/

June 23, 2015

Don’t go back to sleep

By Joan Brown
Global Sisters Report -- Capital E: Earth

I was leading the ninth annual Women’s Wilderness Camping Retreat in the Santa Fe National Forest when the papal encyclical, “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home,” was released. It has been three years since we have retreated in this amazing place of forest, meadows and streams. After a fire in 2013 the forest was closed because of threats of flash floods.

Scars from the fire and vast erosion from monsoon rains are evident everywhere. In this place, the encyclical is enfleshed. The land and communities surrounding them speak of the realities of fire and extreme weather exacerbated by climate change in New Mexico. Creation and people’s livelihoods are affected.

I traveled to the small town of Pecos, about 30 minutes down a road that is almost washed out as the result of fires and rains. One small restaurant boasts of an intermittent Internet connection
that allows me to download the encyclical and do some work for New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light around the encyclical.

While my hopes were for a document that could both inspire and call us to deeper action, my initial reading fills my poetic heart and activist soul with great gratitude. I am moved and pray a prayer of thanks for a call that encompasses “every person on the planet.”

As a Franciscan, I see the imperative to approach nature and the environment with an “openness to awe and wonder,” which are essential to living “intimately united with all that exists,” that forms a foundation of the document. Between the words is the witness of St. Francis and St. Clare to live simply and rooted in joy and wonder.

The opening paragraphs are essential foundations of the document: that it is necessary to hear and answer the call to address current political and economic systems in need of reform. Reform on a personal, societal and countrywide scale is required in order to live in a stance that is “a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.”

Prepared to be given a bird’s eye view of the concerns of environmental devastation, climate change, poverty and structures that create our ongoing dilemma, I am surprised to be given an eagle’s eye view of our reality that is sharp and in places so specific it causes discomfort. There are many invitations to conversion, a very Franciscan virtue.

*Laudato Si*’ begins to sing through me like the ancient *Canticle of Creation by St. Francis of Assisi*. My organizer’s mind imagines how this document can be of service. *Laudato Si*’ can add a moral perspective to a number of issues including: the **Clean Power Plan** the EPA will give to states in August; the Congressional appropriation of money for the **Green Climate Fund** to assist our brothers and sisters who are economically challenged and affected most by climate change; the mobilization of people of faith and conscience to raise a moral and ethical imperative for world leaders to agree upon a binding global treaty on climate change in Paris at the end of the year. (See **IPL Paris Pledge** to lend your voice.)

My head reels as I drive the windy road back to the retreat. Over dinner, after a day of solitude in the forest, the women are anxious to hear about the encyclical. When I report that it is a beautiful and commanding document in which the pope says, “I wish to address every person living on this planet,” they are all overjoyed to be included in the call of the encyclical.

These women are Mennonites, Catholics, “former Catholics,” Buddhists, some espousing no religion and one young woman who says she has come to know her religion as Love and being a loving person. They, as many of the interfaith people I work with, are in love with creation and their brothers and sisters and the future generations. They are very concerned about climate change, devastation of the planet, an economic system that creates more poverty and disparity and a human path leading to the brink of destruction and soulless lives of consumerism.

A line from a Rumi poem set to music has been sung during the retreat, and it could be a clarion call after reading the encyclical. “The voices at dawn have secrets to tell you. Don’t go back to sleep. Step across the threshold and don’t go back to sleep.”
“Laudato Si’: on Care for Our Common Home” will take time to read in depth and digest, but just as good cooks taste as they work on the sacred meal for guests and even share morsels with early guests, the tasting and sharing of morsels has begun.

This week I help lead a Wild GRACE youth and adult leader retreat at Ghost Ranch Retreat and Conference Center in Abiqui, New Mexico. The 90 participants (who are mostly Presbyterian) will be offered some tidbits to encourage, inspire and challenge them, such as: “Young people have a new ecological sensitivity and generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. At the same time they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits.”

I sing in gratitude for Laudato Si’ and pray with humility the lines of one of the prayers at the conclusion of the document.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love,
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light . . .

[Sr. Joan Brown, OSF, is a Franciscan sister from the Franciscan Sisters of Rochester, Minnesota, and executive director of New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/column/capital-e-earth/environment/don%E2%80%99t-go-back-to-sleep-27196

June 24, 2015

Laudato Si’: An encyclical of re-membering

By Margaret Galiardi
Global Sisters Report -- Capital E: Earth

Molloy College in Rockville Centre, Long Island, offered a new course this past spring semester that I designed and co-taught. It was entitled, “The Rights of Nature.” The course description explained that students would examine various paradigms for understanding the Earth / Human relationship from “biblically inspired” dominion, through conservation and protection, and ending with kinship paradigms which promote the rights of mother Earth.
After viewing the outstanding new video entitled “Green Fire” chronicling the life of the founding father of Land Ethic, Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), the students were asked about their relationship with their homeland of Long Island. One student spoke out boldly, “We have an abusive relationship with all land, not only Long Island. All we do is take from the land.” I didn’t expect that response and with a sigh of relief thought to myself, “Well, something is getting through.”

School is out for the summer, so I have no way of bringing the class back to explore the Pope’s new encyclical, but I wonder, if the tables were turned, what grade my students would give Francis for his encyclical. I have a strong hunch they would be pleased with the pope’s “whole-making” or “re-membering,” otherwise known in the encyclical as “integral ecology.”

It’s a clever extrapolation of Paul VI’s phrase “integral development,” which appeared in the 1967 encyclical, “On the Progress of Peoples.” The concept was the brain child of the French Dominican economist, prophet and missionary to fishermen of Northwestern France, Louis-Joseph Lebret (1897-1966). Paul VI, citing Lebret’s work in a footnote, explains it this way: “In order to be authentic, development must be complete; integral that is, it has to promote the good of every person and the whole person” (14). This is an important back-drop for an understanding of the Pope Francis’s “integral ecology.”

Francis references Paul VI’s work in the early pages of his encyclical, pointing to his prescient warning about a potential ecological catastrophe (4). This pope’s contribution is to enshrine forever in Catholic social thought the connection between “the good of every person and the whole person,” and Earth and an articulation of our identity as “Earthlings” with all its subsequent implications. As he writes, “. . . how inseparable the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace”(10).

In a kind of lament, he tells us in the opening paragraphs, “We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters” (2). In the fourth chapter devoted in its entirety to “Integral Ecology,” he reminds us once again: “Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it” (139). I would hope my students give the pontiff credit for his elaboration of one of Thomas Berry’s “Principles of a Functional Cosmology,” namely, “Earth is primary, and the human is derivative. “

So, whole-making number one for the pope: Earth and human are re-membered.

Another example of Francis’s whole-making is to be found in his statements in Chapter One about not only climate change, which has received the lion’s share of attention and rightly so, but also water, loss of biodiversity, decline in the quality of human life, breakdown of society and global inequality. It is an impressive “body scan” of the planet and most timely in its utterance. Not only does the world await the U.N. conference in Paris in December with hopes of a binding global treaty to reduce carbon emissions, (the pope does make several veiled references to this fact without directly mentioning the coming meeting), but the evening before the official release of the encyclical, the news carried reports about the dire state of the world’s aquifers. Twenty-
one of the world’s 37 largest aquifers – in locations from India and China to the United States and France – have passed their sustainability tipping points, a NASA report tell us. The report goes on to elaborate that this means more water was removed than replaced during a decade-long study period. Later on in the encyclical, in a comment sure to raise the ire of some, the pope in speaking about the governance of the oceans, calls for “agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of the so called global commons”(174). The inclusion of the full range of issues indicates that the Pope recognizes that again as Thomas Berry would say: the Earth is a whole and cannot be saved in fragments.

More points from my students for sure and whole-making number two for the pope: Earth, her one water system, diversity of species, flora and fauna, and human life are re-membered.

Whole-making number three: more than once in the encyclical the pope reminds us, “that it is not enough to think of different species merely as potential resources to be exploited while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves” (33). “In our time,” the pontiff boldly states,” the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish;” rather, “ . . . other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: by their mere existence they bless God and give him glory” (69).

The “biblically inspired” dominion model of relating to creation has been permanently retired with the words: “ . . . we must forcefully reject the notion that our being made in the image of God justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (67). The “other-than-human” has been re-membered in the affirmation of its worth in God’s eyes.

Yes, more points for the pontiff from my students, for as they would know from studying Berry, “The Earth is a communion of subjects not a collection of objects.”

The pope turns to the bishops of Bolivia for yet another area for whole-making, which is a lynchpin of the entire document: “Everyday experience and scientific research shows that the greatest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest”(48). It is a “no-brainer” for some, but in a global society like our own where the poor are institutionally and systematically marginalized and kept out of sight and thus out of mind, more points go to the pope for making the invisible visible. He tells us, “ . . . 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 poor” (49). He reinforces this point in ways too numerous to list. Two stand out for their far reaching implications: Profit cannot be the sole criterion (187), and “ . . . we need to think of containing growth . . . the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth”(193).

Whole-making number five: The poor are re-membered into the one community of life. They are not other, they are us.

Integral development and now integral ecology are all about making wholes where artificial and fallacious divisions have grown up over centuries. I recall vividly an experience I had years ago.
I began to feel as if I was bringing more of myself to prayer than ever before. It felt strange at first but then really right. It was an experience of alignment and integration, a re-membering of myself even. I came to understand it as born of my growing embrace of the Universe Story. I knew then that as I came to prayer in the morning, and as I moved throughout day, I carried the 13.8-billion-year story with all its unfolding – other-than human and human life – in my very body. I walked with a new integrity and joy. I carried the pain of centuries as well. This is what happens as we approach wholeness. This is how I feel after reading the encyclical.

In the first chapter Francis articulates the goal of the encyclical. He says, “Our goal is not to amass information or satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it” (19). It certainly had that impact on me. I am not sure about how my students would grade the encyclical, but I would give it an “A.”

[Margaret Galiardi, is a Dominican Sister from Amityville, New York, whose passion is the contemplative integration of justice and peace for people and planet. She is a “lover of the wild,” a spiritual director and workshop and retreat leader who has lectured nationally on the New Cosmology and the Christian Story. She spent a year living with the Trappistine monks in their monastery on the Lost Coast of Northern California in the Redwood Forest.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/column/capital-e-earth/environment/laudato-si%E2%80%99-encyclical-re-membering-27271

June 24, 2015

Religions for Peace New Faiths for Earth Campaign

Religions for Peace InternationalJune 24, 2015

Watch the video here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_3EuybS9Mk

June 24, 2015

Elizabeth May: Why Pope Francis’s statement is important

Earth Charter International

WireService.ca Media Release (06/20/2015) Ottawa, ON - "It is increasingly odd to realize that the voices of the established order, sources of top-down control and out-dated structures, are suddenly allies. My experience for decades was to deride the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for perverse "structural adjustment," the World Bank for bad development, the International Energy Agency for focussing on expanding fossil fuel reserves, and the Vatican for policies so opposed to contraception as to ignore the threat of HIV-AIDs. I now find myself in
the oddest of positions as a Canadian. They are all more progressive than my own government.

"The IMF and the World Bank are powerful allies in the fight to move off fossil fuels - calling for all governments to end fossil fuel subsidies and to place a price on carbon. The International Energy Agency is calling for two-thirds of all known reserves of fossil fuels to stay in the ground until at least 2050, to avoid a 2 degree C rise in global average temperatures. And now the Vatican is more aware of the science of climate change than is Stephen Harper. Galileo would be amazed.

"A Papal Encyclical is a rare event. And this one may be the most important ever. I urge all Canadians to read it, whether Catholic or atheist; Protestant, Jew, Muslim or pagan. It has something to say to us all.

"Its political intention is clear. We are six months from the opening of the deadline talks for the acceptance of a new, comprehensive international climate treaty. As the only Member of Parliament (other than Leona Aglukkaq) to have attended the negotiations in recent years, I have to admit that the prospects for an effective treaty are dim.

"Politicians make great speeches about increased ambition and the need for urgent action, but once behind closed doors their diplomats put on the brakes. The exception is Canada where politicians do not make great speeches and their negotiators put on the brakes. No question some nations and groups of nations are far more helpful than others. The EU has the most ambitious climate target, but ever since the economic disaster of 2008, in the talks its strength as a leader has been reduced. The US under Barak Obama is taking executive action to cut GHGs, but the State Department negotiators seem to be getting instructions from George Bush.

"In Warsaw at COP19, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, realizing the rate of progress was too slow, announced he would host a major UN climate summit in September 2014 to create more momentum for the COP 20 talks in Lima. The global citizens movement seized on his lead and mobilized the largest ever Peoples Climate Marches - all around the world, with 400,000 on the streets of New York the day before the U.N. climate summit. World leaders came to pledge action (not Stephen Harper, of course). But still, Lima sputtered.

"German Chancellor Angela Merkel understands the problem. She capitalized on her role as host of the G7 to make climate a focus. For the first time ever, the world's largest industrialized countries have declared that our only way forward is to stop burning fossil fuels altogether. Sadly, and shamefully for Canadians, to get Stephen Harper to sign a communiqué using the word "decarbonisation" required shifting the deadline in the draft communiqué from "substantially by 2050" to "by 2100."

"Any close observer of the talks will know that we need a miracle. Enter Pope Francis.

"His 74 page open letter to the world is vast in its ambition. It is largely focused on the need for climate action. He places the climate crisis in both scientific and moral terms. The over one billion Roman Catholics in the world will have to take heed - but so too should those of no faith. For in his science he is repeating what the IPCC, IMF, World Bank, IEA, OECD and others have
said.

"In his appeal to a moral response to the crisis, he also has something important to say to those of no faith. Any observers of our current crisis know that consumerism and greed are at the heart of it. We face a deeply moral challenge at many levels. The industrialized and wealthy world is in no position to say "treat all countries the same." We have created a crisis and those most at risk are the least responsible and most vulnerable. As his Holiness writes "the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor are the same."

"Another dimension of the moral challenge is inter-generational. How can we in our generation condemn our own children and their children to an increasingly unlivable world?

"But the Pontiff takes the issue more directly to our current culture. The encyclical takes aim at consumer culture where throwing something away is done without a thought. "Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity." (211)

"I was deeply moved to find words I had helped draft from the Earth Charter:

"As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning...Let ours be remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life." (207)

"The six Global Green Values were distilled from the Earth Charter. I was honoured to be an Earth Charter Commissioner, working with an extraordinary group from around the world. The Green Party at our roots is tied to the Earth Charter.

"So now we have a voice, one with whom we will never agree on everything. Not surprisingly, the encyclical inserts an argument against abortion. Still there is far more to be embraced than rejected in a call for a greater recognition that we must embrace each other as a human family with a shared destiny and a common home. The call for inter-religious dialogue and respect across cultures and beliefs is powerful. Let us all take it to heart."

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http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1152/1/Elizabeth-May-Why-Pope-Franciss-statement-is-important/Page1.html
June 25, 2015

Yale Environment 360

A Note From the Editor

At Yale Environment 360 this week, journalist Daniel Grossman travels to the Himalayan region of India to report on new research indicating that the catastrophic flood that swept through the state of Uttarakhand two years ago was linked to global warming. In an e360 special report and an accompanying video, Grossman goes to the remote town of Kedarnath, an historic destination for Hindu pilgrims, which was heavily damaged by the flood. He talks with local residents who survived the disaster and treks up mountains with Indian geographer Vaibhav Kaul to explore the flood’s source. As Grossman explains, Kaul and other scientists now believe the flood, which killed thousands, was in part caused by melting glaciers and shifting storm tracks caused by climate change. Read his compelling account and watch his video report that takes you to a part of the world that few outsiders have seen.

In an e360 photo gallery, we show you some intriguing projects that are using state-of-the-art tracking and tagging devices to learn more about the lives of animals and the ecosystems in which they live. View the gallery.

View all our content at Yale Environment 360 and add your comments to the discussion. And keep track of the latest environmental news at our e360 Digest and on your mobile device at e360.yale.edu/mobile.

Roger Cohn
Editor
Yale Environment 360

http://wuwm.com/post/wisconsin-islamic-group-ties-green-initiatives-spirituality

June 25, 2015

Next Steps: After Pope Francis

Catholic Climate Covenant
FROM THE DIRECTOR

WHAT A WEEK: For Our Common Home

It's been a tremendously exciting week here at the Covenant. Our staff read Pope Francis's encyclical at home in the wee hours of the morning, and we were texting each other all the way through with exclamations of joy and surprise. I've got to tell you that there has never been a document read at 5:00 in the morning that moved me like this one did.

As I read Laudato Si', I was deeply touched by the clear and compelling case Pope Francis made that our relationships with God, with one another, and with the planet are not as they should be—not by a long shot. The result is that We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. The encyclical is a call to recovery. When we think about our place in this created world, Pope Francis says, we must hear "both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

In the weeks and months ahead, you can count on the Covenant to help explore the deeper meanings of this encyclical. In the meantime, let’s just simply say…

THANK YOU, POPE FRANCIS!

Next week, I will travel to the Vatican to discuss Laudato Si'. We're asking for your help. Sign a letter of support to Pope Francis and share the link with friends. I will give your message to His Holiness. Please share far and wide--because there is a myth in the media that Catholics don't support Pope Francis or climate action, a strong show of unity matters.

Put your name in Pope Francis’s hands. Thanks for spreading the word.
YOUR STORIES

Many of you are taking action in your parishes and in your communities. We recently asked you to share stories of your successes. Here is just a sampling:

- From St. Pius X Parish in Omaha, Rosie told us about her group's work to make power companies more sustainable. As part of a broad coalition, Rosie and her team got the Omaha Public Power District to close three of its coal-burning power plants.
- From the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, American Province, Sister Terri wrote to say that more than 93% of the sisters use renewable energy. The sisters also made a video about climate change and fracking, available here.
- From the Church of the Resurrection in Dubuque, Judith wrote to tell us about her parish's "Green Team." The Green Team inserts sustainability tips into the parish bulletin every week and has even made its annual parish festival "green" through composting and recycling. The compost pile from this year's festival was the size of two Holstein cows!

We are enormously proud and grateful to be part of a community like this one. Keep up the good work, everyone.

WELCOME

We'd like to extend a special welcome to the supporters who have joined us over the past week. It's wonderful to have you as part of our community.

Over the coming months, you'll receive updates on Catholics leading the charge for climate solutions and resources to put your faith into action. If you have any questions or would like to chat, please feel free to contact us here.

ENCYCLICAL MEDIA ROUND-UP

In the past few weeks, the Catholic Climate Covenant has been mentioned in more than 50 news stories, in outlets that include the New York Times, the Washington Post, USA Today, ABC News, Fox News, Bloomberg, Al Jazeera America, and National Catholic Reporter. Among them:

- Executive Director Dan Misleh in the New York Times here, here, and here, and in the Washington Post here.
- Associate Director Lonnie Ellis on PBS.
• Project Manager Dan DiLeo in the National Catholic Reporter.

Additionally, several Catholic experts have provided extended encyclical coverage:

• Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, on Fox News Sunday
• St. Elizabeth College theologian Erin Lothes on Yahoo! News with Katie Couric
• Fordham University theologian Christiana Peppard on WNYC
• Marquette University theologian Jame Schaefer in National Geographic, Huffington Post, and WDJT

ENCYCLICAL RESOURCES

The Catholic Climate Covenant has produced several FREE resources to help your parish implement and act on Laudato Si’:

• Homily helps and other implementation tools are available here. The tools provided are:
  o Homily Helps for June 28, July 5 and August 30
  o Prayers of the faithful
  o Sample bulletin insert
  o Suggested entrance hymns

• A video with Cardinal Rodriguez and encyclical quotes arranged by topic are available here.

These resources are provided free of charge as part of our service to the Catholic community.

June 25, 2015

The Encyclical Laudato Si’ and the Earth Charter

Earth Charter International

Earth Charter International joins the millions of people and organizations that have congratulated Pope Francis and are hopeful about the release of the highly anticipated Laudato Si’ Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home, which significantly echoes the ethical vision proposed in the Earth Charter.

This encyclical has generated great expectations and commentary around the world. World leaders are expressing their satisfaction with this document and the social doctrine of the
Catholic Church, which will have great influence at the COP 21 climate change negotiations in Paris later this year, but also in the transition to a new paradigm of human coexistence with the environment. The document calls for the cultivation of responsible care for creation, with special attention to the poorest who suffer most from environmental damage.

For the global Earth Charter network this document is paramount, as Pope Francis makes an explicit reference to the Earth Charter reference in paragraph 207 of Chapter Six on Ecological Education and Spirituality:

P. 207. The Earth Charter asked us to leave behind a period of self-destruction and make a new start, but we have not as yet developed a universal awareness needed to achieve this. Here, I would echo that courageous challenge: “As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning… Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life”.

Central messages

The encyclical highlights the ethics of care that is central to the Earth Charter, as well as emphasizes several important Earth Charter principles including universal responsibility, interdependence, the common good, economic and social justice, and the precautionary principle, among others. These are principles that should underlie a new global consciousness, as stated in the Sixth Chapter Ecological Education and Spirituality: "Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal." (P. 202)

According to the press release of Radio Vaticana, a central question in Laudato Si’ is, "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” The Pope addresses these in P.160, “This question does not have to do with the environment alone and in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal”. This leads us to ask ourselves about the meaning of existence and its values at the basis of social life: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? ... Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results.”

What are Encyclical Letters and what is their significance?

Encyclicals are public and formal letters of the Pope expressing his teachings on matters of great importance (ref. Catholic.net). According to Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, the Encyclical letters are the most important documents of Catholic Church teaching. As such, Laudato Si’ will have great influence not only for the 1.2 billion Catholics in the world, but also for billions of Christians of other denominations. Encyclicals, when dealing with social, economic or political issues, are
commonly addressed not exclusively to Catholics but to all men and women of the world, especially world leaders, regardless of religion. This is the first time that an Encyclical addresses the issues of environment and sustainability, and for this reason and the great popularity of Pope Francisco, the document has generated great expectations.

In various statements, several published in the New York Times, Pope Francis has made clear that he expects that this Encyclical will influence energy and economic policies, as well as encourage a global movement for sustainability, calling on people to put pressure on politicians for change.

At Earth Charter International, we will continue to analyze the background of this Encyclical, and how we can join forces to raise awareness of the ethical and moral dimensions of environmental challenges and sustainability issues humanity faces, and how we can find solutions to change the global paradigm towards a more just, sustainable, and peaceful society.

Find the full text of the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si’ here: http://bit.ly/1Gi1BTu

Links to other articles on the Encyclical:

- Article by Leonardo Boff on the Pope's Encyclical
- Laudato Si’ — The Ecological Ethics and Systemic Thought of Pope Francis by Fritjof Capra
- Ruud Lubbers comment on Laudato Si’
- Media Release: Why Pope Francis’s statement is important by Elizabeth May
- Laudato Si and the Earth Charter by Steven Rockefeller
- Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp comments on the Pope’s Encyclical
- Climate Change Brings Moral Change by Mary Evelyn Tucker

http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1148/1/The-Encyclical-Laudato-Si-and-the-Earth-Charter/Page1.html

June 25, 2015

Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp comments on the Pope’s Encyclical

Earth Charter International

Taking in the extraordinary message of the Pope word by word I am reminded of two seemingly contradictory commentaries on how the Jewish People received the Ten Commandments. In the
first, the wandering tribe of Jews expressed their willingness to receive and implement them out of free choice. In the other commentary, the Jewish people refused to accept them, as had all other peoples, because they were too demanding. G-d brought the Jewish people to Mount Sinai. He then lifted the mountain above their heads and declared, “When you choose to accept the commandments you will live. If you don’t accept them I will drop the mountain on you and this will be your grave.” Pope Francis points to the overwhelming scientific evidence, coupled with our own local and global experiences, that we, by our own wrong and egocentric choices, have lifted the mountain of waste and neglect above our own heads.

Yes, this can become our grave. But, thank G-d, we still have the choice of preserving our Mother Earth, our home with all its sublime beauty. All we have to do is to recognize our inner knowledge that, as the Earth Charter states in the first paragraph of the Preamble, “…we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.”

However, according to Pope Francis, destiny is not only a lofty ideal but a concrete plan of action. In it we should put the poor, the neglected into the center of our concern, the ones who would suffer most when their more affluent brothers and sisters persist in pursuing their isolated self-interests. Part of the solution suggested is that we must value being more over having more.

Everyone and everything is interconnected. This principle of interconnectedness forms the core of the Earth Charter. The Encyclical urges us to heed the wisdom and the warnings of indigenous peoples. I remember well the cri de coeur of our beloved mother of the Maoris, Pauline Tangiora, who stood up during the last session of the Earth Charter consultations in Paris in the year 2,000. She related that all our efforts would be useless if we did not understand the meaning of the tribe, the natural feeling of belonging and responsibility. When we do not relate in peace and compassionate harmony to nature we will not relate in love and responsibility towards each other as humans. And when we don’t relate in love and responsibility towards each other as humans we will not be able to relate with peace and compassionate harmony towards nature.

In a paradoxical way climate change appears to me as a blessing in disguise. The imminent threat to our common existence will bring us together by necessity, and cooperation is the key. My father Jacob, of blessed memory, wrote from his hiding place during the Second World War to a boy hidden in a chicken farm, “Be always aware G-d created the human to perfect creation in the way he wanted it to be, a world filled with cooperation, love, and righteousness.” To me the words of the pope reflect this meaning and point to the hopeful quiet revolution that is taking place. More and more leaders, from different spiritual traditions and including humanism, realize that we desperately need each other to fulfil our common goal.

Thus, Pope Francis is our common brother and teacher. His call to love our Mother Earth and all living beings resonates with all of us. It gives the urgent appeals from other spiritual traditions and interfaith manifestos of recent years higher visibility. Out of the margin into the center. He takes us on a hazardous road full of obstacles from negation and paralyzing fear towards the indomitable energy of hope.

Fifteen years ago we gave expression to our existential notion that we stood at a critical time in Earth history, a time when humanity must choose its future. These were not wasted years. On the
contrary an ever stronger alliance of prophetic pioneering global citizens and the growing political will of governments brought about the never-expected success of the Millennium Development Goals. The record shows that humanity has averted moral bankruptcy. Yes, it is only a beginning, and we have to harness much more will and readiness to put ourselves in the position of the other. The Encyclical letter opens our eyes and our hearts to the overwhelming tasks ahead.

The Sustainable Development Goals, which the world community is asked to reach, are aimed at eradicating shameful poverty within fifteen years. This will only be possible when a responsible climate agreement is signed in Paris and implemented in the same fifteen years. The failure of negotiations in Johannesburg and Copenhagen is not the full story. Under the surface the soft powers gained momentum. The hundreds of thousands who marched in unison to achieve change in the streets of New York in September last year were the impressive avant garde of a growing massive protest. And the decision of the court in the Netherlands in favor of Urgenta, opens a new legal avenue to force governments to truly protect their citizens regardless of borders.

The Encyclical letter will have a crucial influence on the negotiations in Paris provided we all, and in particular spiritual traditions, support it fully and massively. It is my personal opinion, corroborated by many spiritual leaders in recent years, that an extra effort is required from each and every one of us. All our spiritual traditions require us to donate a part of our wealth to care for those less fortunate. In this spirit, an extra share of at least 0.1 percent to help alleviate abject poverty and sustain the earth would be in order.

It is moving for us who are part of the Earth Charter community that Pope Francis chose to quote the last paragraph of the Charter. We are each only a small instrument, each offering dedication and purpose beyond self-interest, so we repeat our collective hope and promise to the next generations. “Let ours be remembered a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace and the joyful celebration of life.”

And together with Pope Francis our mentor, I pray to G-d:

…Pour out upon us the power of your love  
That we may protect life and beauty  
Fill us with peace that we may live  
As brothers and sisters harming no one.

Awraham Soetendorp

http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1159/1/Rabbi-Awraham-Soetendorp-comments-on-the-Popes-Encyclical/Page1.html

June 25, 2015

Mary Evelyn Tucker: Climate Change Brings Moral Change
Earth Charter International

Pope Francis is clearly one of the most popular people on the planet at present. With his love for the poor, his willingness to embrace the outcaste, and his genuine humility he has captured the hearts of millions - Christian and non-Christian alike. He has inspired minds as well by his willingness to take on difficult issues such as ecology, economy, and equity, which he sees as inextricably linked. Indeed, these three interwoven issues are at the heart of his Papal encyclical released this week. An encyclical is a letter to the Bishops and all Church members. It is the highest level of teaching in the Catholic Church and this is the first encyclical on the environment in the history of the Church.

First, he addresses ecology. Pope Francis, following in the tradition of Francis of Assisi, celebrates the natural world as a sacred gift. He does this with his reference to St Francis' "Canticle of Brother Sun, Sister Moon" in the title of the encyclical "Praised Be". The kinship with all creation that St Francis intuited we now understand as complex ecological relationships that have evolved over billions of years. For Pope Francis these relationships have a natural order or "grammar" that need to be understood, respected, and valued.

Second, he speaks about the economy. Within this valuing of nature, the Pope encourages us to see the human economy as a subsystem of nature's economy, namely the dynamic interaction of life in ecosystems. Without a healthy natural ecology there is not a sustainable economy and vice versa. They are inevitably interdependent. Moreover, we cannot ignore pollution or greenhouse gases as externalities that are not factored into full cost accounting. This is because, for Pope Francis, profit over people or at the expense of the planet is not genuine profit. This is what has happened with fossil fuels causing climate disruption.

Third, he highlights equity. From this perspective, working within the limits of nature's economy can lead to thriving human societies. In contrast, exploiting the Earth and using oil and gas without limits has led to increased human inequities. Ecosystems are being undermined by climate change and the wealthy most often benefit. The Pope recognizes that such an impoverished economic system results in impoverished and unjust social systems. Thus, for him, the poor must be cared for as they are the most adversely affected by climate change.

In all of this the encyclical is not anti-modernity, but hopes to reconfigure the idea of progress. "Not blind opposition to progress but opposition to blind progress" as John Muir said. The Pope refers to this perspective when he speaks of a throwaway economy where humans are saturated in materialism. He sees the need for genuine progress where the health of both people and the planet can be fostered. Thus as the head of the Pontifical Academy of Justice and Peace, Cardinal Peter Turkson, has said, "We need to learn to work together in a framework that links economic prosperity with both social inclusion and protection of the natural world." This linkage of ecology, economy, and equity is what is being called an "integral ecology" and is central to the encyclical.

Such an integral ecology clearly requires interdisciplinary cooperation as we find our path forward on a planet of more than 7 billion people. We need to understand more fully the
challenges the world is facing in terms of economic development and environmental protection. These are not easy to reconcile. Indeed, the international community has been seeking answers since the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 set forth a framework for sustainable development. The world is ever more in need of an integral ecology that brings together a fresh understanding that people and the planet are part of one interdependent life community. Such an integral ecology affirms the cooperation of science and ethics, knowing that our problems will not be solved without both. It is clear that climate change is requiring moral change.

The Papal encyclical, then, represents a new period of potential cooperation. In the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology we have been working for two decades with hundreds of scholars to identify the cultural and religious grounds in the world's religions for a more diverse environmental ethics to complement environmental sciences. Between 1995-2004 we organized ten conferences at Harvard and published ten volumes to examine how the world's religions can contribute their varied ethical perspectives for a sustainable future. At Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies we have been broadening this dialogue and building on the work of environmentalists, policy makers, and economists. The Papal encyclical will be a fresh inspiration for these and numerous other efforts that are bringing together ecology and ethics for the flourishing of the Earth community. To this end we look forward to working together with the Center for Process Studies which, in addition to numerous publications, has convened conferences in both the US and China to advance the goals of ecological civilization.

http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1157/1/Mary-Evelyn-Tucker-Climate-Change-Brings-Moral-Change/Page1.html

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June 25, 2015

Steven Rockefeller on Laudato Si’ and the Earth Charter

Earth Charter International

Laudato Si, the new encyclical issued by Pope Francis, is to a large extent a carefully crafted Christian theological discourse in support of ethical and spiritual values that are also fundamental to the Earth Charter. Pope Francis, therefore, chose to include a quotation from the Earth Charter in the encyclical, the first and last sentences of “The Way Forward”:

As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning….Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

Even though some Earth Charter supporters will question the position of Laudato Si on certain issues, Pope Francis’ strong endorsement of ideals and values that are central to the Earth Charter vision is something to celebrate.

Both Laudato Si and the Earth Charter recognize that there is an ethical and spiritual dimension
to the world’s social and environmental crises that must be addressed, if the human family is to find its way to a just and sustainable future. In this regard, the Earth Charter stresses the urgent need for a relational spirituality that involves an ethic of respect and care for the community of life as a whole. The major theme of Pope Francis’ encyclical is “care for our common home.” He laments the increasing degradation of Earth’s ecosystems and the loss of natural beauty. Like the Earth Charter, the encyclical rejects the widespread and problematical view in industrial-technological civilization that the natural world apart from humanity has utilitarian value only and is just a collection of resources that exist for human exploitation. The imperative to care for creation in the Pope’s theological vision is inspired by a deep sense of the intrinsic value and interdependence of all beings—of plants, animals, forests, mountains, rivers and oceans.

Pope Francis emphasizes throughout Laudato Si the unique and equal dignity of each and every human being, but the encyclical also makes clear that people are an interdependent part of nature. With this interdependence and humanity’s special abilities and powers goes the responsibility to protect Earth’s biosphere. Pope Francis understands the great risks for present and future generations that are created by climate change, and he endorses the view of the vast majority of scientists that climate change is being caused by the burning of fossil fuels and other human activities. He gives special attention to the interconnections between ecological degradation and the suffering of the poor.

Caring for our common home according to Pope Francis requires a radical cultural transformation. It means ending poverty and advancing social and economic justice together with ecological restoration and protection. He urges us to develop a new appreciation of the interrelationship between the world’s spiritual, ethical, social, economic and environmental challenges and to adopt holistic thinking and integrated planning. He calls for a new global partnership of all nations and peoples infused with a spirit of cooperation and a readiness to share equitably the benefits of development. To all of this the Earth Charter movement can only say Amen. Laudato Si is a courageous and prophetic statement that will hopefully have a far-reaching impact as governments gather to make critical decisions regarding the human future in the months ahead.

http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1161/1/Steven-Rockefeller-on-Laudato-Si-and-the-Earth-Charter/Page1.html

June 27, 2015

Love Conquers Hate, Amazing Grace

By Dana Beach
Coastal Conservation League

Folks,

The events of these last two weeks will undoubtedly be counted among the most important in
decades. I suspect we will not fully understand their implications for years.

President Obama visited Charleston on Friday to deliver a eulogy for Senator Clementa Pinckney. Senator Pinckney and eight of his parishioners were murdered last week in the sanctuary of his church, the historic Mother Emanuel AME on Calhoun Street.

The president's theme was grace. There could be no more powerful lesson about grace and love than the reactions of the victims' family members. At the accused shooter's bond hearing last Friday, they spoke directly to the young man and one after another expressed their sorrow, and their forgiveness, for what seemed an unforgivable crime. In Senator Pinckney's own words from April 26 of this year, "We know that only love can conquer hate."

These graceful people have surely taught Charleston, our state and the nation more about love than has been conveyed in recent memory. And they have taught us about the power of religious belief to cope with and gain strength from tragedy. Senator Pinckney and his parishioners are true martyrs for the cause of love and kindness. And South Carolina seems, finally, to be paying attention. We will know more about this next week, when the Legislature votes on removing the Confederate flag from the statehouse grounds.

Across the Atlantic, another towering religious leader, Pope Francis, has released his much anticipated, and revolutionary, encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si*, (Praise Be).


Like the Emanuel AME community, Francis emphasizes the central role love must play in our world, in this case, to stop catastrophic environmental degradation. From his extensive declaration, "A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings."

*Laudato Si* coincides with the publication of a new EPA report on the staggering costs of failing to address climate change, as the *Washington Post* reports, and with NOAA's most recent status report (below) revealing that May 2015 was the warmest May on record, based on global temperatures. *Bloomberg News* provides an exceptionally clear illustration of rising global temperatures and its irrefutable attribution to human activities, in this article and series of graphs.

What's Really Warming the World? Climate deniers blame natural factors; NASA data proves otherwise


Finally, among this dizzying array of historic events is one of particular note. President Obama ended his eulogy in the TD Arena by singing "Amazing Grace." You can watch, and hear, it on this CNN video.
And from the *Post and Courier*, you can read about the 33 year old church West Ashley organist, who felt called to "assist" the president deliver this part of the eulogy.

This strikes me as remarkable. I'm not aware of another example in modern Western history in which a world leader sang, not for entertainment, but to make a profoundly serious point. Could there ever be greater testimony of the power of music to convey the fundamental truths of the human heart?

Dana

**Inaction on climate change would cost billions, major EPA study finds**

By *Joby Warrick* June 22

A global agreement to curb greenhouse gas emissions would prevent nearly 70,000 premature American deaths annually by the end of the century while sparing the country hundreds of billions of dollars’ worth of economic losses, according to a major government study on the cost of climate change.

Slowing the carbon build-up in the atmosphere would also prevent severe damage to a wide range of critical ecosystems, from Hawaiian coral reefs that support tourism to shellfish beds off the East Coast, said the report released by the White House on Monday.

The report, a five-year, peer-reviewed analysis that assesses the benefits of alternative strategies for dealing with climate change, concludes that every region of the country could be spared severe economic disruptions that would result if greenhouse gas concentrations continue to soar.

“The results are quite startling and very clear,” said Environmental Protection Agency administrator Gina McCarthy, whose agency was the chief sponsor of the report. “Left unchecked, climate change affects our health, infrastructure and the outdoors we love. But more importantly the report shows that global action on climate change will save lives.”

The report, “Climate Change in the United States: Benefits of Global Action,” seeks to measure the potential gains for Americans under an international accord to keeps global temperatures from rising by more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over historical averages. The study incorporates research from earlier peer-reviewed studies as well as modeling by scientists from the Energy Department’s Laboratory complex and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other centers.

Researchers compared what would likely happen in a business-as-usual world, in which carbon-
dioxide levels in the atmosphere soar to more than 800 parts per million by the year 2100, compared to levels of about 462 parts per million expected if aggressive action is taken over the coming decades to limit greenhouse-gas pollution.

The report concludes that the effort expended in combating climate change would yield a substantial dividend for Americans, with the benefits accumulating over time.

For example, improvements in air quality from reduced fossil-fuel emissions would lead to about 57,000 fewer premature deaths per year by 2100, the study said. Few extreme heat waves would result in 12,000 fewer deaths each year from heat-related illness, it said.

Local governments would avoid tens of billions of dollars in damage from floods and other severe-weather events, while farmers would save up to $11 billion a year in damage to crops from a combination of drought, flooding and destructive storms. Tens of millions of acres of forests would be preserved because of fewer wildfires, the report said.

“We not only have a moral obligation to act, but we also have an economic opportunity if we take smart but aggressive action to reduce gas emissions,” said Brian Deese, a special adviser to President Obama on environmental issues.

The report’s authors acknowledged that they did not attempt to factor in all of the costs related to cutting greenhouses gases, or consider potential impacts overseas. Moreover, the study does not specify a strategy for keeping global temperatures from rising by more than 2 degrees Celsius. Diplomats from 197 countries will meet in Paris in December to try to negotiate a treaty on reducing carbon emissions, but many climate experts say the pact will likely fall short of that goal.

But McCarthy pointed to the far greater costs of inaction, saying it was important start attacking the problem now.

“It is really not too late to avoid the worst impacts of climate change,” she said.

NOAA: May 2015 was warmest May on record for globe
March-May and year-to-date also record warm

Contact
Katy Matthews, Katy.Matthews@noaa.gov, 828-257-3136
June 18, 2015

The globally averaged temperature over land and ocean surfaces for May 2015 was the highest for the month of May since record keeping began in 1880. March-May and the year-to-date (January-May) globally averaged temperature were also record warm.

With this report and data release, NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information is transitioning to improved versions of its global land (GHCN-M version 3.3.0) and ocean (ERSST version 4.0.0) datasets. Please note that anomalies and ranks reflect the historical record according to these updated versions. Historical months and years may differ from what was reported in previous versions. For more information about these improvements, please see [http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/global/2015/5/supplemental/page-1/](http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/global/2015/5/supplemental/page-1/).

This monthly summary, developed by scientists at NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information is part of the suite of climate services NOAA provides to government, the business sector, academia and the public to support informed decision-making.

Selected significant climate anomalies and events: May 2015 (Credit: NOAA)

May 2015

- The May average temperature across global land and ocean surfaces was 1.57°F (0.87°C) above the 20th century average. This was the highest for May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record set last year in 2014 by 0.14°F (0.08°C).
- The May globally-averaged land surface temperature was 2.30°F (1.28°C) above the 20th-century average. This tied with 2012 as the highest for May in the 1880-2015 record.
- The May globally-averaged sea surface temperature was 1.30°F (0.72°C) above the 20th-century average. This was also the highest for May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record set last year in 2014 by 0.13°F (0.07°C).
- The average Arctic sea ice extent for May was 730,000 square miles (5.5 percent) below the 1981-2010 average and 27,000 square miles larger than the smallest sea ice extent on record that occurred in May 2004. This was the third smallest May extent since records began in 1979 according to analysis by the National Snow and Ice Data Center using data from NOAA and NASA.
- Antarctic sea ice during May was 500,000 square miles (12.1 percent) above the 1981-2010 average. This was the largest May Antarctic sea ice extent on record, surpassing the previous record-large May extent of 2014.
by 20,000 square miles.

- According to data from NOAA analyzed by the Rutgers Global Snow Lab, the Northern Hemisphere snow cover extent during May was 780,000 square miles below the 1981-2010 average. This was the sixth smallest May Northern Hemisphere snow cover extent in the 49-year period of record. Six of the seven lowest May Northern Hemisphere snow cover extents have occurred in the past six years. North America had its third smallest May snow cover extent, while the Eurasian snow cover extent was the 12th smallest.

**March - May 2015**

- The March-May average temperature across global land and ocean surfaces was 1.53°F (0.85°C) above the 20th century average. This was the highest for March-May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record of 2010 by 0.07°F (0.04°C).
- The March-May globally-averaged land surface temperature was 2.39°F (1.33°C) above the 20th century average. This was the highest for March-May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record of 2010 by 0.04°F (0.02°C).
- The March-May globally-averaged sea surface temperature was 1.19°F (0.66°C) above the 20th century average. This was also the highest for March-May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record of 2010 by 0.07°F (0.04°C).
- According to data from the Rutgers Global Snow Lab, the Northern Hemisphere snow cover extent during March-May (spring) was 50,000 square miles below the 1981-2010 average. This was the 22nd smallest March-May Northern Hemisphere snow cover extent in the 49-year period of record. Eurasia had a slightly larger-than-average March-May snow cover extent, while North America had its 15th smallest.

**Year-to-date (January - May 2015)**

- The year-to-date temperature across global land and ocean surfaces was 1.53°F (0.85°C) above the 20th century average. This was the highest for January-May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record set in 2010 by 0.16°F (0.09°C).
- The year-to-date globally-averaged land surface temperature was 2.56°F (1.42°C) above the 20th century average. This was the highest for January-May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record of 2007 by 0.09°F (0.05°C).
The year-to-date globally-averaged sea surface temperature was 1.13°F (0.63°C) above the 20th century average. This was also the highest for January-May in the 1880-2015 record, surpassing the previous record of 2010 by 0.02°F (0.01°C).

A more complete summary of climate conditions and events can be found at: http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/global/2015/5

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http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/love-conquers-hate-amazing-grace/

June 28, 2015

Pope Francis’s environmental message brings thousands on to streets in Rome

Vatican officials to discuss climate change and environment with scientists and activists including Naomi Klein

By Rosie Scammell
The Guardian

Thousands of campaigners and religious leaders have marched through Rome, backing Pope Francis’s uncompromising environmental message ahead of a Vatican conference on climate change, and urging world leaders to take action.

Holy See officials will this week discuss the environment with activists and scientists at a meeting at which Naomi Klein, a prominent social activist, will take centre stage alongside Cardinal Peter Turkson, one of the pontiff’s most senior aides.

Soon after the release of Pope Francis’s encyclical on the environment, regarded as a landmark intervention in the global climate change debate, campaigners on Sunday travelled to Rome from across the globe to thank the Argentinian pontiff for his papal letter.

In the encyclical, Francis directed sharp criticism at global leaders for their failure to combat climate change. It was greeted with a hugely positive response from environmentalists, who have seized on the pope’s message ahead of a United Nations climate change conference to be held in Paris in December.
The UN summit is aimed at reaching a global deal on climate change, but as the pontiff noted, previous meetings have ended in disappointment, with decision-making paralysed by disagreements.

Alongside Klein and Turkson, the conservation group WWF has been invited to this week’s Vatican conference and had a strong presence at the rally on Sunday, described as a “historic event” by Samantha Smith, leader of the organisation’s global climate and energy initiative.

“We have seen that climate change is such a big and important issue that you can’t solve it in a corner with environmental groups,” Smith said. “That’s why the mobilisation of people of faith, including the Catholic church, is so important.”

Activists at the One Earth, One Family event broke through the silence enveloping early-morning Rome with singing and chanting, waving paper birds high over the central Piazza Farnese before marching to the Vatican.

“The reason we are here is to thank Pope Francis, but above all it is to bring a message to the people and politicians on the Paris climate change conference – to make strong, ambitious and binding commitments,” said Andrea Stocchiero, from the voluntary group Focsiv, co-organiser of the event.

While a few hundred people began the multi-faith march, holding banners and sheltering from the sun under giant paper leaves, organisers said about 5,000 were present at the end of the march in St Peter’s Square. There, Francis exhorted a multi-faith effort to help protect the environment. “I encourage the collaboration between persons and associations of different religions on behalf of an integral ecology,” he said.

Among them was Yeb Saño, the Philippines’ former chief climate change negotiator at the UN, who is now a spiritual ambassador for the march co-organisers, OurVoices, a multi-faith environmental group.

Saño praised the pontiff for his “courage and leadership” and said the march represented “a particularly amazing day to celebrate”.

“We know that the adverse impacts of climate change are hitting the Philippines and it’s unfair, because we have very little contribution to the causes of climate change and we are at the receiving end of it,” he said. Pope Francis visited the predominantly Catholic country in January, little over a year after a devastating typhoon killed thousands of people in the Philippines. The November 2013 storm was the strongest recorded to hit land and was seen as an example of the archipelago’s vulnerability to the elements.

The pope’s encyclical was released five months after his Asia trip. While Pope Francis has ensured Catholic voices reach the centre of the climate change debate, organisers of the Rome march were keen to fulfil his wish of going beyond the Christian faith.
Kiran Bali, who travelled from Yorkshire in the UK on behalf of the Hindu community, said it was imperative that religious leaders such as herself get involved. “It’s so clear that the world is at a crucial tipping point due to climate change and it’s so important that faith leaders take action on this important issue,” she said. “Now is the time to unite, to come together and to really make a difference to protect the earth from further destruction.”

Representing the global Anglican community, David Moxon said a global response was necessary as ultimately all would be affected by climate change. “The challenge facing Europe and all of the industrialised and industrialising world is very important – we’re going to choke or cook unless we do something about it,” he said.

Massimiliano Pasqui, from the Institute of Biometeorology at Italy’s National Research Council, said the bel paese has even greater reason than its neighbours to act on climate change.

“For us in Italy – in the middle of the Mediterranean – we’re in one of the most vulnerable places. It’s necessary for us to build strategies because in respect to other countries in northern Europe, what we are up against has a bigger impact on our society.”


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June 28, 2015

Dalai Lama tells Glastonbury of the need to speak out on climate change

By Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Josh Halliday
The Guardian

_Tibetan spiritual leader endorses pope’s radical message on environment and calls for more pressure to be put on international governments_

The Dalai Lama has endorsed the pope’s radical message on climate change and called on fellow religious leaders to “speak out about current affairs which affect the future of mankind”.

The spiritual Buddhist leader was speaking at Glastonbury festival on a panel discussing issues of global warming alongside Katharine Viner, the Guardian’s editor, and the Guardian columnist George Monbiot.

He praised the pope’s recent encyclical on climate change, which warned of the unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, adding that it was the duty of people to “say more – we have to make more of an effort, including demonstrations”.

The Dalai Lama, who will turn 80 next Monday, called for more pressure to be put on international governments to stop the burning of fossil fuels and mass deforestation and invest more in green energy sources.
He said: “The concept of war is outdated, but we do need to fight. Countries think about their own national interest rather than global interests and that needs to change because the environment is a global issue.

“It is not sufficient to just express views, we must set a timetable for change in the next two to four years.”

The Dalai Lama said individuals also had their own responsibility towards the planet. Speaking about his own efforts, he said he always turned the lights off when leaving rooms and took showers instead of baths – though he admitted taking two showers a day.

The Tibetan leader went on to call for countries including Russia and the US to scrap their nuclear weapons and criticised Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, for his recent threat to increase the country’s nuclear arsenal.

Monbiot took the opportunity to appeal to Glastonbury to go further with its efforts to be ecologically friendly. He asked: “Why aren’t we calling for Glastonbury to be meat-free and fish-free?”

The Dalai Lama also embraced his historic visit to Glastonbury on Sunday with several other appearances, including an early gathering at the hallowed ground of the Stone Circle.

Speaking from a modest wooden stage emblazoned with the Tibetan flag, he made a rare comment on the escalating conflict in the Middle East, describing Islamic State violence in Syria and Iraq as “unthinkable”.

In a speech before hundreds of rain-soaked campers, the Dalai Lama said: “In this very moment, in some parts of the world, like Syria, Iraq, Nigeria and some other places – they’re killing, human to human being. Unthinkable. And the worst thing [is that] conflict, killing each other, in the name of their faith.”

He said the real meaning of jihad was not harming others, but using constructive emotion to combat destructive emotions. He said: “I daily use it in my five hours of meditation, this kind of jihad.

“There is nothing wrong with religious beliefs, but the people who are supposed to be following the religion have a lack of moral principle, lack of conviction.’

Asked later whether music made him happy, the Dalai Lama said “not much”. He said he challenged the view that music could bring inner peace: “If music really brings inner peace, then this Syria and Iraq – killing each other – there through some strong music can they reduce their anger? I don’t think so.”

The Tibetan leader made his final appearance at the festival during Patti Smith’s afternoon set on the Pyramid Stage, where he was presented with a birthday cake while Smith led the crowd in a rousing chorus of Happy Birthday. She then read a little birthday poem in his honour.
Speaking to Smith and her fellow musicians on stage, the Dalai Lama said: “Most of you have white hair – but the voice and the physical action looks very youthful. So that gives me encouragement myself. I’m now 80, but I should be more active like you.”

Indeed, his numerous appearances proved to be some of the most talked-about events over the weekend. During his first Stone Circle speech, a Tibetan man, clutching a giant flag of his home country, said he had bought a Glastonbury ticket just to see the Dalai Lama and travelled through the night to get to Worthy Farm in time for his appearance.

“I’m very, very excited. It means a lot to hear him speak. We drove from 2 o’clock last night, it took a long time. The whole night I couldn’t sleep. It is very exciting to be here,” he said, declining to be named because he feared repercussions from the Chinese authorities.

Merle Hansen, who was also in the crowd, said the Dalai Lama’s appearance was one of the highlights in more than 30 years of coming to Glastonbury.

She said: “I thought it was great, absolutely wonderful and perfect timing. It’s so nice to see so many people here – I find it very touching and moving.”


June 28, 2015

Climate Marchers Gather to Show Rousing Support for Pope

By Elisabetta Povoledo
New York Times

VATICAN CITY — When Pope Francis appeared on the balcony of the Apostolic Palace, where he delivers an address each Sunday, he was met by the usual cheers and by an unusual forest of bright green oversized paper leaves.

Had he been able to read what was written on the leaves — which he could not because he was too far away — the pope would have found quotes from “Laudato Si’,” or “Praise Be to You,” his encyclical on the environment published this month.

The leaves were among the colorful props carried by a hodgepodge of organizations — mostly religious or environmental — that marched to the Vatican on Sunday to thank the pope for his forceful message on climate change, and to demand that world leaders heed his call for environmental justice and climate action.

“We want the pope to know we’re behind him 100 percent,” said Tafara Dandadzi, a student in environmental law and governance at North-West University in South Africa, who came to Rome for the march and to take part in a seminar convened in part to bring together emerging leaders from various religious and geographic backgrounds to coordinate on climate action.
There are people here from different backgrounds with a common purpose,” Mr. Dandadzi added. “I hope the pope knows that, and I hope that the political leaders meeting in Paris later this year know that too.”

World leaders will meet in Paris in December for a United Nations summit meeting on climate change that aims to arrive at a comprehensive global accord binding nations to limit greenhouse gas emissions. The pope’s encyclical, which links the environmental crisis to economics and poverty, has been widely read as a call for political action in support of an accord.

The encyclical is hardly the first foray of a religious leader in the realm of the environment, but it comes at a time when there is greater consciousness — as well as division and debate — on what to do about climate change.

“Around the world the spirit of humanity is rising to recognize that we have to care for the earth, that there is a deep moral obligation,” said the Rev. Fletcher Harper, an American Episcopal priest and the coordinator of Our Voices, an interreligious campaign for climate action, which organized the march with an Italian Catholic development nonprofit organization, Focsiv.

Dozens of Italian and international organizations also took part in the demonstration, which brought hundreds of people to St. Peter’s Square.

“This pope is giving voice to a sentiment that is growing in all faiths around the world,” Father Harper said. “We need all people in leadership positions to go decisively on the record about the need for deep change.”

The encyclical is by far the most forceful contribution on the topic by a pope, who has the ear of more than one billion Roman Catholics. Francis’ personal warmth has endeared him to many outside his faith.

“It’s an amazing document that brings together environmental science, social justice and religious teaching and asks us to think about economic policies,” said Samantha Smith, the leader of the Global Climate and Energy Initiative at World Wildlife Fund International. At the heart of the encyclical is a powerful message “that the way we are living on the planet is not sustainable or equitable,” she said. “But it is also hopeful because it urges global mobilization.”

Sunday’s march reprised the spirit, albeit on a much smaller scale, of the People’s Climate March that brought 300,000 people to the streets of New York in September. And indeed, though Sunday’s march was staged at St. Peter’s Square, its message seemed to resonate beyond the Roman Catholic Church. Alongside nuns and priests and other Catholics were Buddhists and Hindus. Only Rome’s residents were conspicuously absent.

“I encourage the collaboration between people and associations of different religions for the promotion of an integral ecology,” Francis said, acknowledging the marchers and reprising some of his considerations in the paper.
Rabbi Lawrence Troster, from Teaneck, N.J., one of the organizers of the march, also underscored the universality of the pope’s message. “‘Laudato Si’ is addressed to everyone,” he said. “It is trying to create a consensus among all people, and not leave such an important issues to a small group of policy makers, leaders or diplomats.”


June 28, 2015

The Pope's Ecological Vow

By Paul Vallely
New York Times

In the days just before its publication, those involved in drafting the pope’s controversial encyclical Laudato Si’ were much exercised about how it would be received by conservative critics. But Pope Francis, Vatican insiders tell me, was unfazed. He remains so in the face of the onslaught of criticism that has indeed ensued.

The pope’s acceptance that global warming is almost certainly man-made has irked the vocal minority with more skeptical views. They say Francis has overlooked the ability of technology to provide solutions to climate change. They’ve upbraided him for ignoring the role of free markets in lifting millions out of poverty. They’ve criticized his dismissal of birth control as the answer to an overcrowded planet.

The truth is that Francis saw all that coming. As the dust settles, after the whirlwind that accompanied its publication, closer examination of the encyclical reveals that the pope implanted within it strategies to rebut these attacks. Laudato Si’ turns out to be one of the shrewdest documents issued by the Vatican during the past century. It has revealed Francis as a wily and sophisticated politician of the first order.

Francis learned a lesson from the American conservatives who branded his previous papal manifesto, Evangelii Gaudium, as Marxist. His eco-encyclical contains a raft of defenses against critics who dismiss it as the work of some kind of left-wing maverick.

The document takes its inspiration, like its name, from the writings of Francis of Assisi. The 13th-century saint, like his 21st-century namesake, combined a love for the poor, for peace and for nature. But if the saint’s theology was new, the pope’s is traditional. Moreover, he has taken care to locate his text firmly in the substantial body of teaching set out by previous popes, including two beloved by American conservatives, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Francis also made a point — highly unusually — of referencing the pioneering eco-theology of the Orthodox Church, as well as citing no fewer than 18 teaching documents from Catholic bishops’ conferences around the world. All this demonstrated his acute awareness of the
importance of alliance-building on such a major issue. You are not, he was telling critics, dealing with just one man here.

He took similar care over the science. The pope should stick to religion and leave science to the scientists, said one conservative, the Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum, in one of a wave of “prebuttal” remarks as the encyclical was being finalized. That is exactly what Francis did in accepting the view of the 97 percent of actively-publishing climate scientists who say human activity is a major contributor to global warming. The pope’s political acumen was also clear from the way he timed the encyclical to target the three United Nations summits on financial aid, sustainable development and climate change later this year.

But there is something more profoundly subversive about Laudato Si’ than what it says on climate change. On the day it was published, the pope privately told his closest advisers in Rome that the encyclical was not really an environmental document at all. Global warming is merely a symptom of a deeper malaise.

The real problem, he insists, is the myopic mentality that has failed to address climate change to date. The rich world’s indifference to the despoliation of the environment in pursuit of short-term economic gain is rooted in a wider problem. Market economics has taught us that the world is a resource to be manipulated for our gain.

This has led us into unjust and exploitative economic systems that support what Francis calls “a throwaway culture,” one that treats not just unwanted things but also unwanted people — the poor, the elderly and the unborn — as waste.

Capitalism may maximize our choices, he observes, but it offers no guidance on how we should choose. Insatiable consumerism has blinkered our vision and left us unable to distinguish between what we need and what we merely want.

It is in this analysis that the pope’s replies to his conservative critics lie. Capitalism may have lifted millions out of poverty, but it has done so at a huge cost. That is shown by the catastrophic air pollution in China, which has replaced the United States as the world’s biggest emitter of greenhouse gases. Worse than that, poorly regulated capitalism in the global south has left behind millions more — the weakest and poorest.

Technological solutions often just change the problem without truly solving it, the pope says. His critics have countered that gas from fracking is less polluting than burning coal. But that is like advocating dieting by eating reduced-fat cookies. Carbon-trading, Francis says, may just encourage speculation — and continued overconsumption.

Population is likewise a red herring, he insists. Poor people make hardly any contribution to global warming, according to one of the pope’s chief science advisers, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research. A 10 percent cut in emissions by rich nations, he says, would be far more effective in combatting global warming than any birth control program.
In all this, the market has tricked us into confusing technological advance with progress. It has reduced our politics to a maximization of our individual freedom and choice. We have forgotten the common good as we have our common home, the earth.

Francis is saying that the environmental crisis is really a crisis in laissez-faire capitalism. And he is saying that the answer is a profound change at all levels — political, economic, social, communal, familial and personal. This is not Marxist, for it lacks a materialist view of history. But it is revolutionary — and deeply disturbing to those with a vested interest in the status quo.

Previous popes have spoken out boldly on environmental degradation. but it was mainly a side issue. For Francis it is central. He is the first pope from the global south, and from the outset he called for “a poor Church for the poor.” He is unafraid to rebuke the world’s politicians for “weak” leadership. But he also gets into the nitty-gritty detail to tell ordinary Catholics to use less heating and air conditioning, sort and recycle garbage, use buses or car-shares, and turn off unnecessary lights.

Ecologists have been saying all that for decades, but Francis is delving to a deeper level in the human psyche. Such “simple daily gestures,” he says, will “break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness.” He asks “every person living on this planet” to stand before God, or our own consciences, and be honest with ourselves about the consumerist lifestyle to which so many of us are in thrall.

Francis knows that if the consciences of ordinary Catholics can be pricked, they may begin to adjust their life choices — and that could create pressure for political action. Climate change skeptics may well find that in Francis they have met their most formidable opponent.

Paul Vallely is visiting professor of public ethics at the University of Chester and the author of the forthcoming book “Pope Francis — The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism.”


June 29, 2015

What ‘Laudato Si’ Means for Malawi

By Alex Muyebe, S.J., and Peter Henriot, S.J.
Irish Missionary Union

It was a very tall and very full tree, branches thick and thin. Ideal for cutting down to cook many meals and to warm many huts. But over the years, no one touched it, despite trees all around it having been cut down and the landscape left quite barren.

When asked why this tree had been preserved, one of the local Malawian villagers answered very directly and simply: “The spirits protect the tree, to help us draw water locally.” And yes, a closer look at the roots of the tree revealed a small spring that provided good fresh water. A
further probe revealed that people of this local village and other villages in the area have a very strong cultural tradition of belief in a spirit-filled world. For instance, the people in the area believe that this particular tree shelters spirits which provide water for the communities around, offering good environmental protection for the people.

That recognition of a spirit-filled environment that is for the delight and the good of humans is central in *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis’s dramatic encyclical on the environment. Indeed, this is another way of expressing the message with which the Pope begins his encyclical. “In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.” [#1]

We hope that *Laudato Si* can reinforce that good tradition in Malawi, a developing country that so very much needs environmental protection today. It is lack of protection from the impact of climate change that daily and substantially contributes to making Malawi one of the poorest countries in the world. (We personally know this as one of us assists village women to produce and promote use of energy efficient stoves that reduce use of wood fuel, and the other of us is working with a secondary school with a “green” commitment in both construction and instruction.)

Indeed, Malawi is a poor country, ranking 174 out of 187 on the UN Human Development Index. But it is a peaceful country with a fairly lively democratic tradition and is very appropriately called “The Warm Heart of Africa.” Its future, however, is threatened by the major global phenomenon addressed in *Laudato Si*: environmental damages due to increasing climate change.

Pope Francis’s message should be well received in Malawi for two reasons: 1) it firmly acknowledges the reality of climate change and its close connection with human activities; and 2) it highlights in particular the need to respect and protect the dignity and lives of the poor, those most vulnerable to climate change, who are the majority of Malawians.

*Climate change is real*

The message of *Laudato Si* could not be clearer: “A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system…. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it.” (#23)

What does that mean in Malawi? A serious problem facing this southern African country and contributing to its environmental difficulties is its over-dependence on one export crop: tobacco. British colonialists oriented the economy in that direction and we still live with its consequences today. Tobacco now brings in over 60% to 70% of foreign earnings. But projections for future earnings will be seriously affected by increased controls on tobacco trade, e.g., WHO’s proposed international regulations.
But to talk about tobacco in Malawi is not simply to talk about the commercial side of its production or the health consequences of smoking cigarettes. Even more central has become attention to the environmental consequences of producing tobacco.

Deforestation – with consequent climate change effects — in this once very green country increases every day and tobacco production is one major cause. Serious ecological damage is due to increased clearing of land to plant tobacco and heavy use of trees for fires to cure the tobacco. Studies have estimated that a hectare of wooded land may be needed to cure one hectare of tobacco. And that adds up fast to deforestation.

However, even if Malawi did not face environmental damage because of it heavy dependence on tobacco production, it still would face the environmental consequences of heavy use of biomass to produce energy for cooking and heating for the majority of Malawians. About 83% of Malawi’s population live in rural areas and rely on wood-fuel for basic energy supply. With less than 9% of households having access to electricity (one of the lowest rates in Africa), both large trees and scrubby bushes are eagerly cut for firewood and to make charcoal, for Malawians to cook and to warm. And this significantly contributes to the widespread phenomenon of deforestation with its disastrous impact on climate change.

Forests in Malawi were once strongly protected during the 30 year iron rule of the country’s founder, Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1964-1994). Banda forbade the indiscriminate cutting of the country’s beautiful and resourceful forest cover. But with his passing, such protection also passed and deforestation has become widespread, with the sad consequences of promotion of global warming and climate change. Trees and forestsoils absorb and store carbon. Diminishing forests result in this carbon being released as carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Malawians do not need scientific investigations to show them that climate change in their beautiful country is indeed very real. They have unfortunately been undergoing that change in very dramatic ways in recent years.

A summary of the consequences of that change is sad to read. but sadder still to experience: increased water scarcity, unpredictable weather patterns, recurring flooding and droughts, unpredictable start of rainfall with short rainy seasons, prolonged dry spells during rainy seasons, drying up of rivers and lakes with lowering fish supplies, heat waves, frequent bush fires, increased prevalence of water borne diseases, low and unstable hydro-electric production, declining flora and fauna, and declining natural specie.

A Malawian woman farmer ably describes the effects of climate change: “In years past, I used to plant my maize field at the end of October or beginning of November, when rains are just beginning. Then with rains stopping in late March I would have been assured of a good harvest. But in recent years, the rains don’t start until late November, then stop in mid-December, trickle in a bit in January, and dry up completely by February. No good harvest, and plenty of hunger in my family!”
The woman’s story is verified in the announcement that in 2015 the UN World Food Programme will provide over 700,000 Malawian families with food assistance because of crops destroyed by both flooding and drought in the past year.

**Global contributions to local climate change**

Of course it isn’t only the deforestation in the country itself that is causing climate change in Malawi. This point is made strongly by Pope Francis, a point ringing so true and so sad for Malawians. “…a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity…. The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system.”

This fossil fuel use on a global scale – firing the global energy system – has been strongly disordering the climate of our fragile earth. For example, global emissions of carbon dioxide have increased over 50% from 1990 levels. Very little of these global emissions come from a poor and non-industrialised country like Malawi, but from the mighty fossil fueled economies of Europe, North America and China.

Thus it is understandable why Pope Francis turns his discussion of environment so strongly into a powerful call to respect and protect the dignity and lives of the poor, those most vulnerable to climate change. He emphasises that “…we have to realise 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.*” (#49)

Again and again, the Pope returns to lift up the suffering of the poor as a consequence of the deterioration of the environment. “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.” (#48)

This emphasis will be heard clearly in Malawi, where it is estimated that 66.7% of the 16 million Malawians experience “*multidimensional poverty*” – a newly-designed measurement of several factors that constitute poor people’s experience of deprivation. This includes things such as poor health, lack of education, inadequate living standard, lack of income, disempowerment, poor quality of work and threat from violence.

**Responses in Malawi**

It is a difficult fact to face, but face it we must: Malawians alone can’t alter the climate change catastrophe the country faces. Major global actors must be honest in looking at the situation, creative in designing effective responses and courageous in taking some hard and unpopular actions. Pope Francis repeatedly calls upon more effective international cooperation for protection of our common home.
That is the importance of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Paris this coming December. Pope Francis sadly notes that previous such conferences have not been effective in addressing this issue: “International negotiations cannot make significant progress due to positions taken by countries which place their national interests above the global common good. Those who will have to suffer the consequences of what we are trying to hide will not forget this failure of conscience and responsibility.”(#165)

But there are some steps that can indeed be taken at the local level in Malawi to move in a direction that offers more hope than despair.

It is significant, for example, that the major development offices of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi recently issued a strong challenge to the members of the Malawi Parliament to design national budget priorities that would realistically take into account the need for recovery from the climate change floods experienced by thousands of Malawians earlier this year.

At a local level, efforts are being made to substitute the traditional three-stone open fire cooking which uses much firewood with energy efficient stoves (mbaula) which reduce the use of firewood by 70-80%. The Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) in Lilongwe is working with local women groups to construct simple stoves, disseminate them to rural communities, and promote their adoption and use. Apart from reducing the use of wood-fuel, the energy-efficient mbaula also reduces emission of carbon into the atmosphere. Use of the simple energy-efficient stoves is an example of the personal steps that Pope Francis calls for that can make a difference in the protection of the environment.

Early on in Laudato Si, the Pope notes his conviction that “change is impossible without motivation and a process of education….” (#15). In Malawi a new secondary school is aiming to make that education for ecological change possible in its construction as well as in its instruction. Loyola Jesuit Secondary School (LJSS) in Kasungu has used soil based bricks to build its many new buildings, rather than relying on the traditional kiln burnt bricks that consume many trees in preparation of the final brick. The joinery preparing furniture for desks and chairs, bunk beds, etc., uses trees from its lot where new trees are planted regularly to prevent local level deforestation. Solar water heaters have been installed around campus, cutting electrical usage. Small steps, but good steps.

It is certainly true when Laudato Si speaks of “our common home,” it is the whole globe of Mother Earth that is referred to. But for we who live in Malawi, the message of Pope Francis is particularly meaningful and challenging. Our response will determine our future.

29 June 2015


[An abridged version of this article appears in the British Catholic magazine, THE TABLET, 28 August 2015]
June 29, 2015

ESA commends Pope Francis for encyclical on the environment

By Monica G. Turner, David W. Inouye, and Jill S. Baron
Ecological Society of America

The following statement is attributable to the Ecological Society of America (ESA), President-elect Monica G. Turner, PhD, President David W. Inouye, PhD and Immediate Past-president Jill S. Baron, PhD. ESA represents nearly 10,000 professional ecologists in the US.

“The Ecological Society of America commends Pope Francis for his insightful encyclical on the environment. Addressed to everyone on this planet, the letter issued on 18 June 2015 is an eloquent plea for responsible Earth stewardship. The pope is clearly informed by the science underpinning today’s environmental challenges. The encyclical deals directly with climate change, its potential effects on humanity and disproportionate consequences for the poor, and the need for intergenerational equity. The document is remarkable for its breadth, as it also addresses pollution, overuse of natural resources, landscape change, sense of place, and the loss of biodiversity. The pope recognizes that slow rates of change can mask the seriousness of environmental problems and the urgency to act. Pope Francis also acknowledges the importance of all taxa and all levels of biodiversity in sustaining our global commons.

“In addition to drawing attention to global change, we are very pleased to see a world leader of his stature advocate strongly for ecological research and education. Pope Francis writes, ‘Greater investment needs to be made in research aimed at understanding more fully the functioning of ecosystems and adequately analyzing the different variables associated with any significant modification of the environment.’ At a time when science is woefully politicized, the pope stresses the importance of unfettered research, stating that ‘… it is essential to give researchers their due role, to facilitate their interactions, and to ensure broad academic freedom.’ Noting that education is fundamental to change, the pope – an experienced teacher himself – advocates passionately for ecological education at all levels. We firmly agree with these sentiments, which align well with the mission of the Ecological Society of America.

“Today’s environmental dilemmas require bold responses, and the pope suggests actions to sustain ecosystems at local to global scales. He sees the need for comprehensive solutions solidly grounded in understanding of nature and society. Because there is no single path to sustainability, he sees generating viable future scenarios as necessary to stimulate dialogue toward finding solutions. We concur.

“Science and religion offer different but complementary ways of engaging the world around us. Ecologists produce fundamental understanding that helps to meet the challenges outlined so well by Pope Francis, such as planning a sustainable and diversified agriculture, promoting better management of marine and forest resources, and providing universal access to drinking water.
Support for these goals by religion will facilitate their achievement. We thank Pope Francis for entering into this discussion. We hope his leadership will lead to serious dialogue among – and action by – the world’s religious, political and scientific leaders on the environmental challenges facing this and future generations of humanity.”


June 29, 2015

The Earth Charter in 2015

Address by Steven C. Rockefeller

Earth Charter+15

It is a privilege to be here with you for this celebration of the 15th anniversary of the launch if the Earth Charter, which took place at the Peace Palace in The Hague. Much has been accomplished in recent years and the Earth Charter’s ethical principles remain profoundly relevant to efforts to find long-term solutions to the major challenges facing humanity.

Read the full address:


June 30, 2015

Clergy and People of Faith Arrested in Civil Disobedience Blockade at Crestwood Midstream

By Sandra Steingraber
We Are Seneca Lake

Media Contact: Sandra Steingraber | 607.351.0719

photos: http://www.wearesenecalake.com/photos-faith/

video: http://www.wearesenecalake.com/video/

Clergy and People of Faith Arrested in Civil Disobedience Blockade at Crestwood Midstream
Protesters Read from Pope Francis Encyclical on Climate Change; Rev. Jane Winters, Former Reading Resident, Among 17 Arrested

Watkins Glen, NY – In an act of civil disobedience, 17 gas storage protesters led by former Reading Center resident Reverend Jane Winters, formed a human blockade shortly after sunrise this morning at the north entrance of Crestwood Midstream on Route 14. The participants, from ten counties across New York State, included members of Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Islamic faiths.

All 17 were arrested shortly before 8 a.m. by Schuyler County deputies, taken into custody, charged with trespassing, and released.

The blockaders held banners that said “People of Faith Against Crestwood: Because Creation,” and “The Climate is a Common Good,” which references Pope Francis’ recent encyclical letter on climate change.

Protesters were reading aloud from the Pope’s encyclical at the time of their arrest. When the arresting officer ordered them to drop the document, they sang and prayed.

None of the protesters this morning had been previously arrested as part of the We Are Seneca Lake movement, which opposes Crestwood’s plans for methane storage expansion in lakeside salt caverns and which has been ongoing since October 2014.

The total number of arrests now stands at 296 in the eight-month-old civil disobedience campaign.

Crestwood’s methane gas storage expansion project was approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission last October in the face of broad public opposition and unresolved questions about geological instabilities, fault lines, and possible salinization of Seneca Lake, which serves as a source of drinking water for 100,000 people.

Presbyterian minister Reverend Jane Winters said, “From the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and continuing through the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian scriptures, God calls God’s children to take care of the earth that has been entrusted to them. We frequently refer to this as being good stewards of creation. The project that Crestwood plans to expand through its Arlington subsidiary and then doubling-down with putting propane and butane in adjacent caverns does not represent good stewardship of creation. The highest calling of a Christian is to love God and love neighbor. I am out here today because I love God, especially through God’s creation, and I love my neighbors, especially the ones who live here in Reading Center where I lived for 13 years.”

Areil Gold, 40, of Ithaca said, “The Torah, the Holy Scripture of the Jewish people, instructs us to make decisions that will allow the communities of the future generations to continue to live. I consider actions that threaten life on this earth, such as the storage of explosive gasses in the fragile salt caverns of Seneca Lake, a violation of this commandment. The potential short-term profits for Crestwood are not worth the risk of the degradation and destruction of our
environment and life itself. In our prophetic tradition, it is not enough to speak out against this threat to our communities and ecosystem—we must pray with our feet, as Rabbi Joshua Heschel demonstrated during the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

Kevin Kunster, 60, Copake Falls, Columbia County, said, “With the scientific information we now have at hand, to do nothing is to be guilty of indifference and perhaps complicity.”

Those arrested today were:

Mike Bucci, 67, Walton, Delaware County
Tricia Campbell, 72, Wolcott, Wayne County
Hannah Dickinson, 33, Geneva, Ontario County
Andrew Feron, 51, Cottekill, Ulster County
Martha Fischer, 58, Enfield, Tompkins County
Arthur Godin, 66, Enfield, Tompkins County
Ariel Gold, 40, Ithaca, Tompkins County
Ben Guthrie, 63, Interlaken, Seneca County
Larry Hirschberger, 60, Ithaca, Tompkins County
Kevin Kuenster, 60, Copake Falls, Columbia County
Steve Marcus, 60, Arkport, Steuben County
Janet McCue, 65, Hector, Schuyler County
Victoria Rasmussen, 43, Valois, Schuyler County
Dianne Roe, 72, Corning, Steuben County
Ryan Solomons, 23, New Paltz, Ulster County
Camille Tischler, 67, Ithaca, Tompkins County
Reverend Jane Winters, 62, Elmira, Chemung County

Read more about the protesters at: http://www.wearesenecalake.com/seneca-lake-defendes/.


**Background on the protests:**

Protesters have been blocking the Crestwood gas storage facility gates since Thursday, October 23rd, including a rally with more than 200 people on Friday, October 24th. On Wednesday, October 29, Crestwood called the police and the first 10 protesters were arrested. More information and pictures of the actions are available at [www.WeAreSenecaLake.com](http://www.WeAreSenecaLake.com).

The unified We Are Seneca Lake protests started on October 23rd because Friday, October 24th marked the day that major new construction on the gas storage facility was authorized to begin. The ongoing acts of civil disobedience come after the community pursued every possible avenue to stop the project and after being thwarted by an unacceptable process and denial of science. The protests are taking place at the gates of the Crestwood compressor station site on the shore of Seneca Lake, the largest of New York’s Finger Lakes.

The methane gas storage expansion project is advancing in the face of broad public opposition and unresolved questions about geological instabilities, fault lines, and possible salinization of the lake, which serves as a source of drinking water for 100,000 people. Crestwood has indicated that it intends to make Seneca Lake the gas storage and transportation hub for the northeast, as part of the gas industry’s planned expansion of infrastructure across the region.

*Note that the WE ARE SENECA LAKE protest is to stop the expansion of methane gas storage, a separate project from Crestwood’s proposed Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) storage project, which is on hold pending a Department of Environmental Conservation Issues Conference on February 12th.

As they have for a long time, the protesters are continuing to call on President Obama, U.S. Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, Governor Cuomo, and Congressman Reed to intervene on behalf of the community and halt the dangerous project. In spite of overwhelming opposition, grave geological and public health concerns, Crestwood has federal approval to move forward with plans to store highly pressurized, explosive gas in abandoned salt caverns on the west side of Seneca Lake. While the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has temporarily halted plans to stockpile propane and butane (LPG) in nearby caverns—out of ongoing concerns for safety, health, and the environment—Crestwood is actively constructing infrastructure for the storage of two billion cubic feet of methane (natural gas), with the blessing of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC).
More background, including about the broad extent of the opposition from hundreds of wineries and more than a dozen local municipalities, is available on the We Are Seneca Lake website at http://www.wearesenecalake.com/press-kit/.

http://www.wearesenecalake.com/faith-arrests/

Summer 2015

Among Republicans, Catholics More Likely to Believe that Global Warming is Happening and Support Policies to Reduce It

By Yale Project on Climate Change Communication
Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies

On June 18th, Pope Francis released a much-anticipated encyclical—one of the most significant forms of communication within the Catholic Church—on climate change. In September, the Pope will visit the United States, where one in four Americans are Catholic, and address the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress at the invitation of House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH).

Our research has shown that, in general, Republicans are less convinced that human-caused global warming is happening and less supportive of climate and clean energy policies than are Democrats. We have also found that American Catholics are more likely than other American Christians to believe global warming is happening and to be worried about it.

In this Climate Note we investigate whether or not there are differences in global warming beliefs, attitudes, and policy preferences between Catholic and non-Catholic Republicans.

Overall, we find that Catholic Republicans are more convinced that global warming is happening and human-caused, and are more worried and supportive of climate policies, than are non-Catholic Republicans. These differences between Catholics and non-Catholics are unique to Republicans; that is, we see far fewer differences between Catholic and non-Catholic Democrats and Independents on these issues.

A Majority of Catholic Republicans Think Global Warming Is Happening and Is Caused Mostly by Human Activities

A majority of Catholic Republicans in the U.S. thinks that global warming is happening (51%), compared to a minority of non-Catholic Republicans (42%).

Further, 36% of Catholic Republicans say global warming is caused mostly by human activities, compared to only 30% of non-Catholic Republicans.

Catholic Republicans Are More Worried About Global Warming
Catholic Republicans are also more worried about global warming than other Republicans—36% say they are somewhat or very worried about global warming, while fewer non-Catholic Republicans are worried (30%).

**Catholic Republicans Are More Likely Than Non-Catholic Republicans to Understand Most Scientists Think Global Warming Is Happening**

Though nearly all climate scientists (97%) are convinced that human-caused global warming is happening (1), we find that among Republicans, Catholics (30%) are more likely than non-Catholics (25%) to know that most scientists agree global warming is happening.

**Catholic Republicans Are More Supportive of Policies to Reduce Global Warming**

Among Republicans, Catholics also express greater support for a variety of policies that would help reduce global warming than do non-Catholics, such as providing tax rebates to people who purchase energy-efficient vehicles or solar panels (71% versus 64% of non-Catholic Republicans) and for funding more research into renewable energy sources (68% versus 63% of non-Catholic Republicans).

**Catholic Conservative Republicans Are More Likely Than Non-Catholic Conservative Republicans to Think Global Warming Is Happening and to be Worried About It**

Are Catholic Republicans more concerned than non-Catholic Republicans about global warming simply because Catholic Republicans are more politically moderate? It is true that Catholic Republicans are less conservative—a smaller percentage of Catholic Republicans self-identify as “conservative” (59%) than do non-Catholic Republicans (69%). Still, even among conservative Republicans, more Catholics than non-Catholics express concern about global warming. For example, Catholic conservative Republicans are more likely than non-Catholic conservative Republicans to think that global warming is happening (42% versus 35%, respectively).

Moreover, Catholic conservative Republicans are also more likely than non-Catholic conservative Republicans to say they are somewhat or very worried about global warming (28% vs. 21%, respectively). Interestingly, Catholic moderate/liberal Republicans are no more worried about global warming than non-Catholic moderate/liberal Republicans (48% vs. 47% respectively).

*This Climate Note is by Zena Grecni*

**Survey Method**

These findings combine data from six nationally representative surveys of American adults conducted between Fall, 2012, and Spring, 2015. All surveys were directed by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication. Results from each of the six surveys were weighted equally to adjust for differences in sample size among the surveys.
The samples were drawn from GfK’s KnowledgePanel®, an online panel of members drawn using probability sampling methods. Prospective members are recruited using a combination of random digit dial and address-based sampling techniques that cover virtually all (non-institutional) resident phone numbers and addresses in the United States. Those contacted who would choose to join the panel but do not have access to the Internet are loaned computers and given Internet access so they may participate.

The sample therefore includes a representative cross-section of American adults irrespective of whether they have Internet access, use only a cell phone, etc. Key demographic variables were weighted, post survey, to match US Census Bureau norms.

The survey instruments were designed by Anthony Leiserowitz, Geoff Feinberg, and Seth Rosenthal of Yale University, and Edward Maibach and Connie Roser-Renouf of George Mason University.

**Survey Field Dates and Number of Respondents**

- February 27 – March 10, 2015; 1,263 American adults
- October 17 – 28, 2014; 1,275 American adults
- April 15 – 23, 2014; 1,384 American adults
- November 23 – December 9, 2013; 830 American adults
- April 8 – 15, 2013; 1,045 American adults
- August 31 – September 12, 2012; 1,061 American adults

**Sample Sizes and Margins of error**

All samples are subject to some degree of sampling error—that is, statistical results obtained from a sample can be expected to differ somewhat from results that would be obtained if every member of the target population was interviewed. Average margins of error, at the 95% confidence level, are as follows:

- Total Republicans = 2,624, +/- 2 percentage points
- Catholic Republicans = 620, +/- 4 percentage points
- Non-Catholic Republicans = 2,004, +/- 2 percentage points
- Conservative Republicans = 1,807, +/- 2 percentage points
- Catholic conservative Republicans = 392, +/- 5 percentage points
- Non-Catholic conservative Republicans = 1,415, +/- 3 percentage points

**Rounding error**

For tabulation purposes, percentage points are rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given chart may total slightly higher or lower than 100%.

http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/article/republican-catholics-more-likely-to-be-concerned-about-global-warming

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**July 2015**

Sacred Sites Research Newsletter (SSIREN)


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**July 1, 2015**

Laudato Si*: A political reading

The papal encyclical is the first work that has risen to the full challenge of climate change

By Robert Manne
The Monthly

When I was young the intellectual milieu was shaped by the need to come to terms with the unprecedented crimes and the general moral collapse that had taken place on European soil following the outbreak of great power conflict in August 1914 – Hitler and Stalin, the Holocaust and the Gulag, the concentration camps and genocide, the tens of millions of deaths that had occurred in two unprecedentedly barbarous wars. For me the most important book on the contemporary crisis of civilization was Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*, a complex study of racism, imperialism, anti-semitism and the regimes that had emerged in Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union. The book was important to me not only because of its formal arguments and its insights but because it was written in a tone that seemed, unlike any other work I had read, to have risen to the extremity of the crimes and the breakdown it was struggling to understand and to explain.

In our own age we are faced with a crisis of civilisation of equivalent depth but of an altogether different kind – the gradual but apparently inexorable human-caused destruction of the condition of the Earth in which human life has flourished over the past several thousand years, at whose centre is the phenomenon we call either global warming or climate change. During the past decade I have read scores of books and thousands of articles, many outstanding, examining from every conceivable angle and also trying to explain the wreckage we are knowingly inflicting on the Earth. It was however not until last week that I read a work whose tone and scope seemed to me, like Arendt’s *Origins*, fully adequate to its theme. That work was Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si*: *On Care for Our Common Home* – in my opinion one of the most important documents of our era.
There can be little doubt that the papal encyclical is the most consequential intervention in the discussion of climate change since Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth*. But as an intervention it is of an interestingly different and more radical kind. The implication of Al Gore was that the crisis we were facing had arisen as a consequence of an unhappy but nevertheless innocent accident. The condition of the Earth was under threat because the unprecedented material prosperity of industrial civilisation had been based on the disastrous but unanticipated and unanticipatable consequence of its source of energy – the burning of fossil fuels. Knowing now what we do, all that was required to overcome the crisis, Gore argued, was to replace fossil fuels with renewables – solar, wind, hydro, geo-thermal. No doubt that transition would be anything but easy and to succeed would require great reserves of political skill and will. For Al Gore the climate crisis was however a mere hiccup in the course of history. Following the transition from fossil fuels to renewables, the fundamental human story – of expanding material prosperity through endless economic growth – would be able to be resumed with its bounty, universalised through the generosity of the developed world, spreading gradually to every corner of the Earth. For Al Gore humankind did face a crisis of the most serious kind. But for him nevertheless, the myth of unending material progress, a core American or indeed Western faith, was untouched.

The papal encyclical is different. Like Al Gore, indeed like all rational people, Pope Francis accepts the consensual conclusions of the climate scientists: that through the burning of fossil fuels human action is causing the Earth to warm dangerously; that this warming has already inflicted great harm and is certain to inflict catastrophe in the future, especially on poorer peoples and on future generations; that it will poison the oceans, transform lands into desert, and lead to a tragic loss of bio-diversity; and that if the effects of global warming are to be mitigated there is no alternative to the speedy elimination of fossil fuels and the embrace of renewable sources of energy. According to the Pope, “this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and unprecedented destruction of eco-systems”. Indeed, because of its failure to abandon fossil fuels “the post-industrial world may well be remembered as the most irresponsible in human history.” All this is deftly summarised in the encyclical. There is nothing about this account that is unusual or with which Al Gore would in any way disagree. Where Al Gore and Pope Francis part company is over the relation of the climate crisis to contemporary industrial civilisation.

For Gore the fundamentals of this civilisation are unquestioned. For Pope Francis the climate crisis is only the most extreme expression of a destructive tendency that has become increasingly dominant through the course of industrialisation. Judaeo-Christian thought “demythologised” nature, breaking with an earlier worldview that regarded nature as “divine”. But as the industrial age advanced, by ceasing to regard the Earth, our common home, with the proper “awe and wonder”, humans have come to behave as “masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits to our immediate needs.” “Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the past two hundred years.” The vision of the encyclical is not straightforwardly anti-modernist, although I have no doubt that it will be mischaracterised in this way. The advances in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications are welcomed. “Who,” Francis exclaims at one point in the encyclical, “can deny the beauty of an aircraft or a skyscraper?” But for him, in the end, the treatment of the Earth as a resource to be mastered and exploited; the limitless appetite for consumption that has accelerated during the past 200 years of the industrial age and has culminated in our “throwaway culture”; and the most extreme consequence of the contemporary crisis of post-industrial society, the climate emergency – are inseparable
phenomena, part of a general and profound civilisational malaise. “Doomsday predictions,” the encyclical claims, “can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophe.”

Why has this come to pass? The encyclical argues that we have become slaves both to what is called the “technological paradigm” and the theory of market fundamentalism. If the history of the twentieth century proves anything, it is the potential of technology to be deployed to anti-human purpose, as it was with the Nazis in the means of killing, as it is in the modern weapons of war. “Never has humanity had such power over itself, yet nothing ensures that it will be used wisely.” Technology has become disconnected from “human responsibility, values and conscience”. Even a lifestyle partially resisting the regime of technology is now described mockingly as “counter-cultural”. Particularly devastating for the wellbeing of both society and the environment is the alliance of convenience that has been forged between technology and economic theory, which serves the interests of the wealthy. The neo-liberal belief in “the magic of the market” ought to have been finally discredited by the global financial crisis. Indeed the encyclical describes it as a theory that “today scarcely anyone dares to defend”. In reality, however, such a belief still dominates daily economic life in practice. “The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings.” Financiers and technologists are united in “the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit”. Talk of “sustainable development” is “usually a way of distracting attention and offering excuses”, absorbing “the language of ecology into the categories of finance and technocracy”. If technology has captured the economy, in turn the economy has captured politics. The encyclical’s description of contemporary political life in a standard Western democracy is painfully familiar.

“A politics concerned with immediate results, supported by consumerist sectors of the population, is driven to produce short-term economic growth. In response to electoral interests, governments are reluctant to upset the public with measures, which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign investment. The myopia of power politics delays the inclusion of a far-sighted environmental agenda.”

As a result of all this, civilisation has been brought to the “crossroads”.

“Everything,” the encyclical declares more than once, “is related.” One meaning here is the connectedness of our relations with all other aspects of creation – with both other creatures and with the inanimate world of nature. “Each creature has its own purpose … Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God … We can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement.” The connectedness between humans and nature is often captured in a language of great beauty. The meaning of the destruction of coral reefs is conveyed in these words. “Who turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life?” In a rather strange but compelling turn of phrase, the encyclical enjoins us to “dare to turn what is
happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it”.

But “everything is related” has another meaning. In the contemporary world there exist not “two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but … one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.” The most important connection between the twin social and environmental crises is expressed in these words. “A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings.” The human family is disfigured by radical inequality. This inequality should arouse our “indignation”. It rarely does. The wealthy are barely in touch with the conditions of life of the poor. If the poor enter into their calculations at all, it is often as an “afterthought”. Conscience has been “numbed”. We are in danger of succumbing to a condition Francis calls “the globalisation of indifference”.

The two crises – of the environment and of society – are directly interconnected in multiple ways. It is the poorer nations who are already paying and will continue to pay the main price as the climate crisis deepens. One of the reasons for the environmental crisis is the obscene level of consumption concentrated in the wealthy nations and also among the wealthy classes in both the developed and the developing worlds. Some of the wealthy “have not the slightest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet”. Corporations remorselessly pursuing profit do not take the wellbeing of the Earth into account. The encyclical enjoins wealthy nations to abandon the ambition of economic growth and assist poorer nations to pursue a growth that is called “healthy”. To make progress in the interconnected struggle against global warming and global inequality, the encyclical also talks of the need for a world political authority. It acknowledges that none of this of course will happen without what the encyclical calls a profound “cultural revolution”.

The contemporary social crisis is not restricted however to the problem of inequality. There are signs everywhere of spiritual malaise. Societies that are devoted above all else to the promotion of a mythology connecting consumption with wellbeing are perpetuating a cruel illusion. Consumption does not, cannot, bring meaning or even ordinary happiness. In the consumer society, the ills of isolation, depression and anxiety are growing, the ties of family and community are weakening, because of what the encyclical calls “the silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion”. The “consumerist vision of human beings” is rather a potent leveller of the riches offered by the variety of cultures – “their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality” – one vital source of human nourishment. Compulsive consumerism creates only a counterfeit conception of freedom. The greed and self-centredness which is instilled by the consumer culture of instant gratification is also incompatible with the idea of “limits” and thus with the idea of the existence of a “common good”. Interestingly, the encyclical argues that it is not the old enemy of the Church, “doctrinal relativism”, but what it calls “practical relativism” that is now inflicting the greater social harm. We are encouraged by the market philosophy not to cooperate but to compete and “for one person to take advantage of another”. Societies are convinced to “allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage”. Sensing imbalance in life, people are driven to a frenetic busy-ness. “In turn [this] leads them to ride rough-shod over
everything about them.” The encyclical characterises the trajectory of contemporary culture with the neologism “rapidification”. As a result of all this, it argues, we have now reached a very strange place where, despite unprecedented material prosperity, “people no longer seem to believe in a happy future”.

In the encyclical, the analysis of the condition of contemporary culture in turn provides the explanation for the most troubling puzzle of the modern era, our abject failure thus far to rise to the challenge of global warming, a failure that explains why the encyclical argues that our generation is likely to be seen as the most irresponsible in history. Climate change denialism is the obvious self-interest of the economically powerful forces of society who, in the words of the encyclical “mask the problems … and conceal the symptoms”. “Is it realistic to hope,” the encyclical inquires, “that those who are obsessed with maximising profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage which they leave behind for future generations?” But there also exists something more common than outright climate change denialism, a climate change inertia which is fostered, according to the encyclical, by “a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and cheerful recklessness”. The encyclical’s account of the psychological mechanism supporting climate change inertia is unusually shrewd and thus worth quoting at some length.

“As often occurs in periods of deep crisis which require bold decisions, we are tempted to think that what is happening is not entirely clear … Such evasiveness serves as a licence to carrying on with our present life-styles and models of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen.”

Pope Francis is also shrewd about the climate change denialism and the climate change inertia found in the ranks of his fellow Catholics. “It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and become inconsistent.” This passage might have been written with Cardinal Pell in mind. Come to think of it, perhaps it was.

Despite everything, however, it would involve a profound misreading of the encyclical to imagine that it was written without a belief that there are real and not merely confected grounds for hope. The encyclical is entirely unambiguous in the praise it offers the international environmental movement for its intelligence of judgment and its achievements. “Worldwide, the ecological movement has made significant advances … Thanks to their efforts, environmental questions have increasingly found a place on public agendas.” Even though the encyclical recognises how difficult it is for the younger generation who “have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence” to develop different habits, it knows that many are aware of what is happening to the common home of the human family and of the terrible betrayal by their parents’ generation. It argues that they possess “a new ecological sensitivity and generous spirit”. Yet the grounds for hope in the encyclical rest ultimately on a faith in certain enduring and unexpungable qualities of what can only be called the human spirit. We have been endowed with free will which means that human history reveals both “decadence and mutual destruction” but also “freedom, growth, salvation and love”. Humans can transcend “their mental and social
conditioning”. They are “born for love”. “No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful.” “All is not lost.” This thought weaves its way throughout the encyclical, lightening the darkness. On occasions it is expressed quite wonderfully. “An authentic humanity … seems to dwell in the midst of the technological culture, almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door.” Pope Francis reminds us of the story from Genesis of the innocent and just man, Noah, who lived at a time when “the wickedness of man was great in the earth”. Through him, however, God “gave humanity the chance of a new beginning. All it takes is one good person to restore hope!”

As I am incapable of locating *Laudato Si’* within the frame of Catholic thought, what I have tried to provide here is a political reading. So have others. Some right-wing critics have claimed that the encyclical reveals that the Pope is a secret Marxist. This seems to me preposterous. Marxism is a materialist philosophy if it is anything. The encyclical is an expression of religious thought throughout and, philosophically speaking, of idealism. If a concern for the poor, or the rejection of radical inequality, or suspicion about the self-interested behaviour of the mega-wealthy is to be regarded as Marxist, there exists a global army of Marxists far mightier than I have ever imagined it to be. Another critique links the encyclical with the kind of anti-modernism or “cultural pessimism” that was found on the far right of Europe especially during the interwar period. This is a more plausible critique but also I believe quite mistaken. At the heart of interwar cultural pessimism was an elitist contempt for “the masses” and a hatred of democracy. What is unusual in the encyclical is the marriage of a critique of contemporary post-industrial culture with the most profound and sincere democratic beliefs and instincts. In its rejection of the spirit of our technological-industrial-consumer society there are undoubtedly similarities between the encyclical and the sociological critique of modernity expressed most profoundly in the work of Zygmunt Bauman. Yet there is a religious and transcendental element found in the encyclical, which is entirely absent in Bauman. Of all major contemporary political thinkers of whom I am aware, the one who most closely resembles Francis is Vaclav Havel in whose great work, *The Power of the Powerless*, several major tendencies of the encyclical can be found – hostility to the technological-industrial-consumer society, profound democratic faith, and a notion of transcendence grounded in the idea of the human spirit. Havel’s masterwork was however written before the problem of climate change became apparent.

With mainstream climate change writers and activists, like Al Gore or Nicholas Stern, who believe that political will and technological ingenuity will provide democratic capitalist society with a benign exit from the climate crisis, Francis shares only acceptance of the conclusions of the climate scientists and an anxiety about the inertia of the international community’s response thus far. He shares more with the radical anti-capitalist green left, of whom presently the most important activist-writer is Naomi Klein, and in particular an understanding that only a transformative revolution can provide us with an exit from the impending climate tragedy. However while the revolution Klein looks for is political and economic, the end of what I call “really existing capitalism”, the revolution that Francis’s vision requires is cultural and spiritual. If I am not mistaken, the word capitalism is not to be found in the papal encyclical. There is however one major climate activist-writer, Bill McKibben, whose anti-technological and anti-industrial writings, as seen in *The End of Nature* or more recently in *Oil and Honey*, rather
closely resembles *Laudato Si’*, in sensibility at least if not in formal argument. Immediately after reading the encyclical, McKibben wrote in the *New York Review of Books*.

“My own sense, after spending the day reading this remarkable document, was of great relief … This marks the first time that a person of great authority in our global culture has fully recognised the scale and depth of our crisis, and the consequent necessary rethinking of what it means to be fully human.”

This was my sentiment as well.

Sentiment is however not enough, as McKibben himself concedes. It will take considerable time for the meaning of the encyclical to be absorbed and assessed. When I think back on the impact on my political thought of Hannah Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*, I can recognise now that, while I learnt an enormous amount from it, on certain issues I was seriously misled. In his furious attack on the encyclical in the *Australian*, Paul Kelly wondered whether the environmental movement across the globe and in Australia would have “the nous” to seize the political opportunity occasioned by the publication of the encyclical. I hope that it does. The first step ought however not to involve propaganda, as Kelly fears, but engagement in a vital but also a difficult debate. Although it will not be easy to find a balance between the worldviews of Al Gore and Pope Francis, that is what, in my opinion, those concerned about the wellbeing of the Earth are now called upon to do.

Robert Manne is Emeritus Professor and Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow at La Trobe University and has twice been voted Australia’s leading public intellectual. He is the author of *Left, Right, Left: Political Essays, 1977–2005* and *Making Trouble*.


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**July 1, 2015**

Pope Francis’ LAUDATO SI and the New Consciousness

By Mike Bell
Deep Time Journey

This article is a commentary on Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment: Laudato Si. It describes the unique nature of the encyclical, the challenge of developing a new consciousness in the face of climate change, and the potential acceptance or rejection of the encyclical both within the church and in the wider world.

Read the article here:
July 1, 2015

People and planet first: the imperative to change course

Vatican Information Service

Vatican City (VIS) – This morning a press conference was held in the Holy See Press Office to present the high-level Conference “People and planet first: the imperative to change course” (Rome, Augustinianum, 2-3 July) organised by the Pontifical Council “Justice and Peace” and CIDSE, an international network of Catholic non-governmental development organisations.

The speakers at the conference were Cardinal Kodwo Appiah Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council “Justice and Peace”; Naomi Klein, writer; Ottmar Edenhofer, co-president of the Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Climate Change (IPCC) and Bernd Nilles, secretary general of Cooperation Internationale pour le Developpement et la Solidarite (International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity).

Cardinal Turkson emphasised that the title of the conference, which focuses on climate change, clearly indicates the aim to be pursued: “people and planet, not one or the other, not one at the expense of the other”. He noted that in his recent Encyclical “Laudato si’”, the Pope proposes an integral ecology that respects its human and social dimensions, and shows that climate change is one of the main challenges facing humanity in our times, also highlighting that the climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. “Yet the costs of climate change are being borne by those least responsible for it and least able to adapt to it – the poor. Overall, climate change is a global problem with a spectrum of serious implications: environmental, social, economic and political”. In “Laudato si’”, the Pope also laments the failure of past global summits on the environment, and launches an urgent appeal for enforceable international agreements to stop climate change.

In this respect, as Cardinal Turkson observes, the COP21 Conference held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015 will be crucial in identifying strong solutions to the problem of climate change. The Sustainable Development Goals are also relevant in this context, and coincide in various aspects with the points made by Pope Francis in his Encyclical. “For example, the 13th proposed goal will express the imperative to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Related goals include: make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”.

“These goals, similar to important points made in 'Laudato si'', await the pledges and the will of the whole world community during the 70th United Nations General Assembly beginning in mid-September 2015. Yet the single biggest obstacle to the imperative to change course is not
economic, scientific or even technological, but rather within our minds and hearts. The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution and the development of poorer countries and regions. … The political dimension needs to re-establish democratic control over the economy and finance, that is, over the basic choices made by human societies. This is the path the entire human family is on, the one which leads through New York to Paris and beyond”, concluded the prelate.

Naomi Klein affirmed that what Pope Francis writes in “Laudato si’” “is not only a teaching for the Catholic world but for 'every person living on this planet'. And I can say that as a secular Jewish feminist who was rather surprised to be invited to the Vatican, it certainly spoke to me”.

“In a world where profit is consistently put before both people and the planet, climate economics has everything to do with ethics and morality. Because if we agree that endangering life on earth is a moral crisis, then it is incumbent on us to act like it. That does not mean gambling the future on the boom and bust cycles of the market. It means policies that directly regulate how much carbon can be extracted from the earth. It means policies that will get us to 100 per cent renewable energy in two or three decades – not by the end of the century. And it means allocating common, shared resources – like the atmosphere – on the basis of justice and equity, not winners-take-all”.

Therefore, “a new kind of climate movement is fast emerging. It is based on the most courageous truth expressed in the encyclical: that our current economic system is both fuelling the climate crisis and actively preventing us from taking the necessary actions to avert it. A movement based on the knowledge that if we don’t want runaway climate change, then we need system change. And because our current system is also fuelling ever widening inequality, we have a chance, in rising to the climate challenge, to solve multiple, overlapping crises at once. In short, we can shift to a more stable climate and fairer economy at the same time”.

“This growing understanding is why you are seeing some surprising and even unlikely alliances. Like, for instance, me at the Vatican. Like trade unions, Indigenous, faith and green groups working more closely together than ever before. Inside these coalitions, we do not agree on everything. … But we understand that the stakes are so high, time is so short and the task is so large that we cannot afford to allow those differences to divide us. When 400,000 people marched for climate justice in New York last September, the slogan was 'To change everything, we need everyone'. Everyone includes political leaders, of course. But having attended many meetings with social movements about the COP summit in Paris, I can report this: there is zero tolerance for yet another failure being dressed up as a success for the cameras. … If the deal fails to bring about immediate emission reductions while providing real and substantive support for poor countries, then it will be declared a failure. As it should be”.

“What we must always remember is that it’s not too late to veer off the dangerous road we are on, the one that is leading us towards 4 degrees of warming”, emphasised Naomi Klein. “Indeed we could still keep warming below 1.5 degrees if we made it our top collective priority. It would be difficult, to be sure. As difficult as the rationing and industrial conversions that were once
made in wartime. As ambitious as the anti-poverty and public works programs launched in the aftermath of the Great Depression and the Second World War. But difficult is not the same as impossible. And giving up in the face of a task that could save countless and lives prevent so much suffering – simply because it is difficult, costly and requires sacrifice from those of us who can most afford to make do with less – is not pragmatism. It is surrender of the most cowardly kind. And there is no cost-benefit analysis in the world that is capable of justifying it”.


July 2, 2015

Shifting the Climate Debate Onto Sacred Ground

By Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, Sufi teacher and author
Huffington Post

"The ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual problem." These words spoken by an Eastern Orthodox theologian, Metropolitan John Zizioulas, at the Vatican news conference on the papal encyclical are profoundly important. The release of the encyclical was soon followed by a new study that confirmed the Earth has now entered a new extinction phase, its sixth great mass extinction event.

Our present environmental crisis is the world's most pressing concern, and yet, this discussion has so far taken place mostly in the arena of science, politics and economics. Science can show us the physical symptoms of a deep global imbalance, of a civilization no longer sustainable, and economic models illustrate how painfully this effects the poorest among us. But Pope Francis' encyclical on climate change, and this week's Vatican conference, shift this most vital issue firmly onto a moral and spiritual ground. He reconnects the well-being of the Earth to the well-being of our soul, care for the Earth to care for the soul. He suggests that while technology is often presented as the only solution, it "proves incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things and so sometimes solves one problem only to create others." And elsewhere he adds the poignant statement, "Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise."

The importance of this realignment cannot be overstated. For the past ten years, I have stressed the urgent need for a spiritual perspective in many articles, talks and radio interviews. Now, due to Pope Francis' encyclical, what had been a fringe and at times a lonely voice, has suddenly become mainstream. It is our sense of being separate from the Earth that has allowed us to abuse it. If we held the Earth as sacred, as part of the living oneness to which we belong, could we treat it in this way -- would we pollute its rivers, kill off its species? Forgetfulness is a most potent poison, enabling our desires to destroy what is most precious. Sacred ground brings us back to the most basic human values, our sense of relatedness and the vital work of "care for our common home."
But how can we reclaim the inherent "mystery" that belongs to all of creation, while living in a "throw away" culture that has covered this wonder with waste? How can we return to a magical world, one that we have made toxic with our greed and desires, with our addiction to consumerism? Could it begin with something as simple as recognizing that we are not separate from the Earth, but -- breathing its air, sustained by its food, nourished by its beauty -- are part of this miracle?

The signs of wonder are all around us, from the simple mystery of a sunrise to the laugh of a child. So too are the signs of desolation we have created, the rubbish we scatter on our streets, the toxins in our water, the species we have depleted. And amidst both the beauty and the desolation is the cry of the Earth, the living being to which we all belong. If we can hear this cry despite the clamor of distractions that bombard us, we can begin the work of returning to what is sacred and whole, to that connection that unites us all. Echoing the teaching of St. Francis, the pope writes how "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth."

Only from this place of wholeness and unity can we begin this work of healing what we have desecrated. If we remain in a place of separation from the Earth, from each other and all of our brothers and sisters, we will only continue the cycle of mutual destruction. Sadly science only too often attempts "solutions" to our ecological predicament from a place of separation, that we are separate from the Earth, or that the environmental crisis is a problem separate from us that we can "solve" through technology or carbon credits--or the even more dangerous economic ideology that the Earth is a resource to sustain our energy intensive culture--not realizing that it is this consciousness of separation that has brought us to this precipice of climate change.

For too long we have separated spirituality from the Earth, the Creator from the creation. We each must find a way to return to the sacred unity, where the Earth is whole as well as holy. For some it may be the "care for the Earth (our common home)" in how we live our daily life. I often think that it is the simple acts of care and attention that are most important--then we feel the bond that connects us all together. There are so many such moments in a day. Filling my bird feeder and watching the sparrows come around is a shared joy, the red-headed woodpecker trying to take over, eating its fill.

It is our love and care for the Earth that is the most powerful force of healing and transformation. The cry of the Earth--as we recognize and feel her suffering--can also open our hearts. This suffering does not belong to another, but to the very core of our own being, where we are one with the Earth. This cry touches deeply within us, the soul of the world meeting our own soul, restoring the sacred ground of being, the interbeing we have with the Earth and all life. Then, as in the prayer Pope Francis finally quotes, we can find our place:

As channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth.
July 6, 2015

An Eastern Orthodox Perspective on Laudato Si: A Personal Response, An Ecumenical Reflection

By John Chryssavgis
First Things

It was a special privilege for me to attend the formal publication of the green encyclical by Pope Francis on June 18, 2015. Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home was jointly released in the new synod hall of the Vatican by His Eminence Peter Cardinal Turkson of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and His Eminence Metropolitan John [Zizioulas] of Pergamon, a senior bishop and theological spokesman of the Church of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Theologians and environmentalists, politicians and pundits have interpreted the encyclical in numerous ways, often—as Cardinal Turkson would say—reading into the text more than even the drafters envisaged. However, I would like to offer some personal insights into the ecumenical context of this important papal statement, which is not just destined for the followers of the Catholic Church and indeed not even for Christians alone.

Communion: An Ecumenical Context

Permit me to tell you about a lesser known aspect of the papal encyclical; to offer a glimpse into a less obvious dimension of this document; to provide some insight into a very important relationship: namely, the connection between a pope and a patriarch.

Almost exactly one year ago, Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew traveled together to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the historical visit there in 1964 by their predecessors, Paul VI and Athenagoras.

Next December marks another milestone, namely the fiftieth anniversary of what is known as “the lifting of the anathemas,” namely, the eradication (by the two same prelates, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras) from the memory of the Church of the tragic excommunications that led to the unfortunate estrangement between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches—the division between the Western and Eastern Churches known as the “great schism”—almost one thousand years ago in 1054.

Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras broke a long and painful silence of ten centuries in their vision and dedication to fulfill Christ’s final commandment and fervent prayer that His disciples “may be one” (John 17:21). For five hundred years, the leaders of our two churches had neither spoken to nor even communicated with one another. When Paul and Athenagoras met in Jerusalem, it was the first time that a Roman pontiff and an Eastern patriarch were meeting face-to-face since the Council of Florence in 1438.
More recently, when in March of 2013 Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew personally attended the inaugural mass of Pope Francis in St. Peter’s Square, it was the first time that the leader of either church had ever taken part in such an event.

And yesterday, June 29th, marked the patronal feast of the Church of Rome, where once again Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was officially represented at the Vatican by Metropolitan John of Pergamon for the solemn celebration of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Above and beyond the theological dialogue that commenced in 1980 on the island of revelation, Patmos, this tradition of formal exchanges between our two churches began in 1969.

What I would submit to you, therefore, by way of providing further background for the Papal Encyclical on Creation Care is that it has long been anticipated not only from an ecological perspective, but also in the context of ecumenical openness between two contemporary religious leaders, who are profoundly and steadfastly committed to restoring communion between their two churches—which Constantinople likes to characterize as “sister churches” and Rome is fond of describing as “two lungs breathing together.”

**Compassion: An Ecological Context**

If commitment to communion is what attracts Francis and Bartholomew to a joint witness in a world otherwise divided by political and economic tensions, as well as by religious and racial conflicts, responsibility for compassion is undoubtedly what impels them to a shared concern for the exploitation of people and of the planet as the body of Christ.

For twenty-five years, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has emphasized the spiritual dimension of the ecological crisis and even introduced the revolutionary concept of ecological sin by way of expanding our understanding of repentance from what we have hitherto considered an individual wrongdoing or social transgression to a much broader, communal, generational and even environmental abuse of God’s creation.

And since his election, the Pope assumed the name of St. Francis of Assisi as an unmistakable indication of his priority for and sensitivity to the marginalized, the vulnerable and the oppressed in our global community. This is why, in his recent encyclical, he prays: “O God, bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it. . . . Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor of the earth.”

**Preserving and Serving**

What the papal encyclical has reminded us so powerfully and permanently is that preserving nature and serving neighbor are inseparable; they are like two sides of the same coin.

In this regard, I believe that it is indeed providential that these two bishops are leading their respective churches at this critical moment in time. And it is also a unique blessing that they relate so comfortably and confidently with each other. There is no doubt in my mind that the favorable reception—but at the same time I would also venture to add: the adverse reaction to and harsh criticism—of their advancing and advocating for the care of God’s creation is arguably
the greatest testimony and evidence that they are most definitely on the right track. For this reason alone, they deserve our prayer and praise, while their enlightened example and instruction deserve our attention and promulgation.

*John Chryssavgis is Archdeacon and theological advisor to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.*


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**July 6, 2015**

**8 Ways Pope Francis Is Changing the Direction of the Catholic Church**

*New York Times*

The first Jesuit pope and the first non-European pope in more than 1,200 years, Francis has differed significantly from his predecessors with his outspoken style and his approach to leading the church. His comments on poverty, church reform, climate change and divorce have made headlines around the world. Here is a look at some of them.

**He Criticized the 'Cult of Money' Driving the World Financial System**

Francis’ emphasis on the poor, and a style that is more akin to that of a parish priest, albeit one with a billion parishioners, was transforming perceptions within weeks of his selection.

In a [speech](http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/07/pope-franciss-laudato-si) to diplomats accredited to the Holy See in May 2013, Francis spoke of the need for more ethics in finance.

“We have created new idols," he said. "The worship of the golden calf of old has found a new and heartless image in the cult of money and the dictatorship of an economy which is faceless and lacking any truly humane goal.”

**He's Not Afraid to Criticize the Church ...**

Six months into his papacy, Pope Francis sent shock waves through the Roman Catholic Church with the publication of his remarks that the church had grown “obsessed” with abortion, same-sex marriage and contraception, and that he had chosen not to talk about those issues despite criticism.

His comments came in a long interview in which he criticized the church for putting dogma before love, and for prioritizing moral doctrines over serving the poor and marginalized. He articulated his vision of an inclusive church, a “home for all” — a striking contrast with his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who envisioned a smaller, purer church.
The next month, in a challenge to the Vatican hierarchy, Francis called for decentralizing power in the church, saying the Vatican and even the pope must collaborate with bishops, laypeople and in particular women.

... Or to Change Its Structure and Leadership

Francis took on a Vatican bureaucracy so plagued by intrigue and inertia that it contributed, numerous church officials now believe, to Benedict's resignation.

Francis replaced traditionalists with moderates as the church prepared for important debates about the Vatican's decision-making process and the nature of the family.

He also started to break up the rival blocs of Italians with entrenched influence in the Roman Curia, the Vatican administration. He increased financial transparency in the Vatican Bank and upended the career ladder that many prelates have spent their lives climbing.

He Endorsed the 'State of Palestine'

Pope Francis put himself directly into the collapsed Middle East peace process in May 2014, issuing an invitation to host the Israeli and Palestinian presidents for a prayer summit meeting at his apartment in the Vatican.

Francis took the unexpected step in Bethlehem, where he became the first pontiff ever to fly directly into the West Bank and to refer to the Israeli-occupied territory as the “State of Palestine.”

After describing the overall situation between Israel and the Palestinians as “increasingly unacceptable,” the pope made a dramatic, unscheduled stop at Israel’s contentious concrete barrier separating Bethlehem from Jerusalem, where he prayed and touched his head to the graffiti-covered wall.

He Could Change the Church's Stance on Divorce

Francis set in motion a high-level debate about whether the church could change its posture toward divorced people without altering a doctrine that declares marriage to be permanent and indissoluble.

It is a hot issue within the church. The battle lines are clear: Some high-level church officials, most notably the conference of German bishops, want the church to relax its rules. They want to give divorced Catholics a chance to more fully return to church life and receive Communion even if they have remarried without having their previous marriages formally annulled.

Traditionalists are pushing back fiercely, arguing that the indissolubility of marriage is ordained by God and therefore nonnegotiable.
This October, bishops and other church leaders will meet for a second Vatican synod at which they will decide whether to recommend changes. The decision of whether to act, then, will be up to Francis.

**He Is Holding Bishops More Accountable for Sex Abuse**

Francis approved the creation of a Vatican tribunal for judging bishops accused of covering up or failing to act in cases of child sexual abuse by priests, a step long demanded by victims in the more than three decades that the Roman Catholic Church has publicly dealt with the abuse scandal.

Until Francis, no pope had publicly confronted or demoted bishops accused of gross negligence.

**He Is Reviving Liberation Theology**

Francis cleared the path for the slain Archbishop Óscar Romero of El Salvador to become a saint. Thousands attended his beatification, the last step before sainthood, in May.

For years, Vatican critics of liberation theology and conservative Latin American bishops helped stall the canonization process for Archbishop Romero, even though many Catholics in the region regard him as a towering moral figure: an outspoken critic of social injustice and political repression who was assassinated during a Mass in 1980.

By advancing the campaign for sainthood, Francis sent a signal that the allegiance of his church is to the poor. That is a big difference from previous years, when some bishops were widely seen as aligned with autocratic governments that favored the wealthy.

**He Is Pushing for Action on Climate Change**

On June 18, Francis released his second teaching letter, known as an encyclical. Entitled "Laudato Si'," it called for a radical transformation of politics, economics and individual lifestyles to confront climate change. It attributed environmental destruction to apathy, the reckless pursuit of profits, excessive faith in technology and political shortsightedness.

It wasn't Francis' first push on the issue. Vatican officials are campaigning for world leaders to enact a sweeping United Nations climate change accord in Paris in December. The accord would, for the first time, commit every nation to enact tough new laws to cut emissions that cause global warming.

They're already encountering fierce resistance, particularly from powerful figures in the United States.

House Speaker John A. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, has invited the pope to speak to Congress when he visits in September. Climate policy advocates see it as a potentially charged moment. Mr. Boehner, who is Catholic, has often criticized the Obama administration for what he calls its “job-killing” environmental agenda.
“I think Boehner was out of his mind to invite the pope to speak to Congress,” said the Rev. Thomas Reese, an analyst at the National Catholic Reporter. “Can you imagine what the Republicans will do when he says, ‘You’ve got to do something about global warming’?”

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/06/13/world/europe/francis-the-activist-pope.html?_r=0

July 6, 2015

Episcopal Church Votes To Withdraw Investments In Fossil Fuels

By Emily Atkin
Think Progress

Leaders of the Episcopal Church voted to divest its holdings from fossil fuels on Friday, citing the fact that fossil fuel burning causes catastrophic climate change.

Calling it a “moral issue,” leaders of the 2 million member Christian denomination said fossil fuel investments would be purged from the church’s holdings, which total approximately $380 million. The vote, however, does not cover the denomination’s $9 billion pension fund, or the $4 billion controlled by parishes and dioceses, the Guardian reported.

Still, the divestment represents a victory for climate hawks, who equate divestment from fossil fuels to taking a symbolic stance against the primary cause of global warming. And symbolism does seem to be part of what the Episcopal Church was going for.

“The vote says that this is a moral issue and that we really have to think about where we are putting our money,” Betsy Blake Bennett, an archdeacon, told the Guardian. “At a point where we are losing species and where human life itself is threatened by climate change, the church, by acting on it, is saying that this is a moral issue and something that everyone needs to look at seriously.”

The vote is certainly timely. Since Pope Francis called for Catholics to act on climate change last month, more attention has been paid to how Christians in general view the human-caused phenomenon, which threatens to impact the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the world.

Leaders of the Episcopal Church have been in the news for their views on climate change before. Back in March, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said people who reject climate science do not appreciate God’s gift of knowledge.

“Episcopalians understand the life of the mind is a gift of God and to deny the best of current knowledge is not using the gifts God has given you,” Jefferts Schori said at the time. “I think it is a very blind position.”
But the Episcopal Church itself is not the first U.S.-based denomination to make a statement on the issue, nor it is the first to divest. That title goes to the United Church of Christ, which in 2013 voted to divest its pension funds from fossil fuel companies. The United Methodist Church also voted to divest its $21 billion pension from coal, but not all fossil fuels.

In addition, the World Council of Churches — a large umbrella group of churches representing more than half a billion Christians worldwide — announced last year that it would pull all of its investments in fossil fuels, saying it had determined the investments were no longer ethical. Also last year, the Unitarian Universalist Association voted to divest from any holdings in 200 fossil fuel companies, and New York’s Union Theological Seminary became the first seminary in the world to cut oil, gas, and coal investments from its $108.4 million endowment.

A growing number of Christians see preserving the climate and the environment as not only ethical, but spiritual — a way to respect God’s creation.

Some are even going so far as to advocate for those values in U.S. politics. At a hearing on proposed Environmental Protection Agency rules to reduce carbon emissions last year, numerous Christian leaders from different denominations spoke out on why limiting global climate change aligned with their values.

“Before man was asked to love his neighbor, love God, or care for the least of these, he was asked to love the earth,” Rev. Marjani Dele, the minister of missions at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, said at the time. “You could say that it was a type of first commandment.”

http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2015/07/06/3677181/episcopal-church-climate-change-divest/

July 6, 2015

A Revolutionary Pope Calls for Rethinking the Outdated Criteria That Rule the World

Pope Francis’ revolutionary encyclical addresses not just climate change but the banking crisis

By Ellen Brown
Common Dreams

Pope Francis has been called “the revolutionary Pope.” Before he became Pope Francis, he was a Jesuit Cardinal in Argentina named Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the son of a rail worker. Moments after his election, he made history by taking on the name Francis, after Saint Francis of Assisi, the leader of a rival order known to have shunned wealth to live in poverty.

Pope Francis’ June 2015 encyclical is called “Praised Be,” a title based on an ancient song attributed to St. Francis. Most papal encyclicals are addressed only to Roman Catholics, but this one is addressed to the world. And while its main focus is considered to be climate change, its
184 pages cover much more than that. Among other sweeping reforms, it calls for a radical overhaul of the banking system. It states in Section IV:

Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life. Saving banks at any cost, making the public pay the price, forgoing a firm commitment to reviewing and reforming the entire system, only reaffirms the absolute power of a financial system, a power which has no future and will only give rise to new crises after a slow, costly and only apparent recovery. The financial crisis of 2007-08 provided an opportunity to develop a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth. But the response to the crisis did not include rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world.

. . . A strategy for real change calls for rethinking processes in their entirety, for it is not enough to include a few superficial ecological considerations while failing to question the logic which underlies present-day culture.

“Rethinking the outdated criteria which continue to rule the world” is a call to revolution, one that is necessary if the planet and its people are to survive and thrive. Beyond a change in our thinking, we need a strategy for eliminating the financial parasite that is keeping us trapped in a prison of scarcity and debt.

Interestingly, the model for that strategy may have been created by the Order of the Saint from whom the Pope took his name. Medieval Franciscan monks, defying their conservative rival orders, evolved an alternative public banking model to serve the poor at a time when they were being exploited with exorbitant interest rates.

The Franciscan Alternative: Banking for the People

In the Middle Ages, the financial parasite draining the people of their assets and livelihoods was understood to be “usury” – charging rent for the use of money. Lending money at interest was forbidden to Christians, as a breach of the prohibition on usury proclaimed by Jesus in Luke 6:33. But there was a serious shortage of the precious metal coins that were the official medium of exchange, creating a need to expand the money supply with loans on credit.

An exception was therefore made to the proscription against usury for the Jews, whose Scriptures forbade usury only to “brothers” (meaning other Jews). This gave them a virtual monopoly on lending, however, allowing them to charge excessively high rates because there were no competitors. Interest sometimes went as high as 60 percent.

These rates were particularly devastating to the poor. To remedy the situation, Franciscan monks, defying the prohibitions of the Dominicans and Augustinians, formed charitable pawnshops called montes pietatus (pious or non-speculative collections of funds). These shops lent at low or no interest on the security of valuables left with the institution.
The first true *mons pietatis* made loans that were interest-free. Unfortunately, it went broke in the process. Expenses were to come out of the original capital investment; but that left no money to run the bank, and it eventually had to close.

Franciscan monks then established *montes pietatis* in Italy that lent at low rates of interest. They did not seek to make a profit on their loans. But they faced bitter opposition, not only from their banking competitors but from other theologians. It was not until 1515 that the *montes* were officially declared to be meritorious.

After that, they spread rapidly in Italy and other European countries. They soon evolved into banks, which were public in nature and served public and charitable purposes. This public bank tradition became the modern European tradition of public, cooperative and savings banks. It is particularly strong today in the municipal banks of Germany called Sparkassen.

The public banking concept at the heart of the Sparkassen was explored in the 18th century by the Irish philosopher Bishop George Berkeley, in a treatise called *The Plan of a National Bank*. Berkeley visited America and his work was studied by Benjamin Franklin, who popularized the public banking model in colonial Pennsylvania. In the US today, the model is exemplified in the state-owned Bank of North Dakota.

**From “Usury” to “Financialization”**

What was condemned as usury in the Middle Ages today goes by the more benign term “financialization” – turning public commodities and services into “asset classes” from which wealth can be siphoned by rich private investors. Far from being condemned, it is lauded as the way to fund development in an age in which money is scarce and governments and people everywhere are in debt.

Land and natural resources, once considered part of the commons, have long been privatized and financialized. More recently, this trend has been extended to pensions, health, education and housing. Today financialization has entered a third stage, in which it is invading infrastructure, water, and nature herself. Capital is no longer content merely to own. The goal today is to extract private profit at every stage of production and from every necessity of life.

The dire effects can be seen particularly in the financialization of food. The international food regime has developed over the centuries from colonial trading systems to state-directed development to transnational corporate control. Today the trading of food commodities by hedgers, arbitrageurs and index speculators has disconnected markets from the real-world demand for food. The result has been sudden shortages, price spikes and food riots. Financialization has turned farming from a small scale, autonomous and ecologically-sustainable craft to a corporate assembly process that relies on patented technologies and equipment increasingly financed through debt.

We have bought into this financialization scheme based on a faulty economic model, in which we have allowed money to be created privately by banks and lent to governments and people at
The vast majority of the circulating money supply is now created by private banks in this way, as the Bank of England recently acknowledged.

Meanwhile, we live on a planet that holds the promise of abundance for all. Mechanization and computerization have streamlined production to the point that, if the work week and corporate profits were divided equitably, we could be living lives of ease, with our basic needs fulfilled and plenty of leisure to pursue the interests we find rewarding. We could, like St. Francis, be living like the lilies of the field. The workers and materials are available to build the infrastructure we need, provide the education our children need, provide the care the sick and elderly need. Inventions are waiting in the wings that could clean up our toxic environment, save the oceans, recycle waste, and convert sun, wind and perhaps even zero-point energy into usable energy sources.

The holdup is in finding the funding for these inventions. Our politicians tell us “we don’t have the money.” Yet China and some other Asian countries are powering ahead with this sort of sustainable development. Where have they found the money?

The answer is that they simply issue it. What private banks do in Western countries, publicly-owned and -controlled banks do in many Asian countries. Their governments have taken control of the engines of credit – the banks – and operated them for the benefit of the public and their own economies.

What blocks Western economies from pursuing that course is a dubious economic theory called “monetarism.” It is based on the premise that “inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon,” and that the chief cause of inflation is money “created out of thin air” by governments. In the 1970s, the Basel Committee discouraged governments from issuing money themselves or borrowing from their own central banks which issued it. Instead they were to borrow from “the market,” which generally meant borrowing from private banks. Overlooked was the fact, recently acknowledged by the Bank of England, that the money borrowed from banks is also created out of thin air. The difference is that bank-created money originates as a debt and comes with a hefty private interest charge attached.

We can break free from this exploitative system by returning the power to create money to governments and the people they represent. The strategy for real change called for by Pope Francis can be furthered with government-issued money of the sort originated by the American colonists, augmented by a network of publicly-owned banks of the sort established by the Order of St. Francis in the Middle Ages.

Ellen Brown is an attorney and founder of the Public Banking Institute. She is the author of twelve books, including the best-selling Web of Debt, and her latest book, The Public Bank Solution, which explores successful public banking models historically and globally.

http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/07/04/revolutionary-pope-calls-rethinking-outdated-criteria-rule-world
July 6, 2015

Papal encyclical calls for renewed cooperation of science and ethics

By Mary Evelyn Tucker
Ecological Society of America

A guest post by Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale and senior lecturer and research scholar at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. Tucker wrote and produced an Emmy Award winning documentary broadcast on PBS titled Journey of the Universe, which is also a book from Yale and a series of Conversations with scientists and environmentalists.

On June 18, 2015 Pope Francis released Laudato Si: On Care of our Common Home, the first encyclical in the history of the Catholic Church on ecology. An encyclical is the highest-level teaching document in Catholicism. There have been earlier statements by popes and bishops on environmental issues, but never an encyclical on the environment. Thus this is a historic moment, especially as Francis makes it clear that he is addressing all people on the planet.

Moreover, he calls for global cooperation noting that environmental problems will require both science and religion working together.

Drawing on scientific studies, he outlines critical environmental challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and water pollution. He suggests that these must be addressed with an “integral ecology” where scientific, economic, social, cultural, and ethical perspectives all play a role in finding solutions. Integral ecology implies that the future of people and the planet are inextricably linked. Science needs society; ecology needs ethics. What distinguishes the pope’s intervention is his linking of environmental concerns with issues of social justice and economic inequality – themes often lacking from climate change discussions for example. Building on a century of Catholic social Justice teachings, Francis brings a Christian message- but also a profoundly human one, namely, “Care for our Common Home”.

In keeping with his outward-looking and engaged leadership, Pope Francis will also visit the United States in September. He will address the United Nations General Assembly and a joint session of the US Congress highlighting the critical nature of environmental issues. What gives this document special importance, then, is the pope’s unique moral force and its timing, before the UN climate change negotiations in Paris in December 2015.

With 1.2 billion Catholics on the planet, the potential for attention to environmental and climate change issues is unprecedented. It is clear that this encyclical letter will be discussed in religious and educational circles radiating out into the larger Christian world and well beyond. Indeed, the media coverage of this document has already been robust. Scientists and ecologists have been keen to draw on its message to enhance on-going work for conservation and sustainability.

The Papal encyclical, then, represents a new period of potential cooperation between ecology and ethics. In the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology we have been working for two decades with hundreds of scholars to identify the cultural and religious grounds in the world’s religions
for a more diverse environmental ethics to complement environmental sciences. Between 1995-2004 we organized ten conferences at Harvard and published ten volumes with Harvard press to examine how the world’s religions can contribute their varied ethical perspectives for a sustainable future. At Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies since 2006 we have been broadening this dialogue and building on the work of environmentalists, policy makers, and economists. [1]

Among some 30 conferences we have organized is one that focused on the Yamuna River in India where scientists and Hindu practitioners were brought together at Teri University in Delhi and at Vrindavan to focus on the degraded state of the river. Similar efforts are occurring in the Middle East where the three Abrahamic traditions are focusing with hydrologists on the restoration of the Jordan River. (EcoPeace Middle East, formerly Friends of the Earth Middle East)

The Papal encyclical provides fresh inspiration for these and numerous other efforts that are bringing together ecology and ethics for the flourishing of the Earth community. Ten panels at this year’s ESA meeting will highlight these projects as well.


July 7, 2015

Pope Francis, in Ecuador, Calls for More Protection of Rain Forest and Its People

By Jim Yardley
New York Times

QUITO, Ecuador — Pope Francis on Tuesday called for increased protection of the Amazon rain forest and the indigenous people who live there, declaring that Ecuador must resist exploiting natural riches for “short-term benefits,” an implicit rebuke of the policies of President Rafael Correa.

In his final stops of a busy day, Francis made environmental protection a central theme, invoking the biblical tenet for humans to be guardians of creation, while praising the way of life of indigenous peoples living in the rain forests. Several indigenous leaders attending Francis’ final event of the day have been fighting the policies of Mr. Correa to expand oil exploration in the Ecuadorean Amazon.

“The tapping of natural resources, which are so abundant in Ecuador, must not be concerned with short-term benefits,” Francis told a group of civil society leaders at his final stop of the day.
“As stewards of these riches which we have received, we have an obligation toward society as a whole, and toward future generations.”

Francis had been expected to address the exploitation of the Amazon, after specifically including the issue in “Laudato Si’,” the environmental encyclical he released to worldwide attention last month. In the document, Francis warned against the perils of climate change but also highlighted the link between environmental destruction and the plight of the poor, including indigenous groups in South America.

Beginning his Latin American tour in Ecuador meant the issue would inevitably arise, and would present political complications, since Mr. Correa is expanding oil production in the Amazon. After weeks of middle-class protests against his proposals to redistribute wealth, Mr. Correa has unabashedly sought to be seen in public with the popular pope.

Environmentalists in Ecuador have embraced the pope’s encyclical, yet Francis has bruised some feelings. Leaders of one association of indigenous peoples have complained that Francis declined a request to meet with them privately about their efforts to fight oil production. And it was too soon to know if the pope’s message — which did not include a direct mention of oil exploration — would have an influence on Mr. Correa.

Ecuador’s government depends on oil royalties for revenues, and Mr. Correa has granted approvals for a major expansion of oil exploration in the Ecuadorean Amazon, including in Yasuní National Park, considered one of the richest sources of biodiversity in the world. In 2007, Mr. Correa proposed leaving oil in the ground if other governments would contribute $3.6 billion to a global trust fund intended to protect 4,000 square miles of pristine rain forest.

But when the government contributions did not arrive, Mr. Correa reversed himself. Two years ago, he ended the moratorium on new exploration and set in motion an approvals process that has cleared the way for new oil production to begin next year.

Oil pollution in Ecuadorean jungles has brought two decades of litigation. Among the civil society activists who attended Francis’s last meeting on Tuesday were leaders of seven different indigenous groups living inside Yasuní National Park. (Two other nomadic indigenous groups inside the Yasuní live removed from any contact with civilization.)

Last weekend, activists also published an online open letter to the pope, seeking his direct intervention in protecting the jungle homeland of Ecuador’s indigenous people. Franco Viteri, one of the activists, planned to present the letter to the pope on Tuesday.

“We ask you to intercede and call upon the Ecuadorean government to not expand the oil frontier and mega-mining in indigenous territories, especially in Yasuní,” the letter concluded. “We ask you to call upon them to respect the constitution and international treaties and agreements on the environment and human rights.”
Kevin Koenig, Ecuador program coordinator of the nonprofit group Amazon Watch, said Francis’ encyclical had heartened environmentalists and indigenous leaders in Ecuador, who fear that Mr. Correa’s expansion plans could be devastating.

“President Correa’s environmental policies are at odds with the message of the pope’s encyclical,” said Mr. Koenig, whose group works with indigenous peoples to protect the Amazon. He said oil exploration was “the major indigenous rights environmental battle in the Amazon right now.”

In his remarks on Tuesday, Francis cited his own encyclical, stating that the Amazon required “greater protection because of its immense importance for the global ecosystem.” He also cited his principle of integral ecology, a balance of economic development and environmental protection, and returned to that theme in his remarks on Tuesday.

“Ecuador — together with other countries bordering the Amazon — has an opportunity to become a teacher of integral ecology,” he said. “We received this world as an inheritance from past generations, but also as a loan from future generations, to whom we will have to return it.”

William Neuman and Carolina Loza contributed reporting.


July 7, 2015

Laudato Si’ - A story of right relationships

By Patricia Siemen
Global Sisters Report -- Capital E: Earth

“It’s all a question of story,” wrote Thomas Berry. “We are in trouble now because we do not have a good story . . . and the old story, the account of how we fit into it, is no longer effective. We have not yet learned the new story.”

Pope Francis’s long-awaited encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si’, tells a story and issues a call to all people to act on behalf of our common home. It offers much more than a treatise on the environment and climate change; it sets a cosmological context of belonging to creation as relatives, as brothers and sisters (11). It calls for an ecological spirituality and conversion (216), and offers a moral framework for both individual and collective response to care for our common home.

As an Earth lawyer and Catholic sister striving to awaken people to the peril of Earth's desecration and the promise of acting as a single community of life, I hear Francis's story with gratitude and relief.
Francis weaves a story of integral ecology (137).

"... [W]e have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate the questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (49).

He emphasizes the interrelationship between environmental destruction, anthropocentric domination of nature, disregard for people who are poor and vulnerable among us, extinction of species and the plunder of an unrestrained global economic system. Pollution and climate change, depletion of fresh water, biodiversity loss and disregard for human communities are the consequence "of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production" (32).

Francis connects the value of human life with the value of the Earth community which sustains all life. "It is not enough . . . to think of different species merely as potential ‘resources’ to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves" (33).

While sliding over the consequences of overpopulation (50), Francis boldly identifies the interrelated, causal dynamics that are destroying the fabric of our common home.

I was engaged, surprised, grateful and often in tears as I read Francis's epic story. It was encouraging to discover how closely it aligns with the sacred story that guides me and the work of Earth jurisprudence that is rooted in kinship.

**A call to right relationship**

Francis tells the story in ordinary language. He sets a familial tone of belonging throughout the encyclical with his use of kinship language: “Sister” Mother Earth, or Brother Sun, Sister Water, or Brother Wind. He invites the reader to self-reflection and to listen to the voices of Earth and persons who are poor as they speak to us.

Like Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis calls us into right relationship with all beings who share our common home and to defend those among us who suffer the most.

While not explicitly endorsing his Jesuit brother Teilhard de Chardin, who taught a cosmology of an interrelated, co-evolutionary Universe that is Christic-oriented, Francis reveals an affinity without specifically endorsing the co-evolutionary nature of the Universe. He writes, "The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things" (83). He expands on this in paragraph 233: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal . . . is to discover God in all things." Thus Francis positions humanity as having "unique worth and . . . tremendous responsibility" (90), while also recognizing the inherent worth of other aspects of creation as well.

**The end of a theology of domination**
Francis calls for a new story of human relatedness with creation, and specific rejection of human domination over. “... Nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (67).

Francis’ explicit rejection of a theology of dominion over the Earth is a needed correction. Humanity will never take the necessary action to counter and reduce the impacts of climate change and environmental destruction if we continue to subscribe to a human exceptionalism that legitimates our ongoing domination of nature.

Laying the groundwork for new legal systems that require shared responsibility

In my years as an Earth lawyer, there has been a silence in church teaching regarding the linkages between, and co-violations of, environmental and human rights. So it is particularly gratifying to have Francis issue a clarion call throughout Laudato Si’ that positions the church as a strong ally of both environmental and human justice.

The encyclical recognizes the need for new legal frameworks which are "indispensable" in setting "clear boundaries [that] ensure the protection of ecosystems" (53). This is a breakthrough moment for people who are working to advance legal recognition of nature's rights to exist and flourish.

Francis's call for people to listen to the laws of nature legitimizes the germinal efforts of organizations that strive to design and implement laws and policies that respect the inherent value of nature – for example: the Center for Earth Jurisprudence, the Earth Law Center, the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network, Navdanya, and Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.

These organizations are joining with international indigenous organizations and other European-based "eradicating ecocide" initiatives in preparing for the third World Peoples' Tribunal on the Rights of Mother Earth taking place in Paris during the U.N. climate negotiations in December. Our intent is to speak with one voice on the need for laws that respect the rights of Mother Earth. In alignment with the encyclical, and with the two previous Tribunals, there will be stories and evidence presented to a panel of renowned citizen judges of co-violations of environmental and human rights. People most affected by climate change and excessive environmental extractive practices will be the expert witnesses testifying to this peoples' tribunal exercising moral jurisdiction.

We adopt this Peoples' Tribunal, since the U.N. and international community remain derelict in implementing structures and mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and its consequences.

Mechanisms leading to climate justice
Although a key purpose and timing of *Laudato Si'* is to influence the outcome of the upcoming [climate negotiations in Paris in December](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Agreement_on_Climate_Change), Francis does not endorse or promote any specific climate justice solutions. He does, however, reject "cap and trade" mechanisms (171). These market mechanisms expand increased economic commodification and objectification of nature; i.e., the atmosphere. Treating the atmosphere as a trade commodity, and then allocating to the market the right to sell the levels of air pollution, is a false economically-driven "solution" that is not consistent with an integral ecology. Rather, it exacerbates the problem.

Francis invites consideration of other solutions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. He insists that wealthy, industrialized nations owe an ecological and social debt to other countries, as a result of disproportionate consumption of Earth's minerals and natural resources. He speaks of common, but "differentiated responsibilities" for social and environmental justice (52). This term, which is often used in global climate discussions, means that all nations, industrialized and developing ones together, share a common responsibility for reducing carbon emissions. However, not every nation has contributed the same degree to climate change; therefore, there are historical responsibilities that need to be "differentiated."

Clearly the developed countries have contributed more greenhouse gas emissions than the developing nations. Many of the developing countries argue they are owed technological and financial resources from the industrialized nations to help them adapt to the impacts of climate change. They also need assistance in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. They have contributed the least to environmental devastation and carbon emissions, yet they suffer the most.

In addition, these "undeveloped" countries often have an abundance of natural resources that industrialized countries are grabbing quickly. This often lays the foundation for violence between mining and extractive industries and local residents. The resistance is often led by indigenous peoples who want to preserve their land and lifestyle from destructive mining practices.

For example, in Ecuador, there was a campaign started in 2007 to protect the [Yasuni Amazon National Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasuni_Amazon_National_Park) from mining and oil extraction. The Shuar people have led the [resistance campaign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasuni-ITT_Initiative) to keep "the oil in the soil." President Rafael Vicente Correa Delgado led a [Yasuni-ITT Initiative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasuni-ITT_Initiative) for several years to keep this area protected from mining. He asked for contributions from industrialized societies to keep the oil in the ground rather than extract it and add to increased carbon emissions. After six years, over extensive protest of Ecuadorian citizens, Correa ended this initiative. However, the leaders of indigenous communities continue their resistance.

Last November, [José Isidro Tendetza Antún](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jos%C3%A9_Isidro_Tendetza_Ant%C3%BAn), a former vice-president of the Shuar Federation of Zamora, was found murdered. He was last seen on his way to the U.N. Conference on Climate in Lima, Peru, where he was invited to testify at the climate talks about the Mirador copper and gold mine and the continued aggression of international mining companies that were destroying the land and cultures of indigenous people living there.

The killing highlights the violence and harassment facing environmental activists in
Ecuador and elsewhere. A United Kingdom group, Global Witness, reported in April, 2015 that "at least 116 environmental activists died in 2014 while campaigning against mining, logging, water and land grabs."

It is important to note that many of the industrial initiatives are legal: They have signed contracts with trade representatives of developing countries to extract resources in exchange for financial contributions to the country's economy. These contributions, however, rarely extend to the members of the natural community, indigenous and ecological alike that have been devastated by the mining – and they do nothing to protect the integrity of the land or people. Consistently we see that the rapacious greed of an unrestrained global market does not balance the rights of people and the environment in their drive for constant economic growth.

Challenges and possibilities

Significant challenges exist to the adoption and ratification of a climate framework that all nations can agree to. Francis recognizes that "[e]nforceable international agreements are urgently needed, since local authorities are incapable of effective intervention" (173).

One of the greatest barriers to a global climate treaty is the lack of international enforcement mechanisms that can hold nations accountable to achieving annual emissions reduction targets. The complexities of enforcing such a global mechanism seem daunting. Yet, as Naomi Klein (who recently was invited to the Vatican to consult with Cardinal Turkson on Laudato Si’) illustrates in her book, This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate, there already exists at least one model (albeit without transparency or impacted parties' participation) for enforcing global regulatory agreements: the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The WTO has a set of rules that all signers agree to follow, sometimes with draconian results. These rules enable parties to challenge alleged "unfair and protectionist trade practices." Frequently, challenges have applied to measures taken by countries to specifically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For example, in 2009 Ontario, Canada, pledged to wean its province completely off coal by 2014 (Klein, 67). It adopted legislation which incentivized renewable energy providers by allowing them to sell power back to the grid. The legislation also provided incentives for local municipalities, co-ops and indigenous communities to enter the renewable energy market. In order to qualify, solar energy developers had to obtain at least 40 percent to 60 percent of their production material from within the province. There were also "buy local" and "hire local" provisions that added more than 31,000 jobs by 2014.

It seemed to be an incredible success story. Soon, however, Japan and the European Union submitted a complaint to the World Trade Organization alleging that Ontario's "local-content requirement" was in violation of WTO rules. They specifically argued "that the requirement that a fixed percentage of renewable energy equipment be made in Ontario would 'discriminate against equipment for renewable energy generation facilities produced outside of Ontario'" (Klein 68). The WTO decided against Canada, ruling that Ontario's requirement to "buy-local" was protectionist and violated the free trade agreement. The manufacturing plant was closed down, and workers were again unemployed. The Ontario government did not appeal. Thus trade trumped climate. But the enforcement mechanism "worked."
I cite this to illustrate two points. First is to demonstrate the economic prowess of global multinational behemoths that have designed international trade agreements such as the WTO Agreements, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the emergent Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). They can effectively counter local climate change remedies. Secondly, and even more importantly, is to illustrate that if international trade representatives can design global mechanisms that enforce alleged trade violations across international borders, why can’t similar mechanisms be adopted to enforce violations of carbon emission commitments? It is already being done in the name of free trade.

As Francis notes, workable solutions "must be respectful of each nation's sovereignty" and they must "also lay down mutually agreed means of averting regional disasters which would eventually affect everyone" (173). Lasting solutions become a matter of respect, political will and commitment to the common good.

Making an impact

Laudato Si’ stirs hope and promise for many, fear and trepidation for others. At the press conference immediately following the release of Laudato Si’, Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in Vatican City, referred to the upcoming U.N. climate negotiations taking place in Paris in December and said, “Humanity is face to face with a crucial challenge that requires the development of adequate policies, which, moreover, are currently being discussed on the global agenda. Certainly, Laudato Si’ can and must have an impact on important and urgent decisions to be made in this area.”

Recognizing that we need a new story that has mythic and spiritual power to awaken us as a species to the "soul-sized" crises facing us, Francis asks each of us, “What kind of world do you want to leave to those who come after us. . .” (160)? He boldly has set before us a vision of what it means to be human in the 21st century. He offers interconnected criteria for building an integral ecology and a moral compass for defending our common home.

What will be our response? What will be the response of the global community meeting in Paris in December? Will the United Nations be receptive to Pope Francis’s message when he addresses the General Assembly in September? Will the U.S. Congress? How about the people in the pews?

Finally, what story will we tell ourselves and our children when we look back at this pivotal moment in history? In the words of Terry Tempest Williams in Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place, “The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint; that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come."

[Patricia Siemen, OP, JD, is a Dominican Sister from Adrian, Michigan, and a civil attorney who works to protect the long-term ecological and spiritual health of humans and all members of the Earth community. She is director of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence at Barry University School of Law, Orlando, Florida.]
July 9, 2015

In Bolivia, Pope Francis Apologizes for Church’s ‘Grave Sins’

By Jim Yardley and William Neuman
New York Times

SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia — Pope Francis offered a direct apology on Thursday for the complicity of the Roman Catholic Church in the oppression of Latin America during the colonial era, even as he called for a global social movement to shatter a “new colonialism” that has fostered inequality, materialism and the exploitation of the poor.

Speaking to a hall filled with social activists, farmers, garbage workers and Bolivian indigenous people, Francis offered the most ambitious, and biting, address of his South American tour.

He repeated familiar themes in sharply critiquing the global economic order and warning of environmental catastrophe — but also added a twist with his apology.

“Some may rightly say, ‘When the pope speaks of colonialism, he overlooks certain actions of the church,’ ” Francis said. “I say this to you with regret: Many grave sins were committed against the native people of America in the name of God.”

He added: “I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offense of the church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.”

Francis, an Argentine, is the first Latin American pope, and his apology comes as he is trying to position the church as a refuge and advocate for the poor and dispossessed of his native continent.

During his visit to Ecuador, and now Bolivia, Francis has made broad calls for Latin American unity — on Thursday mentioning “Patria Grande,” the historic ambition to make the continent a unified world force — even as he has sidestepped some local controversies.

Bolivia suffered stark exploitation during Spanish rule, as silver deposits helped finance the Spanish empire, bankroll European colonialism elsewhere and also fill the treasury of the Vatican. Bolivia’s president, Evo Morales, is a longtime leftist critic of the church, yet on Thursday he spoke before the pope and praised him.

Francis’ criticism of multinational corporations and global capitalism has already brought him criticism and suspicions among some who question the leftist tint of his ideas.
Mr. Morales, a fierce critic of American corporate influence, wore a white shirt and a dark jacket bearing a picture of the Communist revolutionary Che Guevara on the left breast.

“For the first time, I feel like I have a pope: Pope Francis,” Mr. Morales said.

Francis has filled four consecutive days with appearances, but other than an environmental critique offered in Ecuador, the pope had hewed mostly to theological topics or broad themes like family, service and mission.

His appearance on Thursday night was at the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, a congress of global activists working to mobilize and help the poor. Some people wore Che Guevara T-shirts while some indigenous women wore traditional black bowlers.

Francis drew cheers when he called on the activists and others to change the social order: “I would even say that the future of humanity is in great measure in your own hands, through your ability to organize and carry out creative alternatives, through your daily efforts to ensure the three Ls — labor, lodging, land.”

Francis repeated his condemnation of an economic system rooted in pursuit of money and profits, but in an aside he criticized “certain free-trade treaties” and “austerity, which always tightens the belt of workers and the poor” — a likely reference to Greece.

“Human beings and nature must not be at the service of money,” he said. “Let us say no to an economy of exclusion and inequality, where money rules, rather than service. That economy kills. That economy excludes. That economy destroys Mother Earth.”

But if Francis again called for change, he also offered no detailed prescription.

“Don’t expect a recipe from this pope,” he said. “Neither the pope nor the church have a monopoly on the interpretation of social reality or the proposal of solution to contemporary issues. I dare say no recipe exists.”

In Latin America, Francis’ apology will likely draw the most attention, though he told the audience that Pope John Paul II had already apologized.

In 2000, John Paul made a blanket apology from the Vatican, asking forgiveness from Jews, ethnic populations on different continents and other groups. Francis’ apology was specific and made on Bolivian soil.

Yet Francis’s agenda for the trip includes bolstering the church, and he noted that many priests and laity had acted with courage on behalf of Latin America and said Catholicism was integral to the continent’s identity.

“An identity which here, as in other countries, some powers are committed to erasing, at times because our faith is revolutionary, because our faith challenges the tyranny of Mammon,” he said.
Inside the conference hall, Francis’ words resonated. Isabel Olivo, 64, an Uruguayan dairy farmer, praised the speech.

“Now what is needed is that what he said goes onto the agenda of all the politicians and the movements, that it goes on their work agenda and doesn’t get buried on their desks,” she said.

And Alfredo Marco, 48, a taxi driver and representative of neighborhood councils in Santa Cruz, praised the pope as speaking the “same language as President Evo, the same words.”

“There are two popes, Pope Francis and Pope Evo,” he said.

At the end of the speech, Francis made his familiar request that people pray for him, but mindful that this was a more secular crowd, he added that if people could not pray for him that “you think well of me and that you send me good energy.”


July 9, 2015

From Pope Francis to Green Muslims, faith groups steadfast in push for clean energy

By Kari Lydersen
Midwest Energy News

Rev. Booker Steven Vance took to the pulpit in historic Old St. Patrick’s Church in downtown Chicago on June 22 to praise Pope Francis’ ground-breaking encyclical on climate change and sustainability.

Vance attached a very concrete and local element to the Pope’s sweeping call to action. He and other religious and environmental leaders hosting a press conference declared that passing a proposed Clean Jobs bill in the Illinois legislature is one way the Pope’s call to action should be answered.

“The encyclical provides an opportunity for a game-changer, bringing this conversation to a whole new level,” said Vance. “I’m talking about the bill downstate in Springfield that deals with clean air, clean energy and clean jobs. The pope is absolutely correct, we are responsible and the onus falls on us.”

That same evening 90 miles north in Milwaukee, the Islamic Environmental Group of Wisconsin, also known as the Wisconsin Green Muslims, gathered to break the Ramadan fast together while also talking about a spiritual obligation to care for the earth, in part by reducing carbon emissions and embracing a more sustainable lifestyle.
Local leaders described how the Islamic Society of Milwaukee—one of nearly 30 mosques enrolled in this year's national Greening Ramadan campaign—has overhauled its buildings with LED lights, skylights, a green roof, motion sensors and special faucets to conserve energy and water. Energy efficiency is one of the requirements to be recognized as a Greening Ramadan Mosque in the national campaign, in addition to food and water conservation, using green products and reducing waste.

A crowning achievement for the Islamic Society of Milwaukee would be installing solar panels on the 107,000-square foot roof of the society’s largest building, leaders say.

But this will be difficult to do financially given the solar policies instituted by We Energies, including increased fixed charges on customers with solar installations and a low rate for solar energy sent back to the grid.

Protecting the environment has long been a tenet of many faiths, from indigenous spiritual practices around the globe to the world’s major organized religions. Today, faith-based action on clean energy has the power to influence individual behavior and also government policy. These two snapshots show how different faiths are embracing this role, and also how long the road can sometimes be.

A difficult mission

The Clean Jobs bill would create about 32,000 jobs in Illinois, according to proponents, by increasing the state’s commitment to renewable energy and energy efficiency. A study by the Union of Concerned Scientists found it would spur $23 billion in clean energy investment and lower consumer bills by a total of $12 billion over 15 years.

The bill has widespread support—including from interfaith groups and religious leaders—but it also faces competing bills backed by powerful energy interests and a state budget crisis that is consuming the legislature’s attention.

Meanwhile the Wisconsin Green Muslims also are up against powerful forces in trying to promote clean energy.

In partnership with the Cleaner Milwaukee Coalition, they were among the scores of organizations and individuals who filed comments opposing We Energies’ proposals.

“Our biggest wish is to enable houses of worship and people of faith to install solar energy systems on their properties, however, the requested change in this rate case appears to make this goal very difficult to accomplish,” said Wisconsin Green Muslims founder Huda Alkaff in comments filed with the Wisconsin Public Service Commission.

Despite massive public opposition, the Public Service Commission approved most of the utility’s proposals.
“Call me a pessimist,” said Lucas Johnson, an assistant professor of religion and environmental studies at Wake Forest University, who does not think the Pope’s encyclical or other messages by religious leaders will have much effect on policy. He notes that four top Republican contenders for the 2016 Presidential election and 60 percent of white Catholics in the U.S., according to a recent Pew Research Center study, do not accept the idea that humans are causing problematic climate change.

“The pope joined a long line of religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama and others, who have been talking about climate change for some time,” Johnson said. And yet, national and international progress on the issue has been slow and plagued with political gridlock.

“Statements from high-profile individuals are more often symbolic than they are pragmatic, I’m not sure how much they filter down,” to government actions or the beliefs of regular people, said Johnson. “Remember the official Catholic Church position is that birth control is impermissible,” yet it is widely used by Catholics.

Muslim leaders at the Milwaukee event said educating their base about sustainability and clean energy has been a slow process, in part because they are working with immigrant communities from the Middle East, Burma and Somalia who are dealing with other socioeconomic issues.

“We’re trying to make people aware, it takes time, it’s a work in process,” said Islamic Society of Milwaukee executive director Othman Atta. “Once people see a clear benefit, they go for it.”

Johnson said that, “as a scholar there is not a lot of data that points to there being any past real trends” where religious leadership influenced environmental policy or distinct behavioral shifts. “But as a father I have hope we can get past all the differences and come to an empathetic, ethical understanding” of how to live sustainably.

A celebratory moment

Though progress may be slow, it’s clear that faith-based leadership and awareness-raising can impact the views and practices of people from a range of spiritual traditions.

Brian Sauder, executive director of the Chicago-based group Faith in Place, sees the Pope’s encyclical as bolstering and inspiring faith-based movements that are already in action, and helping break through the partisan political divide that has stymied clean energy and environmental policies.

“We see this as a celebratory moment, to have an international popular figure really champion the message is a great joy for us,” Sauder said. “We hope to amplify that message…to overcome these walls that divide us, to let that moral message lead us forward.”

At the Ramadan dinner in Milwaukee, people spoke passionately of the commitment to moderation and conservation that is inherent in Islam, and how that can translate to clean energy.
“In every aspect of our faith there’s an emphasis on moderation, and there’s a special focus on the environment,” said Nabil Salous, an officer of the Islamic Society who oversaw the energy efficiency overhauls. He pointed to the Prophet Muhammad’s message to conserve water in washing for prayer even when one is on the banks of an abundant river. “You are trustees of the environment, it’s at the heart of our faith.”

The Wisconsin Green Muslims’ current campaign focus is water, including conserving water, understanding the area’s watersheds and reducing stormwater run-off.

But energy and water are intrinsically connected, Alkaff noted, so through water the group is able to educate members about climate change and energy issues. A Ramadan calendar created by the Wisconsin Green Muslims lists different ecological goals for each day, including moderating your thermostat, supporting renewable energy investments and joining the climate justice movement.

“We know water is sacred and scarce, so from there it’s easy to move into climate issues, and also the issue of climate refugees,” Alkaff said. “It’s important for people to see the whole picture and connect the dots.”

Alkaff noted that in November 2014, as part of the Midwest Week of Climate Action, Wisconsin Green Muslims had more than 200 Milwaukee Muslim youth participate in a "Cut Carbon Pollution" photo petition campaign in support of the EPA’s Clean Power Plan.

Social justice across faiths

The Islamic Environmental Council of Wisconsin is a member of Interfaith Power and Light, a national group that began in the late 1990s as an Episcopal effort and grew into an interfaith mission to address climate change. Interfaith coalitions and activism have been deeply involved in promoting clean energy across the Midwest.

“It’s a micro-lab of the potential we have to overcome our differences and do things together,” said Sauder. “We might disagree on 99 percent of the issues from our different faith traditions, but we share our common home and a desire to take care of it on behalf of our children.”

Many faiths embrace both a commitment to protect the earth and also its most vulnerable residents. These two sentiments increasingly converge as environmental justice movements have grown and evidence accumulates regarding how climate change will disproportionately impact poor and marginalized people around the globe.

Social justice along with environmental stewardship has been a unifying theme of interfaith efforts around clean energy. Pope Francis’ encyclical depicted environmental sustainability and economic justice as intertwined struggles, in keeping with his defining focus on poverty and his identification with the poor.

Johnson points to the Pew study showing that in contrast to white Catholics’ skepticism of human-driven climate change, 60 percent of Latino Catholics in the U.S. do see climate change
as a problem caused by man. He suggests that this could be related to the fact that underdeveloped areas in Latin America, and lower-income, more vulnerable people in the U.S., are likely to be hit harder by the effects of climate change.

Johnson points to the fact that in general, Americans have experienced “a growing disaffection with traditional sources of religious authority,” and are increasingly likely to define spirituality on their own terms “and cobble together their own spiritual frameworks.”

“The most important movements toward ecological awareness and political traction that we’re seeing are not coming from the major world religions,” said Johnson. “They are coming from the margins, from the periphery, from cultural groups who are manufacturing new and different ways to be.”


July 10, 2015

An Ode To Climate Trolls (interview with Mary Evelyn Tucker)

Green Majority Radio

Listen to the episode here: https://greenmajoritymedia.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/459-an-ode-to-climate-trolls/

Josh Schlossberg is freelance journalist, a member of the Society of Environmental Journalists and editor for The Biomass Monitor, a page that tracks news and research around Biomass Energy. Biomass Energy has largely been given a pass as “green” by environmentalists, but should it? Biomass has largely fallen from the spotlight but it’s still going on, in fact in many area’s it’s increasingly being implemented, but Josh has done his homework and thinks that one reason it’s not being talked about much anymore is that frequently these projects are not nearly as green as they purport to be.

Check out the Biomass Monitor homepage here, and you can find Josh on twitter here.

Mary Evelyn Tucker is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University where she has appointments in the School of Forestry, Environmental Studies and the Department of Religious Studies. Mary Evelyn joins us to dig deeper into the contents and impact of Pope Francis’ Encyclical. Particularly, we discuss the science heavy (for a religious proclamation) contents and tone and the effect this will have on the future of the climate and more generally the environmental movement.

You can read more about Mary Evelyn Tucker here, and please check out the Forum on Religion and the Environment at Yale with lots of great links and articles here. Finally, regardless of your
religious persuasion, even if you read it one paragraph at a time for the rest of the summer, you will need to make sure you read every word of the Pope’s Encyclical for yourself here.

Finally, Stefan read us a short piece he wrote inspired by the recent “Jobs, Justice Climate” rally that saw 10,000+ people flood downtown Toronto last weekend called “An Ode To Climate Trolls”.


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**July 10, 2015**

A Radical Vatican?

By Naomi Klein
The New Yorker

**JUNE 29TH—PACKING**

When I was first asked to speak at a Vatican press conference on Pope Francis’s recently published climate-change encyclical, “Laudato Si’,” I was convinced that the invitation would soon be rescinded. Now the press conference and, after it, a two-day symposium to explore the encyclical is just two days away. This is actually happening.

As usual ahead of stressful trips, I displace all of my anxiety onto wardrobe. The forecast for Rome in the first week of July is punishingly hot, up to ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit. Women visiting the Vatican are supposed to dress modestly, no exposed legs or upper arms. Long, loose cottons are the obvious choice, the only problem being that I have a deep-seated sartorial aversion to anything with the whiff of hippie.

Surely the Vatican press room has air-conditioning. Then again, “Laudato Si’” makes a point of singling it out as one of many “harmful habits of consumption which, rather than decreasing, appear to be growing all the more.” Will the powers that be make a point of ditching the climate control just for this press conference? Or will they keep it on and embrace contradiction, as I am doing by supporting the Pope’s bold writings on how responding to the climate crisis requires deep changes to our growth-driven economic model—while disagreeing with him about a whole lot else?

To remind myself why this is worth all the trouble, I reread a few passages from the encyclical. In addition to laying out the reality of climate change, it spends considerable time exploring how the culture of late capitalism makes it uniquely difficult to address, or even focus upon, this civilizational challenge. “Nature is filled with words of love,” Francis writes, “but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wracking distractions, or the cult of appearances?”
I glance shamefully around at the strewn contents of my closet. (Look: some of us don’t get to wear the same white getup everywhere…)

**JULY 1ST—THE F-WORD**

Four of us are scheduled to speak at the Vatican press conference, including one of the chairs of the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. All except me are Catholic. In his introduction, Father Federico Lombardi, the director of the Holy See press office, describes me as a “secular Jewish feminist”—a term I used in my prepared remarks but never expected him to repeat. Everything else Father Lombardi says is in Italian, but these three words are spoken slowly and in English, as if to emphasize their foreignness.

The first question directed my way is from Rosie Scammell, with the Religion News Service: “I was wondering how you would respond to Catholics who are concerned by your involvement here, and other people who don’t agree with certain Catholic teachings?”

This is a reference to the fact that some traditionalists have been griping about all the heathens, including United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and a roster of climate scientists, who were spotted inside these ancient walls in the run-up to the encyclical’s publication. The fear is that discussion of planetary overburden will lead to a weakening of the Church’s position on birth control and abortion. As the editor of a popular Italian Catholic Web site put it recently, “The road the church is heading down is precisely this: To quietly approve population control while talking about something else.”

I respond that I am not here to broker a merger between the secular climate movement and the Vatican. However, if Pope Francis is correct that responding to climate change requires fundamental changes to our economic model—and I think he is correct—then it will take an extraordinarily broad-based movement to demand those changes, one capable of navigating political disagreements.

After the press conference, a journalist from the U.S. tells me that she has “been covering the Vatican for twenty years, and I never thought I would hear the word ‘feminist’ from that stage.”

The air-conditioning, for the record, was left on.

The British and Dutch ambassadors to the Holy See host a dinner for the conference’s organizers and speakers. Over wine and grilled salmon, discussion turns to the political ramifications of the Pope’s trip to the United States this September. One of the guests most preoccupied with this subject is from an influential American Catholic organization. “The Holy Father isn’t making it easy for us by going to Cuba first,” he says.

I ask him how spreading the message of “Laudato Si’” is going back home. “The timing was bad,” he says. “It came out around the same time as the Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage, and that kind of sucked all the oxygen out of the room.” That’s certainly true. Many U.S. bishops welcomed the encyclical—but not with anything like the Catholic firepower expended to denounce the Supreme Court decision a week later.
The contrast is a vivid reminder of just how far Pope Francis has to go in realizing his vision of a Church that spends less time condemning people over abortion, contraception, and who they marry, and more time fighting for the trampled victims of a highly unequal and unjust economic system. When climate justice had to fight for airtime with denunciations of gay marriage, it didn’t stand a chance.

On the way back to the hotel, looking up at the illuminated columns and dome of St. Peter’s Basilica, it strikes me that this battle of wills may be the real reason such eclectic outsiders are being invited inside this cloistered world. We’re here because many powerful Church insiders simply cannot be counted upon to champion Francis’s transformative climate message—and some would clearly be happy to see it buried alongside the many other secrets entombed in this walled enclave.

Before bed, I spend a little more time with “Laudato Si’” and something jumps out at me. In the opening paragraph, Pope Francis writes that “our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.” He quotes Saint Francis of Assisi’s “Canticle of the Creatures,” which states, “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.”

Several paragraphs down, the encyclical notes that Saint Francis had “communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them ‘to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason.’” According to Saint Bonaventure, the encyclical says, the thirteenth-century friar “would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister.’”

Later in the text, pointing to various biblical directives to care for animals that provide food and labor, Pope Francis comes to the conclusion that “the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.”

Challenging anthropocentrism is ho-hum stuff for ecologists, but it’s something else for the pinnacle of the Catholic Church. You don’t get much more human-centered than the persistent Judeo-Christian interpretation that God created the entire world specifically to serve Adam’s every need. As for the idea that we are part of a family with all other living beings, with the earth as our life-giving mother, that too is familiar to eco-ears. But from the Church? Replacing a maternal Earth with a Father God, and draining the natural world of its sacred power, were what stamping out paganism and animism were all about.

By asserting that nature has a value in and of itself, Francis is overturning centuries of theological interpretation that regarded the natural world with outright hostility—as a misery to be transcended and an “allurement” to be resisted. Of course, there have been parts of Christianity that stressed that nature was something valuable to steward and protect—some even celebrated it—but mostly as a set of resources to sustain humans.

Francis is not the first Pope to express deep environmental concern—John Paul II and Benedict XVI did as well. But those Popes didn’t tend to call the earth our “sister, mother” or assert that chipmunks and trout are our siblings.
JULY 2ND—BACK FROM THE WILDERNESS

In St. Peter’s Square, the souvenir shops are selling Pope Francis mugs, calendars, aprons—and stacks and stacks of bound copies of “Laudato Si’,” available in multiple languages. Window banners advertise its presence. At a glance, it looks like just another piece of papal schlock, not a document that could transform Church doctrine.

This morning is the opening of “People and Planet First: The Imperative to Change Course,” a two-day gathering to shape an action plan around “Laudato Si’,” organized by the International Alliance of Catholic Development Organisations and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Speakers include Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland and a current United Nations Special Envoy on Climate Change, as well as Enele Sopoaga, the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, an island nation whose existence is under threat from rising seas.

After an opening prayer led by a soft-spoken bishop from Bangladesh, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson—a major force behind the encyclical—delivers the first keynote. At sixty-six, his temples are grey, but his round cheeks are still youthful. Many speculate that this could be the man to succeed the seventy-eight-year-old Francis, becoming the first African pope.

Most of Turkson’s talk is devoted to citing earlier Papal encyclicals as precedents for “Laudato Si’.” His message is clear: this is not about one Pope; it’s part of a Catholic tradition of seeing the earth as a sacrament and recognizing a “covenant” (not a mere connection) between human beings and nature.

At the same time, the Cardinal points out that “the word ‘stewardship’ only appears twice” in the encyclical. The word “care,” on the other hand, appears dozens of times. This is no accident, we are told. While stewardship speaks to a relationship based on duty, “when one cares for something it is something one does with passion and love.”

This passion for the natural world is part of what has come to be called “the Francis factor,” and clearly flows from a shift in geographic power within the Catholic Church. Francis is from Argentina, and Turkson from Ghana. One of the most vivid passages in the encyclical—“Who turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?”—is a quotation from a statement of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines.

This reflects the reality that, in large parts of the global south, the more anti-nature elements of Christian doctrine never entirely took hold. Particularly in Latin America, with its large indigenous populations, Catholicism wasn’t able to fully displace cosmologies that centered on a living and sacred Earth, and the result was often a Church that fused Christian and indigenous world views. With “Laudato Si’,” that fusion has finally reached the highest echelons of the Church.

Yet Turkson seems to gently warn the crowd here not to get carried away. Some African cultures “deified” nature, he says, but that is not the same as “care.” The earth may be a mother, but God is still the boss. Animals may be our relatives, but humans are not animals. Still, once an official
Papal teaching challenges something as central as human dominion over the earth, is it really possible to control what will happen next?

This point is made forcefully by the Irish Catholic priest and theologian Seán McDonagh, who was part of the drafting process for the encyclical. His voice booming from the audience, he urges us not to hide from the fact that the love of nature embedded in the encyclical represents a profound and radical shift from traditional Catholicism. “We are moving to a new theology,” he declares.

To prove it, he translates a Latin prayer that was once commonly recited after communion during the season of advent. “Teach us to despise the things of the earth and to love the things of heaven.” Overcoming centuries of loathing the corporeal world is no small task, and, McDonagh argues, it serves little purpose to downplay the work ahead.

It’s thrilling to witness such radical theological challenges being batted around inside the curved wooden walls of an auditorium named after St. Augustine, the theologian whose skepticism of things bodily and material so profoundly shaped the Church. But I would imagine that for the conspicuously silent men in black robes in the front row, who study and teach in this building, it is also a little terrifying.

This evening’s dinner is much more informal: a sidewalk trattoria with a handful of Franciscans from Brazil and the U.S., as well as McDonagh, who is treated by the others as an honorary member of the order.

My dinner companions have been some of biggest troublemakers within the Church for years, the ones taking Christ’s proto-socialist teachings seriously. Patrick Carolan, the Washington, D.C.-based executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, is one of them. Smiling broadly, he tells me that, at the end of his life, Vladimir Lenin supposedly said that what the Russian Revolution had really needed was not more Bolsheviks but ten St. Francises of Assisi.

Now, all of a sudden, these outsiders share many of their views with the most powerful Catholic in the world, the leader of a flock of 1.2 billion people. Not only did this Pope surprise everyone by calling himself Francis, as no Pope ever had before him, but he appears to be determined to revive the most radical Franciscan teachings. Moema de Miranda, a powerful Brazilian social leader, who was wearing a wooden Franciscan cross, says that it feels “as if we are finally being heard.”

For McDonagh, the changes at the Vatican are even more striking. “The last time I had a Papal audience was 1963,” he tells me over spaghetti vongole. “I let three Popes go by.” And yet here he is, back in Rome, having helped draft the most talked-about encyclical anyone can remember.

McDonagh points out that it’s not just Latin Americans who figured out how to reconcile a Christian God with a mystical Earth. The Irish Celtic tradition also managed to maintain a sense of “divine in the natural world. Water sources had a divinity about them. Trees had a divinity to them.” But, in much of the rest of the Catholic world, all of this was wiped out. “We are presenting things as if there is continuity, but there wasn’t continuity. That theology was
functionally lost.” (It’s a sleight of hand that many conservatives are noticing. “Pope Francis, The Earth Is Not My Sister,” reads a recent headline in The Federalist, a right-wing Web magazine.)

As for McDonagh, he is thrilled with the encyclical, although he wishes it had gone even further in challenging the idea that the earth was created as a gift to humans. How could that be so, when we know it was here billions of years before we arrived?

I ask how the Bible could survive this many fundamental challenges—doesn’t it all fall apart at some point? He shrugs, telling me that scripture is ever evolving, and should be interpreted in historical context. If Genesis needs a prequel, that’s not such a big deal. Indeed, I get the distinct sense that he’d be happy to be part of the drafting committee.

JULY 3RD—CHURCH, EVANGELIZE THYSELF

I wake up thinking about stamina. Why did Franciscans like Patrick Carolan and Moema de Miranda stick it out for so long in an institution that didn’t reflect many of their deepest beliefs and values—only to live to see a sudden shift that many here can only explain with allusions to the supernatural? Carolan shared with me that he had been abused by a priest at age twelve. He is enraged by the cover-ups, and yet he did not let it drive him permanently from his faith. What kept them there?

I put this to Miranda when I see her at the end of Mary Robinson’s lecture. (Robinson had gently criticized the encyclical for failing to adequately emphasize the role of women and girls in human development.)

Miranda corrects me, saying that she is not actually one of those who stuck it out for much of their lifetimes. “I was an atheist for years and years, a Communist, a Maoist. Until I was thirty-three. And then I was converted.” She described it as a moment of pure realization: “Wow, God exists. And everything changed.”

I asked her what precipitated this, and she hesitates, and laughs a little. She tells me she had been going through a very difficult period in her life, when she came across a group of women “who had something different, even in their suffering. And they started talking about the presence of God in their lives in such a way that made me listen. And then it was, suddenly, God just is there. In one moment, it was something impossible for me to think. In the other moment, it was there.”

Conversion—I had forgotten about that. And yet it may be the key to understanding the power and potential of “Laudato Si’.” Pope Francis devotes an entire chapter of the encyclical to the need for an “ecological conversion” among Christians, “whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”

An evangelism of ecology, I realize, is what I have been witnessing take shape during the past three days in Rome—in the talk of “spreading the good news of the encyclical,” of “taking the
Church on the road,” of a “people’s pilgrimage” for the planet, in Miranda laying out plans to spread the encyclical in Brazil through radio ads, online videos, and pamphlets for use in parish study groups.

A millennia-old engine designed to proselytize and convert non-Christians is now preparing to direct its missionary zeal inward, challenging and changing foundational beliefs about humanity’s place in the world among the already faithful. In the closing session, Father McDonagh proposes “a three-year synod on the encyclical,” to educate Church members about this new theology of interconnection and “integral ecology.”

Many have puzzled over how “Laudato Si’” can simultaneously be so sweepingly critical of the present and yet so hopeful about the future. The Church’s faith in the power of ideas—and its fearsome capacity to spread information globally—goes a long way toward explaining this tension. People of faith, particularly missionary faiths, believe deeply in something that a lot of secular people aren’t so sure about: that all human beings are capable of profound change. They remain convinced that the right combination of argument, emotion and experience can lead to life-altering transformations. That, after all, is the essence of conversion.

The most powerful example of this capacity for change may well be Pope Francis’s Vatican. And it is a model not for the Church alone. Because if one of the oldest and most tradition-bound institutions in the world can change its teachings and practices as radically, and as rapidly, as Francis is attempting, then surely all kinds of newer and more elastic institutions can change as well.

And if that happens—if transformation is as contagious as it seems to be here—well, we might just stand a chance of tackling climate change.

Naomi Klein is the author of “This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate,” which comes out in paperback this August. A documentary based on the book, directed by Avi Lewis, will be released in September.


July 10, 2015

Bishop of Salisbury welcomes update to environment guide

Diocese of Lincoln

The Church of England’s lead bishop on the environment has welcomed a new update to a guide providing advice and resources for parishes on tackling climate change.
Don’t Stop at the Lights, first published in 2008 by Church House Publishing, will be issued with a new booklet giving updated information and practical tips to churches on incorporating the environment into the Church year.

People who already have the book, co-authored by Claire Foster and David Shreeve, can either download the update or apply for a free copy by email.

Nicholas Holtam, Bishop of Salisbury, writing in the update, detailed practical action taken by churches including work on energy efficiency, renewable energy and care for churchyards which are havens of biodiversity.

All churches are committed to shrinking their carbon footprint and there is a growing movement to pray and fast for the climate on the first day of every month, he added.

“I do hope this book helps clergy and congregations to see how the environment can matter throughout the year and how it need not be yet another burden to add to an already heavy workload, but a real contribution to our service and commitment,” Bishop Nicholas wrote.

David Shreeve, the Church of England’s environmental adviser, said: “So much has happened since Don’t Stop at the Lights was first published in 2008 – the update provides new website links including vital information about how churches can prepare for the forthcoming Paris climate change talks.

“Don’t Stop at the Lights takes the whole of the Church year and gives advice and ideas to churches on how they can include the environment throughout the Christian calendar year. You don’t have to wait for Harvest festival to do something on the environment.”

The update has been issued after faith leaders including the Archbishop of Canterbury signed the Lambeth Declaration last month warning of the “huge challenge” facing the world over climate change. The declaration includes a call on faith communities to recognise the pressing need to make the transition to a low carbon economy.

The 2015 Update to Don’t Stop at the Lights: Leading your church through a changing climate is available to download from the Church House Publishing website

Hard copies can be ordered via publishing@churchofengland.org

For more information about the Church of England’s national environmental campaign see the website


July 14, 2015
Our Common Home: Climate Change Brings Moral Change

Stemming climate change is a moral responsibility, suggests Pope Francis in encyclical on need for sustainability

By Mary Evelyn Tucker
YaleGlobal

NEW HAVEN: On June 18th, news outlets around the world reported on the Pope's Encyclical *Praised Be: On the Care of Our Common Home*. The encyclical is a global call for creating an “integral ecology” that brings multiple disciplines together for a sustainable future. This movement reflects a major shift in thinking regarding environmental issues – one where religious, cultural and secular values are seen as crucial for social transformation.

For decades the public has assumed that scientists or policymakers would solve environmental problems like climate change. Market-based and technological solutions were also pursued. While these approaches are necessary, we are realizing they are not sufficient to resolve pressing environmental challenges. Ecological issues are no longer viewed as simply scientific or policy issues, but also moral concerns. That is the significance of the encyclical and why it is provoking such strong reactions. Ethics is meeting ecology – a powerful formula for change.

The encyclical marks a historic moment. An encyclical is the highest-level teaching document in the Catholic Church, and this is the first in 2000 years concerned with the environment. It is addressed to the faithful, some 1.2 billion Catholics. Pope Francis makes it clear, however, that he is speaking not just to Catholics, or the larger Christian community of another 1 billion members. Rather, he is speaking to all people on the planet about our common home.

Even before its release there was a flurry of news stories – on its meaning and long-term significance – with attention from both supporters and detractors. The debate will continue for years to come for we are witnessing a historic moment.

The message has world-changing potential. The Pope is a popular leader who speaks simply and yet authoritatively, drawing on his MA in chemistry and his theological training as a Jesuit. And the encyclical was delivered as there is growing consensus that the human community needs to make changes on both global and local levels. The encyclical was released before the December climate talks in Paris and before the pope speaks at the United Nations and the US Congress in September.

The pope is calling for an integral ecology that brings together concern for people and the planet. He makes it clear that the environment can no longer be seen as only an issue for scientific experts, or environmental groups, or government agencies like the US Environmental Protection Agency alone. Rather, he invites all people, programs and institutions to realize these are complicated environmental and social problems that require integrated solutions beyond a “technocratic paradigm” that values an easy fix.
Under this framework, for example, he suggests that ecology, economics and equity are intertwined. Healthy ecosystems depend on a just economy that results in equity. Endangering ecosystems with an exploitative economic system is causing immense human suffering and inequity. In particular, the poor and most vulnerable are threatened by climate change, although they are not the major cause of the climate problem. Within this integrated framework, he calls for bold new solutions. This includes what he calls a “cultural revolution” of values from Christianity and the world’s religions.

Thus to contribute to global warming and compromise our planetary life systems is seen by the pope and many others as morally problematic. This is a watershed moment – a broadening of ethics that encompasses both humans and nature. The move in the United States from segregation to civil rights in the 1960s was sparked by moral voices, such as Martin Luther King. So, too, ethical concerns now led by the pope encourage the growing turn from unsustainable environmental and economic practices. Indeed, he calls for “ecological virtues” to overcome “ecological sin.” No wonder there is pushback; it is not surprising that climate skeptics are wavering. And just as with civil rights, this moral shift will take time.

For 25 years, the UN Intergovernmenal Panel on Climate Change and the US National Academy of Sciences have issued numerous scientific reports. All warn about irreparable damage to ecosystems with human-induced climate change. The US Pentagon has acknowledged that climate change is a major security risk and urged efforts at mitigation. Yet, citizens of the United States along with others in the developed world have not changed our consumptive habits regarding energy use. Moreover, political gridlock dominates on both national and international levels, preventing enforceable agreements from being negotiated.

From Pope Francis, a penetrating moral message is emerging. This man who washes the feet of prisoners and lives in simple quarters has captured the hearts of millions yearning for authentic leadership and genuine change. And he follows in the footsteps of his namesake, Francis of Assisi from eight centuries ago, a man who abandoned family wealth and spoke of Brother Sun and Sister Moon recognizing the kinship of humans with nature and the cosmos.

Pope Francis has also embraced the poor, threatening the status quo of privilege and power.

He is encouraging transformation in religious, spiritual and secular communities working for ecology and justice. In doing so, he acknowledges the need for believers and non-believers alike to help renew the vitality of Earth’s ecosystems and expand systemic efforts for equity. He is making visible an emerging worldwide phenomenon of religious environmentalism already working on greening seminaries and houses of worship as well as developing new ecotheologies and ecojustice ethics. This diverse movement is evoking a change of mind and heart, consciousness and conscience.

This is the focus of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, which has worked for two decades to highlight the diverse ecological and cultural values embedded in the world’s religions. The work began at Harvard from 1995 to 1998 with 10 conferences and then 10 edited volumes on World Religions and Ecology published at Harvard. The forum has since moved to Yale,
continuing research, education and outreach; its website documents the publications, statements, and engaged projects that have emerged in the religious communities around the world.

The pope’s encyclical also happened to run in tandem with a conference in Beijing on the efforts in China to create an interdisciplinary “ecological civilization” drawing on science, business, education and cultural values – sponsored by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. The conference is among more than 25 organized by the forum.

The rising moral force for ecological and social transformation can be witnessed on every continent and in every religious tradition, as covered in my book *Ecology and Religion*, co-authored with John Grim: Indigenous communities preserve forests in the Amazon and in North America; the film *Renewal* examines eight case studies of religious environmentalism in the United States; Buddhist monks protect forests in Southeast Asia. Hindu practitioners restore sacred rivers in India; Jews, Christians, and Muslims conserve the Jordan River.

These examples of religious communities caring for our common home offer hope that Francis' message will not only be heard, but acted on. Indeed, the future of the Earth community may depend on it.

*Mary Evelyn Tucker is co-director with John Grim of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, with the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and Yale Divinity School. They are authors of *Ecology and Religion*, published in 2014 by Island Press, and producers of the Emmy Award–winning PBS film *Journey of the Universe*.*

http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/our-common-home-climate-change-brings-moral-change

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**July 15, 2015**

The Emerging Phenomenon Of Religious Environmentalism

An encyclical is the highest-level teaching document in the Catholic Church, and this is the first in 2000 years concerned with the environment.

By Mary Evelyn Tucker

Outlook

On June 18th, news outlets around the world reported on the Pope's Encyclical *Praised Be: On the Care of Our Common Home*. The encyclical is a global call for creating an "integral ecology" that brings multiple disciplines together for a sustainable future. This movement reflects a major shift in thinking regarding environmental issues — one where religious, cultural and secular values are seen as crucial for social transformation.

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July 17, 2015

From Times Square to the Capitol, Apache Protestors Fight U.S. Land Swap with Mining Company

By Andrew C. Revkin
Dot Earth
New York Times

Here’s a Dot Earth postcard from Kieran Suckling, the executive director of the Center for Biological Diversity, who has been traveling with a group of protestors from the San Carlos Apache tribe in southeastern Arizona. The protestors, from a group called Apache Stronghold, oppose a land swap between the federal government and a subsidiary of the giant Rio Tinto mining company that they say threatens Oak Flat, a part of Tonto National Forest that they consider sacred.

[Update, July 28, 11:58 p.m. | A former tribal historian disputes this below.]

A recent Op-Ed article by Lydia Millet*, “Selling Off Apache Holy Land,” conveys their argument, which centers on dicey politics:

The swap — which will trade 5,300 acres of private parcels owned by the company to the Forest Service and give 2,400 acres including Oak Flat to Resolution so that it can mine the land without oversight — had been attempted multiple times by Arizona members of Congress on behalf of the company…. This time, the giveaway language was slipped onto the defense bill by Senators John McCain and Jeff Flake of Arizona at the 11th hour. The tactic was successful only because, like most last-minute riders, it bypassed public scrutiny.

(Here’s the argument of Resolution Copper Mining, the Rio Tinto subsidiary.) [Resolution Copper sent an expanded response, which is in the comment thread.]

Heres Suckling’s missive, filed from Times Square on Friday:
Times Square. I’m in a flash mob organized by Apache Stronghold, a group of San Carlos Apaches trying to save Oak Flat, a sacred religious site in Arizona stolen from them by a disgraceful John McCain rider on the Department of Defense budget bill last year. Between “repent now!” signs, nearly nude showgirls and nonchalant cops, 50 Apaches are drumming, singing, dancing, and working the crowd. Even in Times Square this is a thing.

I’ve been on and off the road with them for a couple of weeks, mostly with a small group on tour with Neil Young, opening up his Rebel Content/Monsanto Years concerts [Facebook video].

The larger group is traveling from reservation to reservation drumming up anger and support to stop the desecration of Oak Flat. Wendsler Nosie, Sr., an elder and former tribal chairman, flies in and out, meeting with Baptist leaders and congressmen. Next Tuesday a traditional spiritual run will cut through Rock Creek to Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. Wednesday, there’ll be a big rally on the West Lawn. Having fired up Indian Country, the Apache Stronghold should turn out 500 Native Americans from more than 100 tribes and at least that many non-white supporters. Today it’s on to the United Nations.

The chaotic, seat-of-the-pants, insanely energizing caravan is a snapshot of the hyper-integrated, relentlessly hybrid, never-quite-modern NOW we all live in one way or another.

Native Americans from one the poorest reservations in the country are using cell phones, Twitter and Facebook to throw a flash mob in Times Square to save a sacred site in Arizona stolen by a multi-national mining company in Australia. It’s their land, but it’s public land, and John McCain is bent on privatizing it.

Cell phones abound, but there’s no credit card and money is very, very tight. The large group is out of range much of the time, performing ceremonies and sharing stories with other tribes. But you can follow their progress on Facebook.

The convoy is a run from tribe to tribe. They have been given hand-carved, carefully painted wooden arrows by the tribes they met to bring to Washington, D.C. Except one that is purple and metal because that’s all that a man could offer from the life and history America dealt to his tribe. It, too, is placed in the quiver.

The defenders of Oak Flat are traditionalists. Some leave the reservation rarely, but Standing Fox is a hip-hop artist and Rudy just traveled to London to shame Rio Tinto, which is partly British-owned. Last night in Camden, N.J., Neil Young asked 50 Apache drummers, singers and dancers to open his show.

I, who can barely muster the white man shuffle and don’t know what the sacred songs mean, find myself choreographing the performance in the parking lot an hour before show time because I’m the only one who knows what the stage looks like. It’s fraught with cables, amps, mikes, speakers and buttony things we’re told to never, ever step on.

Neil Young must be crazy. What international rock star risks his reputation to help desperate people he’s never met, and who, save Standing Fox, have no professional music experience? The
man is heart and soul. As medicine man Anthony Logan, the eldest of the elders, sings a hunched over prayer with drums pounding, one of the teen Apache dancers takes selfies from the stage. This is how we live. This is how we fight. This is how we win.

*Suckling and Millet were formerly married.*

**Correction: July 18, 2015**

Kieran Suckling directs the Center for Biological Diversity. The post initially had Center for Conservation Biology (the perils of filing at night after a long day).


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**July 18, 2015**

The system is intolerable: the change we need is in our hands

By Pope Francis
The Ecologist

_The world has become intolerable for people everywhere, and for Earth herself, says Pope Francis. Profound, transformative change leading to social and economic justice is now an absolute necessity and something we must all fight for. We must also act to safeguard the Earth herself, our common home._

Today God has granted that we meet again. The Bible tells us that God hears the cry of his people, and I wish to join my voice to yours in calling for land, lodging and labor for all our brothers and sisters.

I said it and I repeat it: these are sacred rights. It is important, it is well worth fighting for them. May the cry of the excluded be heard in Latin America and throughout the world.

Let us begin by acknowledging that change is needed. Here I would clarify, lest there be any misunderstanding, that I am speaking about problems common to all Latin Americans and, more generally, to humanity as a whole. They are global problems which today no one state can resolve on its own.

With this clarification, I now propose that we ask the following questions:

- Do we realize that something is wrong in a world where there are so many farmworkers without land, so many families without a home, so many laborers without rights, so many persons whose dignity is not respected?
- Do we realize that something is wrong where so many senseless wars are being fought and acts of fratricidal violence are taking place on our very doorstep?
• Do we realize something is wrong when the soil, water, air and living creatures of our world are under constant threat?

So let's not be afraid to say it: we need change; we want change.

**The 'invisible thread' that organises social and environmental destruction**

In your letters and in our meetings, you have mentioned the many forms of exclusion and injustice which you experience in the workplace, in neighborhoods and throughout the land. They are many and diverse, just as many and diverse are the ways in which you confront them.

Yet there is an invisible thread joining every one of those forms of exclusion: can we recognize it? These are not isolated issues. I wonder whether we can see that these destructive realities are part of a system which has become global. Do we realize that that system has imposed the mentality of profit at any price, with no concern for social exclusion or the destruction of nature?

If such is the case, I would insist, let us not be afraid to say it: we want change, real change, structural change. This system is by now intolerable: farmworkers find it intolerable, laborers find it intolerable, communities find it intolerable, peoples find it intolerable ... The earth itself - our sister, Mother Earth, as Saint Francis would say - also finds it intolerable.

We want change in our lives, in our neighborhoods, in our everyday reality. We want a change which can affect the entire world, since global interdependence calls for global answers to local problems. The globalization of hope, a hope which springs up from peoples and takes root among the poor, must replace the globalization of exclusion and indifference!

Today I wish to reflect with you on the change we want and need. You know that recently I wrote about the problems of climate change. But now I would like to speak of change in another sense. Positive change, a change which is good for us, a change - we can say - which is redemptive. Because we need it.

I know that you are looking for change, and not just you alone: in my different meetings, in my different travels, I have sensed an expectation, a longing, a yearning for change, in people throughout the world.

Even within that ever smaller minority which believes that the present system is beneficial, there is a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and even despondency. Many people are hoping for a change capable of releasing them from the bondage of individualism and the despondency it spawns.

**Money is the 'dung of the devil'**

Time, my brothers and sisters, seems to be running out; we are not yet tearing one another apart, but we are tearing apart our common home. Today, the scientific community realizes what the
poor have long told us: harm, perhaps irreversible harm, is being done to the ecosystem. The earth, entire peoples and individual persons are being brutally punished.

And behind all this pain, death and destruction there is the stench of what Basil of Caesarea called "the dung of the devil". An unfettered pursuit of money rules. The service of the common good is left behind.

Once capital becomes an idol and guides people's decisions, once greed for money presides over the entire socioeconomic system, it ruins society, it condemns and enslaves men and women, it destroys human fraternity, it sets people against one another and, as we clearly see, it even puts at risk our common home.

I do not need to go on describing the evil effects of this subtle dictatorship: you are well aware of them. Nor is it enough to point to the structural causes of today's social and environmental crisis.

We are suffering from an excess of diagnosis, which at times leads us to multiply words and to revel in pessimism and negativity. Looking at the daily news we think that there is nothing to be done, except to take care of ourselves and the little circle of our family and friends.

**But what can we the poor and powerless do? A lot!**

What can I do, as collector of paper, old clothes or used metal, a recycler, about all these problems if I barely make enough money to put food on the table? What can I do as a craftsman, a street vendor, a trucker, a downtrodden worker, if I don't even enjoy workers' rights?

What can I do, a farmwife, a native woman, a fisher who can hardly fight the domination of the big corporations? What can I do from my little home, my shanty, my hamlet, my settlement, when I daily meet with discrimination and marginalization? What can be done by those students, those young people, those activists, those missionaries who come to my neighborhood with their hearts full of hopes and dreams, but without any real solution for my problems?

A lot! They can do a lot. You, the lowly, the exploited, the poor and underprivileged, can do, and are doing, a lot.

I would even say that the future of humanity is in great measure in your own hands, through your ability to organize and carry out creative alternatives, through your daily efforts to ensure the 'three L's' - labor, lodging, land - and through your proactive participation in the great processes of change on the national, regional and global levels. Don't lose heart!

You are sowers of change. Here in Bolivia I have heard a phrase which I like: "process of change". Change seen not as something which will one day result from any one political decision or change in social structure. We know from painful experience that changes of structure which are not accompanied by a sincere conversion of mind and heart sooner or later end up in bureaucratization, corruption and failure.
That is why I like the image of a 'process', where the drive to sow, to water seeds which others will see sprout, replaces the ambition to occupy every available position of power and to see immediate results. Each of us is just one part of a complex and differentiated whole, interacting in time: peoples who struggle to find meaning, a destiny, and to live with dignity, to 'live well'.

**Our suffering is our strength and inspiration**

As members of popular movements, you carry out your work inspired by fraternal love, which you show in opposing social injustice. When we look into the eyes of the suffering, when we see the faces of the endangered campesino, the poor laborer, the downtrodden native, the homeless family, the persecuted migrant, the unemployed young person, the exploited child, the mother who lost her child in a shootout because the barrio was occupied by drugdealers, the father who lost his daughter to enslavement .... when we think of all those names and faces, our hearts break because of so much sorrow and pain.

And we are deeply moved ... We are moved because 'we have seen and heard' not a cold statistic but the pain of a suffering humanity, our own pain, our own flesh. This is something quite different than abstract theorizing or eloquent indignation. It moves us; it makes us attentive to others in an effort to move forward together.

That emotion which turns into community action is not something which can be understood by reason alone: it has a surplus of meaning which only peoples understand, and it gives a special feel to genuine popular movements.

Each day you are caught up in the storms of people's lives. You have told me about their causes, you have shared your own struggles with me, and I thank you for that. You, dear brothers and sisters, often work on little things, in local situations, amid forms of injustice which you do not simply accept but actively resist, standing up to an idolatrous system which excludes, debases and kills.

I have seen you work tirelessly for the soil and crops of campesinos, for their lands and communities, for a more dignified local economy, for the urbanization of their homes and settlements; you have helped them build their own homes and develop neighborhood infrastructures. You have also promoted any number of community activities aimed at reaffirming so elementary and undeniably necessary a right as that of the 'three L's': land, lodging and labor.

This rootedness in the barrio, the land, the office, the labor union, this ability to see yourselves in the faces of others, this daily proximity to their share of troubles and their little acts of heroism: this is what enables you to practice the commandment of love, not on the basis of ideas or concepts, but rather on the basis of genuine interpersonal encounter.

We do not love concepts or ideas; we love people ... Commitment, true commitment, is born of the love of men and women, of children and the elderly, of peoples and communities ... of names and faces which fill our hearts. From those seeds of hope patiently sown in the forgotten fringes
of our planet, from those seedlings of a tenderness which struggles to grow amid the shadows of exclusion, great trees will spring up, great groves of hope to give oxygen to our world.

**Nurturing the seedlings of hope**

So I am pleased to see that you are working at close hand to care for those seedlings, but at the same time, with a broader perspective, to protect the entire forest. Your work is carried out against a horizon which, while concentrating on your own specific area, also aims to resolve at their root the more general problems of poverty, inequality and exclusion.

I congratulate you on this. It is essential that, along with the defense of their legitimate rights, peoples and their social organizations be able to construct a humane alternative to a globalization which excludes. You are sowers of change. May God grant you the courage, joy, perseverance and passion to continue sowing. Be assured that sooner or later we will see its fruits.

Of the leadership I ask this: be creative and never stop being rooted in local realities, since the father of lies is able to usurp noble words, to promote intellectual fads and to adopt ideological stances. But if you build on solid foundations, on real needs and on the lived experience of your brothers and sisters, of campesinos and natives, of excluded workers and marginalized families, you will surely be on the right path.

The Church cannot and must not remain aloof from this process in her proclamation of the Gospel. Many priests and pastoral workers carry out an enormous work of accompanying and promoting the excluded throughout the world, alongside cooperatives, favouring businesses, providing housing, working generously in the fields of health, sports and education.

I am convinced that respectful cooperation with the popular movements can revitalize these efforts and strengthen processes of change.

Let us always have at heart the Virgin Mary, a humble girl from small people lost on the fringes of a great empire, a homeless mother who could turn a stable for beasts into a home for Jesus with just a few swaddling clothes and much tenderness. Mary is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice. I pray that Our Lady of Mount Carmel, patroness of Bolivia, will allow this meeting of ours to be a leaven of change.

**An economy to administer our common home**

Lastly, I would like us all to consider some important tasks for the present historical moment, since we desire a positive change for the benefit of all our brothers and sisters. We know this. We desire change enriched by the collaboration of governments, popular movements and other social forces. This too we know.

But it is not so easy to define the content of change - in other words, a social program which can embody this project of fraternity and justice which we are seeking. So don't expect a recipe from this Pope. Neither the Pope nor the Church have a monopoly on the interpretation of social reality or the proposal of solutions to contemporary issues.
I dare say that no recipe exists. History is made by each generation as it follows in the footsteps of those preceding it, as it seeks its own path and respects the values which God has placed in the human heart.

I would like, all the same, to propose three great tasks which demand a decisive and shared contribution from popular movements:

The first task is to put the economy at the service of peoples. Human beings and nature must not be at the service of money. Let us say NO to an economy of exclusion and inequality, where money rules, rather than service. That economy kills. That economy excludes. That economy destroys Mother Earth.

The economy should not be a mechanism for accumulating goods, but rather the proper administration of our common home. This entails a commitment to care for that home and to the fitting distribution of its goods among all. It is not only about ensuring a supply of food or 'decent sustenance'.

Nor, although this is already a great step forward, is it to guarantee the 'three L's' of land, lodging and labor for which you are working. A truly communitarian economy, one might say an economy of Christian inspiration, must ensure peoples' dignity and their "general, temporal welfare and prosperity". [1]

This includes the 'three L's', but also access to education, health care, new technologies, artistic and cultural manifestations, communications, sports and recreation. A just economy must create the conditions for everyone to be able to enjoy a childhood without want, to develop their talents when young, to work with full rights during their active years and to enjoy a dignified retirement as they grow older.

It is an economy where human beings, in harmony with nature, structure the entire system of production and distribution in such a way that the abilities and needs of each individual find suitable expression in social life. You, and other peoples as well, sum up this desire in a simple and beautiful expression: 'to live well'.

Such an economy is not only desirable and necessary, but also possible. It is no utopia or chimera. It is an extremely realistic prospect. We can achieve it. The available resources in our world, the fruit of the intergenerational labors of peoples and the gifts of creation, more than suffice for the integral development of "each man and the whole man". [2]

The problem is of another kind. There exists a system with different aims. A system which, while irresponsibly accelerating the pace of production, while using industrial and agricultural methods which damage Mother Earth in the name of 'productivity', continues to deny many millions of our brothers and sisters their most elementary economic, social and cultural rights. This system runs counter to the plan of Jesus.

**Economic justice is not charity, but a universal right we must all uphold**
Working for a just distribution of the fruits of the earth and human labor is not mere philanthropy. It is a moral obligation. For Christians, the responsibility is even greater: it is a commandment. It is about giving to the poor and to peoples what is theirs by right.

The universal destination of goods is not a figure of speech found in the Church’s social teaching. It is a reality prior to private property. Property, especially when it affects natural resources, must always serve the needs of peoples. And those needs are not restricted to consumption.

It is not enough to let a few drops fall whenever the poor shake a cup which never runs over by itself. Welfare programs geared to certain emergencies can only be considered temporary responses. They will never be able to replace true inclusion, an inclusion which provides worthy, free, creative, participatory and solidary work.

Along this path, popular movements play an essential role, not only by making demands and lodging protests, but even more basically by being creative. You are social poets: creators of work, builders of housing, producers of food, above all for people left behind by the world market.

I have seen at first hand a variety of experiences where workers united in cooperatives and other forms of community organization were able to create work where there were only crumbs of an idolatrous economy. Recuperated businesses, local fairs and cooperatives of paper collectors are examples of that popular economy which is born of exclusion and which, slowly, patiently and resolutely adopts solidary forms which dignify it. How different this is than the situation which results when those left behind by the formal market are exploited like slaves!

Governments which make it their responsibility to put the economy at the service of peoples must promote the strengthening, improvement, coordination and expansion of these forms of popular economy and communitarian production. This entails bettering the processes of work, providing adequate infrastructures and guaranteeing workers their full rights in this alternative sector.

When the state and social organizations join in working for the 'three L's', the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity come into play; and these allow the common good to be achieved in a full and participatory democracy.

**The second task is to unite our peoples on the path of peace and justice**

The world's peoples want to be artisans of their own destiny. They want to advance peacefully towards justice. They do not want forms of tutelage or interference by which those with greater power subordinate those with less. They want their culture, their language, their social processes and their religious traditions to be respected.

No actual or established power has the right to deprive peoples of the full exercise of their sovereignty. Whenever they do so, we see the rise of new forms of colonialism which seriously prejudice the possibility of peace and justice. For "peace is founded not only on respect for
human rights but also on respect for the rights of peoples, in particular the right to independence.” [3]

The peoples of Latin America fought to gain their political independence and for almost two centuries their history has been dramatic and filled with contradictions, as they have striven to achieve full independence.

In recent years, after any number of misunderstandings, many Latin American countries have seen the growth of fraternity between their peoples. The governments of the region have pooled forces in order to ensure respect for the sovereignty of their own countries and the entire region, which our forebears so beautifully called the "greater country".

I ask you, my brothers and sisters of the popular movements, to foster and increase this unity. It is necessary to maintain unity in the face of every effort to divide, if the region is to grow in peace and justice.

The many faces of the new colonialism

Despite the progress made, there are factors which still threaten this equitable human development and restrict the sovereignty of the countries of the 'greater country' and other areas of our planet. The new colonialism takes on different faces.

At times it appears as the anonymous influence of mammon: corporations, loan agencies, certain 'free trade' treaties, and the imposition of measures of 'austerity' which always tighten the belt of workers and the poor.

The bishops of Latin America denounce this with utter clarity in the Aparecida Document, stating that "financial institutions and transnational companies are becoming stronger to the point that local economies are subordinated, especially weakening the local states, which seem ever more powerless to carry out development projects in the service of their populations.” [4]

At other times, under the noble guise of battling corruption, the narcotics trade and terrorism - grave evils of our time which call for coordinated international action - we see states being saddled with measures which have little to do with the resolution of these problems and which not infrequently worsen matters.

Similarly, the monopolizing of the communications media, which would impose alienating examples of consumerism and a certain cultural uniformity, is another one of the forms taken by the new colonialism. It is ideological colonialism. As the African bishops have observed, poor countries are often treated like "parts of a machine, cogs on a gigantic wheel." [5]

It must be acknowledged that none of the grave problems of humanity can be resolved without interaction between states and peoples at the international level. Every significant action carried out in one part of the planet has universal, ecological, social and cultural repercussions. Even crime and violence have become globalized.
Consequently, no government can act independently of a common responsibility. If we truly desire positive change, we have to humbly accept our interdependence. Interaction, however, is not the same as imposition; it is not the subordination of some to serve the interests of others.

Colonialism, both old and new, which reduces poor countries to mere providers of raw material and cheap labor, engenders violence, poverty, forced migrations and all the evils which go hand in hand with these, precisely because, by placing the periphery at the service of the center, it denies those countries the right to an integral development. That is inequality, and inequality generates a violence which no police, military, or intelligence resources can control.

Let us say NO to forms of colonialism old and new. Let us say YES to the encounter between peoples and cultures. Blessed are the peacemakers.

**The church too must beg for forgiveness**

Here I wish to bring up an important issue. Some may rightly say, *"When the Pope speaks of colonialism, he overlooks certain actions of the Church."* I say this to you with regret: many grave sins were committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God. My predecessors acknowledged this, CELAM has said it, and I too wish to say it.

Like Saint John Paul II, I ask that the Church "kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters." [6] I would also say, and here I wish to be quite clear, as was Saint John Paul II: I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the Church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America.

I also ask everyone, believers and nonbelievers alike, to think of those many bishops, priests and laity who preached and continue to preach the Good News of Jesus with courage and meekness, respectfully and pacifically; who left behind them impressive works of human promotion and of love, often standing alongside the native peoples or accompanying their popular movements even to the point of martyrdom.

The Church, her sons and daughters, are part of the identity of the peoples of Latin America. An identity which here, as in other countries, some powers are committed to erasing, at times because our faith is revolutionary, because our faith challenges the tyranny of mammon.

Today we are dismayed to see how in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world many of our brothers and sisters are persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in Jesus. This too needs to be denounced: in this third world war, waged piecemeal, which we are now experiencing, a form of genocide is taking place, and it must end.

To our brothers and sisters in the Latin American indigenous movement, allow me to express my deep affection and appreciation of their efforts to bring peoples and cultures together in a form of coexistence which I would call polyhedric, where each group preserves its own identity by building together a plurality which does not threaten but rather reinforces unity.
Your quest for an interculturalism, which combines the defense of the rights of the native peoples with respect for the territorial integrity of states, is for all of us a source of enrichment and encouragement.

**The third task, perhaps the most important facing us today, is to defend Mother Earth**

Our common home is being pillaged, laid waste and harmed with impunity. Cowardice in defending it is a grave sin. We see with growing disappointment how one international summit after another takes place without any significant result.

There exists a clear, definite and pressing ethical imperative to implement what has not yet been done. We cannot allow certain interests - interests which are global but not universal - to take over, to dominate states and international organizations, and to continue destroying creation.

People and their movements are called to cry out, to mobilize and to demand - peacefully, but firmly - that appropriate and urgently-needed measures be taken. I ask you, in the name of God, to defend Mother Earth. I have duly addressed this issue in my Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat: the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change.

I am with you. Let us together say from the heart: no family without lodging, no rural worker without land, no laborer without rights, no people without sovereignty, no individual without dignity, no child without childhood, no young person without a future, no elderly person without a venerable old age.

Keep up your struggle and, please, take great care of Mother Earth. I pray for you and with you, and I ask God our Father to accompany you and to bless you, to fill you with his love and defend you on your way by granting you in abundance that strength which keeps us on our feet: that strength is hope, the hope which does not disappoint.

Thank you and I ask you, please, to pray for me.

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*This article* represents the text of a speech by Pope Francis on Thursday 9th July 2015 at the World Meeting of Popular Movements, taking place in Expo Fair, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. It was originally published on Vatican Radio.

The World Meeting of Popular Movements, organized in collaboration with Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, brings together delegates from popular movements from around the world.
Below, please find the full text of Pope Francis' prepared address for the World Meeting of Popular Movements:

Footnotes


http://www.theecologist.org/blogs_and_comments/commentators/2949432/the_system_is_intolerable_the_change_we_need_is_in_our_hands.html

July 19, 2015

Pope is not alone as people of faith take up environmental cause

Mary Evelyn Tucker says the pope's historic call on climate change captures a growing movement that gives environmental activism moral weight

By Mary Evelyn Tucker
South China Morning Post

For decades, the public has assumed that scientists or policymakers would solve environmental problems like climate change. Market-based and technological solutions were also pursued. While these approaches are necessary, we are realising they are not sufficient to resolve pressing environmental challenges.

Ecological issues are no longer viewed as simply scientific or policy issues, but also moral concerns. That is the significance of the pope's encyclical "On the Care of Our Common Home" and why it is provoking such strong reactions. Ethics is meeting ecology - a powerful formula for change.
The encyclical is the first in 2,000 years concerned with the environment. And Pope Francis makes it clear that he is speaking not just to Catholics, or the larger Christian community, but rather to all people on the planet about our common home.

The message was delivered as there is growing consensus that the human community needs to make changes on both global and local levels.

To contribute to global warming and compromise our planetary life systems is seen by the pope and many others as morally problematic. This is a watershed moment - a broadening of ethics that encompasses both humans and nature.

The move in the US from segregation to civil rights in the 1960s was sparked by moral voices, such as Martin Luther King. So, too, ethical concerns now led by the pope encourage the growing turn from unsustainable environmental and economic practices. Indeed, he calls for "ecological virtues" to overcome "ecological sin". No wonder there is pushback. And just as with civil rights, this moral shift will take time.

From Pope Francis, a penetrating moral message is emerging. This man who washes the feet of prisoners and lives in simple quarters has captured the hearts of millions yearning for leadership and genuine change.

The rising moral force for ecological and social transformation can be witnessed on every continent and in every religious tradition. Indigenous communities preserve forests in the Amazon and in North America; the film Renewal examines eight case studies of religious environmentalism in the US; Buddhist monks protect forests in Southeast Asia; Hindu practitioners restore sacred rivers in India; Jews, Christians and Muslims conserve the Jordan River.

These examples of religious communities caring for our common home offer hope that Francis' message will not only be heard, but acted on.

Mary Evelyn Tucker is co-director of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. Copyright: YaleGlobal and the MacMillan Centre

White House honors Wisconsin Green Muslims founder

By Kari Lydersen

*Midwest Energy News*

On June 22, Huda Alkaff circulated among the crowd of men, women and youth at the Islamic society of Milwaukee gathered to break the Ramadan fast after sunset and to talk about climate change, water and how to live a more environmentally sustainable existence.

The event was hosted by the [Islamic Environmental Group of Wisconsin](https://www.islamicenvironmentalgroupofwisconsin.org), or Wisconsin Green Muslims, a volunteer group that Alkaff founded in 2005 and now directs. The group educates the Muslim community and the general public about Islamic environmental teachings, in order to apply these teachings in daily life and to form coalitions with others working toward a just, healthy, peaceful and sustainable future, Alkaff explained.

The enthusiasm, curiosity and commitment to these issues on display that humid, stormy night in Wisconsin was a window into a larger local and national movement Alkaff has helped spark and shape.

Today Alkaff is among 12 faith leaders around the country being honored by the White House as [Champions of Change](https://www.whitehouse.gov/champions), who “have demonstrated clear leadership across the United States and around the world through their grassroots efforts to green their communities and educate others on the moral and social justice implications of climate change,” as a White House statement said.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy and Senior Advisor to the President Brian Deese will honor the champions at the event today at 2 p.m. Eastern time, which will be live-streamed.

Alkaff has degrees in conservation ecology, sustainable development and environmental education from the University of Georgia, and she has taught environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin.

She’s also a founding member of [Wisconsin Interfaith Power and Light](https://www.wiinterfaithpowerandlight.org), which trains and mobilizes people of all faiths to fight climate change by promoting energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy. She serves on the national Interfaith Power and Light Campaigns Committee, the national Greening Ramadan Task Force and the Milwaukee Environmental Consortium Board of Directors.

*Midwest Energy News* spoke with Alkaff about climate change among Muslim communities and her leadership work.

*Midwest Energy News*: How did you get involved in environmentalism and energy issues?

Alkaff: Believe it or not, I have been an environmentalist since I was a child. Back then, I remember being asked the famous question from the adults in my family and my teachers, “What
do you want to be when you grow up?” Remember that question? To everyone’s surprise, my answer was “An ecologist, an environmentalist!” I was and still am fascinated by nature and all its inhabitants, and I wanted to learn more about them, and the connections between them.

I earned a double major degree in chemistry and biology, but was yearning for a more interdisciplinary field of study. Ecology is the study of interconnections and interdependence among everything in space and in time. This was my higher education investment.

The continuous attempt at establishing connections and gaining holistic network insights is the driving force for my ongoing work to build strong and sustainable bridges between the environmental teachings in Islam, other faiths and spiritualities and my university environmental training and education.

Why are faith leaders so important to the larger effort to address climate change?

People of faith have a great responsibility to stand up for climate justice and address the concerns and calamities of the poor and marginalized communities, those with the lowest ecological footprints, yet they are the most impacted by climate disasters. It is a moral issue, and the interfaith voice standing united for climate justice and care of creation is instrumental in mobilizing the faithful for the common good.

What kind of impact do you think this year’s Green Ramadan has had in Wisconsin or beyond?

I think this year’s Green Ramadan was more successful than any previous years, mainly because it became a national campaign, with 35 mosques in 17 states participating. This means tens of thousands of Muslims participated either directly or indirectly, with an overall greater reduction in their ecological footprints.

Have you or Wisconsin Green Muslims been able to reach people in the community who weren’t previously aware of or concerned about climate change and how they can make a difference?

People have different interests and we try to meet them where they are.

Yes, by designating a certain theme each month, we align our limited capacity with a larger event that provides resources, and enables us to reach a wide variety of people and interests, while tying to the theme of the month, whether it is water, food, fair trade, energy, recycling, peace or environmental justice to climate change. People have different interests and we try to meet them where they are. We tie their interests and concerns to the effect of climate change, while facilitating simple ways that they can make a difference.

We do outreach with environmental programs to formal and informal Islamic schools, for K-12 students, college students, teachers, parents and other adults, and we were able to make connections to climate change causes and impacts.
Why do you think the message of sustainability and reducing carbon emissions has resonated with Muslims in Wisconsin?

The message of sustainability should resonate with Muslims everywhere, not just in Wisconsin, because the Islamic environmental teachings are abundant in the Qur’an (the holy book for Muslims) and the Hadith (the reports and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him).

For more than a decade now, Wisconsin Green Muslims have been providing a variety of educational activities for all ages connecting faith and sustainability, and this sincere and tireless effort should produce results in the community.

How does the Wisconsin Green Muslims’ focus on water issues also dovetail with taking action on climate change?

Water is mentioned numerous times in the Qur’an and Hadith with an abundance of stories, wisdom lessons and insights. Water is a sacred and scarce resource, and it resonates with the Muslim community that climate change effects water. There is drought; negative impacts on food production; extreme weather events, such as tsunamis, floods, hurricanes, monsoons; as well as increased water temperatures, sea level rise, decline in fisheries. The spirituality, beauty and preciousness of water touch the heart, and lead to sincere and passionate water and climate conversations, and a strong will for climate action.

This year, we already had several one-on-one and group water and climate conversations as part of a larger Midwest Faith Climate Conversations project, at which we address the issues of climate, justice and peace, and the issue of climate refugees that highlights the urgency of this global problem.

Do the Wisconsin Green Muslims deal with both mitigation and adaptation to climate change? While encouraging people to reduce their carbon footprint, are you also advising people on how to handle the impacts of climate change?

Our volunteer effort mostly deals with mitigation, but we collaborate with other organizations that address actions to deal with heat waves, floods and other climate change-related emergencies.

Does a faith approach help further the international nature of the need to address climate change? In other words, since there are Muslims all over the world, does approaching this from a faith perspective help people view climate change as something that affects people across borders and must be addressed collectively?

We talk about how the Muslim world is the most affected by climate change, in terms of droughts, increased temperatures, heat waves, decline in food and water resources, increase in price of needed goods, sea level rise, floods, freshwater contamination, and extreme weather patterns that hit the poorest the hardest, such as typhoons, tsunamis, monsoons, hurricanes that
destroy a large number of innocent lives and livelihoods. We point out how our collective impact is needed to reduce our carbon footprint here in the U.S.A., to be part of the global solution.

**How do you feel about the White House recognition?**

I am deeply honored. This recognition is for all Wisconsin Green Muslims’ partners, friends, supporters and collaborators throughout the past 10 years and the years to come. Also, this recognition is for all those involved with Wisconsin Interfaith Power and Light and the interfaith climate justice movement. I dedicate this recognition to my beloved parents, who would have loved to be with me attending the award ceremony, but are not able to. Thank you.


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**July 20, 2015**

**White House Honors Florida Faith Leader for Climate “Champions of Change”**

Environmental Protection Agency

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**ATLANTA** – On Monday, July 20th, the White House will recognize Steven Beumer of Maitland, Fla., as a “Champion of Change” for his efforts in protecting our environment and communities from the effects of climate change.

The Champion of Change event will feature remarks by Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy and Senior Advisor to the President Brian Deese, as they honor Mr. Beumer and 11 other Americans who have demonstrated clear leadership across the United States and around the world through their grassroots efforts to green their communities and educate others on the moral and social justice implications of climate change.

The Champions of Change program was created as an opportunity for the White House to feature individuals doing extraordinary things to empower and inspire members of their communities.

“Today, we are excited to recognize extraordinary people of faith, from across the country, who are acting on climate to protect our planet from harmful climate change impacts,” said Administrator McCarthy. “Many of our faith leaders understand that it is our moral obligation to help preserve a healthy planet for generations to come, and are heeding President Obama’s call for community-led climate efforts.”

Steven Beumer is an active member of St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church in Winter Park, Florida. He has led St. John to make changes through new energy efficient roofing and LED
lighting. He also organized a regular worship service in April dedicated to Earth Day. Additionally, Beumer organized hands-on environmental projects such as labeling storm drains in the neighborhood to prevent trash from going into the lakes, and litter clean up on public streets near the church. Further, Beumer has worked with other faith communities to find their environmental footing within their own faith context.

The other honorees are:
Patrick Carolan, Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), Stratford, Connecticut
Sunita Viswanath, Coalition of Progressive Hindus, Brooklyn, New York
Cassandra Carmichael, National Religious Partnership for the Environment, Annapolis, Maryland
Rachel Lamb, Steering Committee for Young Evangelicals for Climate Action, Silver Spring, Maryland
Reverend Lennox Yearwood Jr., Hip Hop Caucus, People’s Climate Music, Hyattsville, Maryland
Huda Alkaff, the Islamic Environmental Group of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Green Muslims), West Bend, Wisconsin
Sister Joan Brown, New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light, Albuquerque, New Mexico
Reverend Kim Morrow, Executive Director of Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light, Lincoln, Nebraska
Rabbi Marc Soloway, Haver, Boulder’s Rabbinic Fellowship, Rabbinic Advisory Board for Hazon, Boulder, Colorado
Nana Firman, Green Mosque Initiative for Islamic Society of North America, Riverside, California

The event will be live streamed on the White House website. To watch this event live, visit www.whitehouse.gov/live on Monday, July 20th at 2:00 PM ET. To learn more about the White House Champions of Change program, visit www.whitehouse.gov/champions. Follow the conversation at #WHChamps.

http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/1AF664C642BB32785257E8800775585

July 22, 2015

Why Do I Care? French Government makes climate change debate personal pre COP

Press Release

VIDEO OF THE CONFERENCE here.

Photos of the Summit of Conscience.

In a move that many, including key government figures, said was “remarkable”, “unique”, “historic” the French government agreed last night to send through its diplomatic channel a letter from leading religious and cultural world figures to the heads of the 195 delegations coming to
the climate change COP.

The letter asks them to ask themselves a single and personal question: Why Do I Care?

“Why are we asking you to do this?” it asks. “Because we hope that in answering this question, you will come to the COP primarily as a conscious human being not just a representative of a Government or agency. In the end the most important element of this is that we hear from you as a person, a member of the human family who has for a time a uniquely significant role to play in protecting the world.”

The letter was announced at a groundbreaking “Summit of Conscience” in Paris, July 21, hosted by the Elysee Palace, along with leading French publisher Bayard Press and the UK-based Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC).

“The Summit of Conscience departs from the place that the climate crisis … cannot be reduced to scientific, technological, economic and political dimensions, however important those are,” said French President Francois Hollande. “It is in fact a crisis of meaning.”

“In the past we have talked about “stewardship” but now we must talk about care,” said Cardinal Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, who presented Pope Francis’ Laudato Si Environment Encyclical to the world in June.

“When we care it is with passion and commitment and attachment. Commitment to embrace with passion not just with thoughts and ideas but with the heart….What kind of world do we want to bequeath? An environment will not be able to sustain life after us unless we embrace commitment – we received a garden as our home and we may not turn it into wilderness. The garden we received must be passed on and bequeathed,” Cardinal Turkson said

Arnold Schwarzenegger supported the Summit and sent a special video in which he talks about his childhood in Austria. "I have to admit that I wasn't always on my best behaviour when my parents brought me to church - I hope that you can forgive me for that - but any time the priest talked about Noah’s Ark, I hung onto every word, I loved the story of Noah building a ship large enough to save every species on Earth. That epic mission captured every fibre of my imagination. And today we have an epic mission of our own."

“France is one of the most secular governments in the world and for the president and government of France to propose this level of cooperation with the major faiths of the world is highly unusual.” said ARC’s Martin Palmer.

“In fact both the French Minister of the Environment Segolene Royal and the French Development Minister Laurent Fabius spoke of it as never having happened before.”

The Summit of Conscience was championed by the French TV personality and environmentalist Nicolas Hulot, appointed President Hollande’s Special Envoy for Climate Change.

It was the first of many.
Already Senator Loren Legarda from the Philippines has pledged to ask her own government this weekend to host its own Summit of Consciousness, and leading figures from Senegal’s two Muslim majorities (the Confreries Mourids and Tidjanes) who represent some 80% of the population, will ask their government to do the same.

“The issue of climate change and protecting our planet has largely been taken away from people by governments, by scientists and international agencies making most people feel powerless or even hopeless in the face of all the data,” said Palmer.

“We need that but we also need to feel that we each can make a difference.”

Swami Amritasvarupananda, representing Amma, or India’s “hugging saint” perhaps expressed it most succinctly.

“For the climate to change we must each change.”

Why Do I Care now an international movement
This is not just a movement for politicians or delegates or people who are already leaders. When Bayard, one of France’s largest publishing companies especially for young peoples’ magazines, agreed to sponsor the costs of the meeting, and carry out much of the on the ground organization, their editorial staff said they thought this was a question their young readers would love to answer.

They created the website www.whydoicare.org in which people of all countries are invited to tell their story in less than 200 words or a one minute video and this testimony will be added to the words of thousands of others, like a river of personal commitments.

Bayard are also devoting many of the autumn editions of their magazines to this theme.

Meanwhile other organisations such as MOA Japan which hosts an international childrens art festival with more than 400,000 entries every year made the question “Why Do I Care” a key theme to this year’s competition.

And so almost by accident a movement was born, because in asking the question “Why Do I Care” everyone can take part.

Links
www.whydoicare.org
Twitter: @WhyDolCare #WhyDoICare and #Sommet21
Text of letter
Facebook: Why Do I Care
Bayard Press
R20
BACKGROUND
OPENING SPEAKERS included: President Hollande, Jean-Paul Delevoye, CESE President, Michael Higgins, President of Ireland, Prince Albert of Monaco, Nicolas Hulot, Kofi Annan. Speakers and panelists included: Ecumenical “Green” Patriarch Bartholomew, Cardinal Turkson, Rabbi David Rosen, Dr Abdoul Filaly-Ansary, Prof Tu Weiming, Irina Bokova, UNESCO, Senator of Acre Marina Silva, Fr Rigobert Minani-Bihuzo, Mohammad Yunus, Ghayth Abduljabbar Abdullah Al Timeemi, Iraq, Nandita Krishna, Vandana Shiva, Edgar Morin, Alina Saba, Trin Xuan Thuan, Susan George, Master Zhang Gaocheng, Sebastiao Salgado, Sailesh Rao, Sister Chan Khong, leading indigenous environmental challengers from Ecuador (Patricia Gualinga and Felix Santi from Sarayaku tribe) and Brazil (Valddeice Veron and Natanel Vilharva Careers from Guarani-Kaiowa tribe), former President of Ireland and Special Envoy for Climate Change of the SG of the UN, Mary Robinson, Dr Rajwant Singh of EcoSikh, Janos Pasztor, Assistant SG for Climate Change, Fletcher Harper of Greenfait, Jean-Luc Fauque, Henrik Madsen, Reverend Ashizu of Munakata Grand Shrine, “Tree” Bishop Frederick Shoo, Bishop Nathan Kyamanywa, Swami Amritasvarupananda, Vinya Ariyatne, Sailesh Rao, Sheikh Khaled Bentounes, Masami Saionji, Loren Legarda, Omar Abdi, Marina Silva, Irina Bokova, Nigel Savage of Hazon, French Minister of Environment Segolene Royal, Minister Laurent Fabius and others.

Arnold Schwarzenegger supported the Summit and sent a special video

PERFORMERS INCLUDED: Cheikh Lo, Zhang Zhang, the Polyphony Quartet, Nobuko Kashiwagi

VIDEO OF THE CONFERENCE AVAILABLE here.


July 26, 2015

The Sabbath Day and Earth Stewardship

By George Handley
Patheos

The LDS Church has recently rolled out new training for members about the central importance of the observance of the Sabbath Day and of the sacrament. My thoughts here are inspired by this training, which I find to be wonderfully focused on the fundamental covenant we make at baptism and which we renew each Sunday to take upon ourselves the name of Christ and to keep his commandments.

We are to keep the Sabbath Day holy, but it is also clear that setting this day apart is not an end but a means to an end. And what is that end? If we are living with integrity and Christian purpose throughout the week, the end result is that the entire week becomes holy. We become sanctified by our willingness to bear Christ’s name every day and this enables us to live in his light. But it
is a good question to ask: what does it mean to make a day holy? We might say that it is a way of making the secular sacred, since a “day” is a measure of temporality we use in the profane world, in the profane calendar of time that we have created. That is almost the point, but it seems to ignore the fact that those of us who view the Sabbath, either on a Saturday or a Sunday, as a holy day apart from the others, do so in remembrance of God’s creation of the world. That is, although in English at least our days carry names drawn from astronomy and pagan cultures and our calendar is shaped by a mix of sacred and secular sources, our calendar is nevertheless a way of measuring that at least echoes an original sacred purpose. In other words, keeping the Sabbath Day holy is a method for restoring the secular to its original sacred purposes.

So what does the Sabbath Day have to do with the creation? Why is it that God structures time into seven creative periods, the last one being the day of rest? Does it imply that the work of creating the world, like the mundane work you and I might do to make a living, is perhaps dirty and messy and profane and unworthy of the holy day? If we follow the logic of the end purpose of the Sabbath Day, it would seem to be the opposite. The purpose of the day of rest is to reflect on the entirety of the creation and to see it all as sacred and holy. Sure, the creation was a messy, muddy, and earthly affair. It would be easy to imagine how ugly such messiness might seem in comparison to God’s rest in heaven. But just as we must learn to rest from our labors and reflect on the whole of our lives in order to be better understand our daily role in the unfolding purposes of God, so did God (and perhaps all of us together to the degree that we were involved in this process) rest and have a chance to understand and appreciate the magnificence of the whole of it. Indeed, although God creates in stages and moves from simpler to more complex forms of life, he consistently pronounces everything that he creates—from the earth itself to plant and animal life—as “good.” Although we alone are created in his image and we alone are daughters and sons of heavenly parents in all of the creation, it is also clear that there is a spiritual continuum between the most simple forms of life and our human lives. The earth was created for us, but not for us to exploit or misuse. It was created to allow us and all other living forms the chance to flourish, to enjoy posterity, and to learn to live together. After all, God did not command human beings alone to “multiply and replenish.” In Genesis 1, at the end of the fifth day of creation, we read:

21 And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

22 And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

In my view, no believer in this account of the creation can afford to deny the holiness of the creation, the inherently sacred worth of every living thing, of the planet itself. Nor can we afford to remain indifferent to the earth’s destruction and to the onslaught of extinction we have caused. Such remembrance of our stewardship appears to be one of the chief purposes of the Sabbath Day. It is a day to remember the creation, to bring to our minds our connection to the entirety of life, and to be filled with appreciation for the holiness of it all.
It do not believe it is a coincidence that one of the revelations given to Joseph Smith that most directly addresses the Sabbath Day and the importance of its observance also happens to be one of the revelations that most directly describes our stewardship of the earth and all of its bounty. I am speaking of section 59 of the Doctrine and Covenants where we learn that the Sabbath Day and its proper observance is intended to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (vs. 9). It is clear that the “world” here refers not to the physical environment but to the ways of sinfulness. Indeed, it is a chance to remember and restore the sacred purposes of our bodies and the body of the earth. Just as the Sabbath Day is intended to restore holiness to the entire week, a fast is not intended to teach us the uncleanness of the body’s needs but rather to restore holiness to the body itself. The Lord tells us to fast and prepare food “with a singleness of heart” (vs. 13) and “with thanksgiving, with cheerful hearts and countenances” (vs. 15) so “that thy joy might be perfect” (vs. 13) Indeed, he tells us that all things were given to us for the purpose of our fullest joy, which he describes as a kind of spiritual and aesthetic pleasure we find in the life of the body and in appreciative contemplation of the beauties of this earth.

He is quick to remind us, however, the terms on which such joy is based, especially the terms of our proper relationship to the creation:

18 Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart;

19 Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul.

20 And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man: for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion.

21 And in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments.

We cannot find verses in the Bible that so clearly describe the principle of earthly stewardship. So it is worth asking ourselves, what are we doing with these verses? What difference do they make in our Christian lives? How does our observation of the Sabbath help us to remember our responsibilities to the creation and renew our commitments to restore it to its holy and healthy purposes? How can we avoid the sin of ingratitude and be more attentive and caring of what we have been given in the forms of life all around us?

In all of our needed concern for what is appropriate for Sabbath Day observance, I hope we can consider the value for individuals and families to take some time to walk some place beautiful, even if only in our own neighborhood, and to talk of and acknowledge the goodness of the earth. It appears to be an offense to the Lord to not notice his gifts. It is a good day to enjoy meals with “singleness of heart” which I take to mean with an eye to the gift it is to eat, to enjoy good tasting food, and to do so in the company of family and friends. This is one way to make the bread we bake at home a little more like the holy sacrament. That should be our goal. We should find on the Sabbath sacred occasions to consider the blessings of physical life, of human relationships, and of our relationship to this remarkable creation. There are not words sufficient
to describe the magnitude of the gift of all life, but we must still try. It is hard to remember how holy each day is on this planet and in these bodies, but there is no better time to try than on the Sabbath Day.


July 28, 2015

Pope Francis on Animal Liberation

By Jane Gray Morrison and Michael Charles Tobias
Millennium Alliance for Humanity and Biosphere

Pope Francis’s “‘Encyclical Letter, Laudato Si’ Of The Holy Father Franciscus On Care For Our Common Home’” (“Given in Rome at Saint Peter’s on 24 May, the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 2015”), can easily be summarized by virtually any one segment of its 246 stanza entirety. We would suggest statement #71 as a fitting emblem:

71. Although “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (Gen 6:5) and the Lord “was sorry that he had made man on the earth” (Gen 6:6), nonetheless, through Noah, who remained innocent and just, God decided to open a path of salvation.[1]

Even if the language is of salvation, of a “triune” God, and of the Lord – if interpreted through the insistence upon, or prescriptions of no faith, no religious orientation, not even the alleged neutrality of atheism; and forgetting the tired rhetorical schisms between politics, faith and science, in all “isms” – there remains in this provocative paean to the Earth an inherently good and viable embrace of all that transcends our personal biases.

Francis has effectively merged science, faith, transcendence, and a plethora of the trappings of Church history and catechism. Of the 172 citations, only three, relating to – Dante, Teilhard de Chardin and the late French philosopher Paul Ricoeur – are not explicitly Church authorities. Nonetheless, the breadth of citations encompasses speeches, historic and philosophical texts, and environmental injunctions from a broad and honest multiplicity of inaugurations, exchanges, and serious conferences (e.g., the Rio Summit 1992), from New Zealand to Asia, each of them in the same camp as what is conventionally thought of as engaged environmentalism; of compassion in action.

By invoking Noah, this inspired reverie by the Pope may be summarized in two words: Animal liberation, a fitting and massive Church tribute to the very Patron Saint of Ecology [2], Saint Francis himself. Church history shows Noah protecting the animals of the ark day and night for a year (Gen). In Rabbinic tradition, during that year at sea all the animals abstained from sex so as not to overpopulate what was a strictly formulated size of the vessel. Learned debates regarding the boat’s size were sustained prominently throughout the Renaissance and did not cease to fascinate the world’s audience until the time of Darwin, at which point historians let rest the
uncertainties with respect to just how many representatives of each species might have found lodging with Noah.

Of course, the Pope is not the first to equate the killing of animals with humanity’s own incorrigible self-destruction. Back in November (8th) 1997, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, leader of some 300 million Greek Orthodox adherents, in speaking at an environmental symposium in Santa Barbara, declared boldly:

*It follows that, to commit a crime against the natural world, is a sin. For humans to cause species to become extinct and to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation... for humans to degrade the integrity of Earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the Earth of its natural forests, or destroying its wetlands... for humans to injure other humans with disease... for humans to contaminate the Earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life, with poisonous substances... these are sins.* [3]

Noah is said to have liberated animals from certain destruction: global annihilation brought upon biodiversity as a result of human greed, hubris, ignorance, vanity and violence, an only too real mythology – magnificently enshrined by such pictorial geniuses as the Flemish Renaissance master Jan Breughel the Elder. God is said to have forgiven Noah. And that forgiveness remained inchoate as a potent and viable template for the future of biology here on Earth.

Within such forgiveness is the corresponding injunction to do something towards renewal, the renaissance of life, the giving back of life, not just the taking of a precious gift, which has been our predominate penchant as a species, and as individuals.

This forgiveness gives every indication of our perception of some God-like force, whether one considers him/herself driven by faith, or by nothing; acting alone or in concert; a total narcissist or survivalist. It does not really matter anymore what characterization we choose as individuals with which to align ourselves. The writing on Earth’s walls are clear: each of us is zoologically related by birth to the biophilia that pervades that collection of forces and genes that gave us our birthright and self-consciousness, whether in the mind of a man, the man Noah, the Pope Francis, the readership – all of us.

It is our mission to join forces with those recipients of our intentions and actions. Every major ethical and indigenous tradition, going back at least some 70,000 years (to the cave of Shanidar 4 on Bradost Mountain in Iraqi Kurdistan) has honored the implicit conscience that accompanies the love of others, of nature, or physiolatry in ancient Greek. This Encyclical is but the latest, perhaps most hard-hitting of documents within that outstanding legacy we think of as our humanity.

Read the full article:

July 31, 2015

More Than 180 Evangelical Leaders Endorse Obama’s Carbon Reduction Plan

By Jack Jenkins
Climate Progress

More than 180 evangelical Christian leaders signed a letter this week backing President Barack Obama’s plan to reduce carbon emissions from power plants, the latest effort in a growing faith-based environmental movement to curb the effects of climate change.

On Thursday, theologically conservative faith leaders sent a letter to President Obama endorsing the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) proposed Clean Power Plan (CPP), a sweeping, historic project unveiled in June and set to be officially released next week. Signers of the letter, which was posted on the Evangelical Environmental Network’s website, framed their support in explicitly moral terms.

“We see overcoming the climate challenge as one of the great moral opportunities of our time, a chance to fulfill the Great Commandments to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves,” the letter read. “It is God’s love that calls all of us to take on this challenge. That is why we write to offer our support and encouragement for your efforts to overcome the climate challenge.”

Signatories included pastors, teachers, and evangelical thinkers, such as National Latino Evangelical Coalition president Rev. Gabriel Salguero, bestselling Christian author Rev. Brian McLaren, and prominent evangelical theologian Dr. David Gushee. The letter also cited several professors affiliated with conservative Christian schools such as Wheaton College, Calvin College, North Point University, and Oral Roberts University.

The group lauded the potential economic and health benefits of the CPP, which will likely improve public health and reduce energy costs for most Americans by cutting carbon pollution by 30 percent from 2005 levels. It also drew a connection between a “pro-life” position and support for green initiatives, noting that “nearly 230,000 pro-life Christians” have contacted the EPA to express support for the plan.

“[Obama’s] Climate Action Plan … when fully implemented, will: (1) position America to lead the world in the coming clean energy revolution; (2) create good jobs here in America, (3) reduce pollution that fouls our air and makes our water impure, (4) protect the health of our children and the unborn, and (5) build resiliency to the consequences of climate change both here and in vulnerable poor nations,” the letter read.

The effort reflects a growing form of conservative Christian environmentalism. Although evangelical Protestants are historically more likely than most Americans to deny climate change,
scores of evangelical leaders have begun calling for their fellow believers to embrace “creation care” — a theological framework that focuses on faith-based concern for the environment. Meanwhile, evangelical scientists such as Dr. Katherine Hayhoe have become leading activists within the environmental movement. Earlier this month, a group of more than 200 evangelical scientists sent a letter to Congress demanding legislation that would reduce carbon emissions and protect the planet.

Evangelicals are also increasingly active participants in ecumenical and interfaith efforts to combat climate change. Conservative Christians insisted President Obama discuss climate change with Pope Francis when the two met last year. Several evangelical leaders recently added their names to a similar letter addressed to Congress, which expressed support for the pontiff’s encyclical on the environment and demanded that lawmakers introduce legislation to curtail the impact of human-caused climate change. In addition, several pastors from the Evangelical Environmental Network are scheduled to meet with Vatican officials in August to discuss climate concerns.


July-August 2015

Integrating Ecology and Justice: The New Papal Encyclical

By Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim

Solutions

In Brief

In June of 2015, Pope Francis released the first encyclical on ecology. The Pope’s message highlights “integral ecology,” intrinsically linking ecological integrity and social justice. While the encyclical notes the statements of prior Popes and Bishops on the environment, Pope Francis has departed from earlier biblical language describing the domination of nature. Instead, he expresses a broader understanding of the beauty and complexity of nature, on which humans fundamentally depend. With “integral ecology” he underscores this connection of humans to the natural environment. This perspective shifts the climate debate to one of a human change of consciousness and conscience. As such, the encyclical has the potential to bring about a tipping point in the global community regarding the climate debate, not merely among Christians, but to all those attending to this moral call to action.

Read the full article:


July-August 2015
Theologian Leonardo Boff compares the Earth Charter and the Pope's Encyclical

Similarities between the Encyclical Laudato sí’: "On Care for our Common Home" and the Earth Charter, “Earth, Our Home”

By Leonardo Boff
Earth Charter International

The encyclical, Laudato sí’: On Care for our Common Home and The Earth Charter are two documents of worldwide relevance that coincidentally have many commonalities. They deal with the degradation of the Earth and life in its many forms, departing from the conventional vision expressed through environmentalism. They subscribe to a new relational and holistic paradigm, the only one, perhaps, which is still capable of giving us hope.

The Earth Charter is echoed in the encyclical, which, in one of its most fundamental passages, proclaims, “I dare to propose again this precious challenge: as never before in history, the common destiny calls on us to seek a new beginning.” (p. 207). That new beginning is being undertaken by Pope Francis.

Let us enumerate, among others, some of the similarities between the two documents.

In the first place, one sees the same spirit running through the two texts: in their analytical form, gathering the best scientific data; in their critical form, denouncing the present system that puts the Earth out of balance; and in their hopeful form, offering solutions. They do not surrender to resignation, but rather trust in the human capacity to create a new lifestyle and in the renewing actions of the Creator, “Lord who loveth the living” (Wis. 11, 26).

They have the same starting point. The Earth Charter states, “The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species.” (Preamble, 3). The encyclical repeats, “…we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair…the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view…” (p. 61).
They make the same proposals. The Earth Charter affirms, “Fundamental changes are needed in our values, institutions, and ways of living.” (Preamble, 4). The encyclical emphasizes, “Every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in ‘lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies.’” (p. 5).

A great innovation, central to the new cosmologic and ecological paradigm, is the following affirmation in the Earth Charter, “Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.” (Preamble, 4). The encyclical echoes this assertion: there are some threads that run through the entire document, “…the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.” (p. 16). This suggests solidarity among all, shared sobriety and replacing “…consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing…” (p. 9).

The Earth Charter mentions the “spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life (Preamble 5). Similarly, the encyclical affirms, “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.” (p. 92). That is the universal Franciscan fraternity.

The Earth Charter emphasizes that it is our duty to “Respect and care for the community of life. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.” (Pillar 1 and Principle 1). The entire encyclical, starting with its title, “On Care for Our Common Home”, makes a sort of refrain from this mandate. It proposes “a more passionate concern for the protection of our world.” (p. 216) and “‘a culture of care’ which permeates all of society.” (p.231). Here caring emerges not as mere perfunctory benevolence but as a new paradigm, a loving of life and of all that exists and lives.

Another important affinity is the value assigned to social justice. The Earth Charter maintains that there is a strong relationship between ecology and “social and economic justice” that works to “protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer…” (9. c). The encyclical reaches one of its highest points when it affirms 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.” (p.49).

Both The Earth Charter and the encyclical go against the current thinking in emphasizing that “…every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.” (1. a). Pope Francis reaffirms that “…all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.” (p. 42). In the name of this understanding, the Pope strongly criticizes anthropocentrism (pps. 115-120), because it views humanity's relationship with nature as using and devastating her, forgetting that human beings are a part of nature and that humanity's mission is to be her guardian and protector.
The Earth Charter devised one of the best definitions of peace that has come from human reflection, “…the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.” (16. f). If peace, as Pope Paul VI was accustomed to say, is “the equilibrium of movement” then the encyclical says that it is “ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God.” (n.210). The result of that process is the perennial peace so desired by all peoples.

These two documents are beacons that guide us in these somber times, and that are capable of returning to us the much-needed hope that we still can save our Common Home and ourselves.

Leonardo Boff is an ecotheologian and author of the book Ecology: Cry of the Earth - Cry of the Poor, Orbis 2002.


August 8, 2015

Balancing Science and Awe (Podcast with Mary Evelyn Tucker)

By Bridgett Ennis
Yale Climate Connections

Engaging people through love, awe, and wonder can help society address climate change.

Ninety-seven percent of climate scientists are convinced human-caused global warming is happening, but society has not yet taken sufficient action to limit emissions. Mary Evelyn Tucker of the Yale Divinity School says that’s partly because some among the public find the scientific facts overwhelming.

TUCKER: “I think we have to take a step back from our sometimes sad/bad news and the doom and gloom.”

Instead of only emphasizing the bad, she recommends highlighting a different story – how amazing our world really is . . .

TUCKER: “A story that can inspire wonder, awe, beauty.”

Highlighting how forests, rivers, and other ecosystems work – and how climate change might alter those systems – can engage people emotionally.
TUCKER: “If we can tap into why people love this planet, and why they can feel part of it, these are actually fabulous emotions which can give us the energy for the work that needs to be done on the ground, in institutions, in law and policy, and so on.

Tucker says wonder and awe are renewable sources of the human energy needed to achieve widespread change.

Listen to the podcast:


August 10, 2015

Pope Francis announces World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

Vatican Radio

Pope Francis has decided to set up a “World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation” which will be celebrated on September 1st annually.

He made the announcement in a letter to the heads of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

Listen to Lydia O’Kane's report:


Below in English is Pope Francis' letter announcing the “World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation”

To my Venerable Brothers

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah TURKSON, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

Cardinal Kurt KOCH, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity

Sharing with my beloved brother the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew his concerns for the future of creation (cfr Encyclical Letter. Laudato Si, 7-9) and taking up the suggestion by his representative, the Metropolitan Ioannis of Pergamum who took part in the presentation of the Encyclical Laudato Si on the care of our common home, I wish to inform you that I have decided to set up also in the Catholic Church, the “World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation” which, beginning this year, will be celebrated on the 1st of September, as the Orthodox Church has done for some time now.
As Christians we wish to offer our contribution towards overcoming the ecological crisis which humanity is living through. Therefore, first of all we must draw from our rich spiritual heritage the reasons which feed our passion for the care of creation, always remembering that for believers in Jesus Christ, the Word of God who became man for us, “the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us.” (ibid., 216). The ecological crisis therefore calls us to a profound spiritual conversion: Christians are called to “an ecological conversion whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.” (ibid., 217). Thus, “living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”(ibid).

The annual World Day of prayer for the Care of Creation offers to individual believers and to the community a precious opportunity to renew our personal participation in this vocation as custodians of creation, raising to God our thanks for the marvellous works that He has entrusted to our care, invoking his help for the protection of creation and his mercy for the sins committed against the world in which we live. The celebration of the Day on the same date as the Orthodox Church will be a valuable opportunity to bear witness to our growing communion with our Orthodox brothers. We live in a time where all Christians are faced with identical and important challenges and we must give common replies to these in order to appear more credible and effective. Therefore it is my hope that this Day can involve, in some way, other Churches and ecclesial Communities and be celebrated in union with the initiatives that the World Council of Churches is promoting on this issue.

Cardinal Turkson, as President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I’m asking you to inform the Justice and Peace Commissions of the Bishops’ Conferences, as well as the national and international Organizations involved in environmental issues about the establishment of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, so that in union with the needs and the local situation, this celebration can be rightly marked with the participation of the entire People of God: priests, men and women religious and the lay faithful. For this reason, it will be the task of this Dicastery, in collaboration with the Episcopal Conferences to set up relevant initiatives to promote and illustrate this Day, so that this annual celebration becomes a powerful moment of prayer, reflection, conversion and the adoption of appropriate life styles.

Cardinal Koch, as President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, I’m asking you to make the necessary contacts with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and with the other ecumenical organisations so that this World Day can become the sign of a path along all believers in Christ walk together. It will also be your Dicastery’s task to take care of the coordination with similar initiatives set up by the World Council of Churches.

Whilst I look forward to the widest possible cooperation for the best start and development of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, I invoke the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and of St. Francis of Assisi, whose Canticle of the Creatures inspires so many men and women of goodwill to live in praise of the Creator and with respect for creation. I support this pledge along with my Apostolic Blessing which I impart with all my heart to you, my dear Cardinals, and to all those who collaborate in your ministry.
August 12, 2015

Pope Francis’ Appeal for the Future

By Daniel C. Maguire
Consortium News

Pope Francis is pleading for world leaders to defend the rights of mankind and the future of nature against the power of corporations and the pillage of “free market” dogma, a warning about the planet’s survival that vested political and media interests reject out of hand, writes Daniel C. Maguire.

The Right has no applause for Pope Francis’s powerful encyclical *Laudato Si* (See, for example, David Brooks’s June 23 [column](http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-announces-world-day-of-prayer-for-the)) What the pope sees and his conservative critics do not is that the world economy is in crash mode, an accelerating train hurtling down the track and ignoring all the signs that say Bridge Out Ahead.

The instinct for self-preservation is strong: but in the human species, it seems, not strong enough. Like any good preacher, Francis tries to stir hope as he calls for radical reforms – and the reforms he calls for are radical – but the shrill of despair keeps peeking out at the brim of his Jeremiad.

At no point in this eloquent *cri de coeur* is the pope playing Pollyanna, but at times he seems close to Cassandra who was blessed with the knowledge of the future but cursed with the realization that no one will believe her.

The oceans with their coral treasures and rich animal life are dying of acidity and poison. The pope asks: “Who turned the wonder-world of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?” Arctic ice is in a death spiral and ice sheets are melting in Greenland as well as in the Himalayan-Tibetan glacier that provides water to hundreds of millions. The portents are nightmarish.

The governments of low-lying nations states like Tuvalu and Maldives have plans in place to remove their entire populations. To where? Topsoil and rainforests are perishing as we turn up the heat. We have double-based the planet with CO2 and we are near to passing or have passed some tipping points in the “big melt” where human efforts to stay catastrophic results will avail nothing. Agricultural scientists calculate that for every degree Celsius that temperature rises, wheat yields drop 10 percent in the earth’s hotter midriff.
Clive Ponting notes grimly: “About 40 million people die every year from hunger and related diseases — equivalent to 300 Jumbo jet crashes every day — with half of the passengers being children.”

The Pope sees all this and cries crisis! The neoliberals, drunk on our 300 years of nature-rape, insist we are doing fine. Minor tinkering like carbon credits will do all that we need but the overall system is fine, indeed sacrosanct. Beyond that, conservative critics complain that Francis has no practical alternative vision to the status quo he criticizes. Nonsense! He has an alternative vision replete with practical details that the Right finds abhorrent.

The Alternative Vision

The two dirtiest words in the neoliberal lexicon are redistribution and regulation and the pope repeatedly calls for both. Indeed he calls for regulation on a “global” scale by a supranational authority, “a true world political authority,” a concept tribal nationalism cannot abide.

He addresses governments and those gargantuan corporations that roam the planet like rogue behemoths; their legitimacy depends on their commitment to social and distributive justice. He mocks the self-serving naivete that says “the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth.” He scores the “numbing of conscience and tendentious analyses” that ignore the “excluded” poor, the expendables, “the majority of the planet’s population, billions of people.”

As Eduardo Galeano says, the reigning economic system vomits out the poor. The nub of the Pope’s message is: the poor need nourishment and it is murder for greedy hyper-accumulators to deprive them of it.

Redefining Social Life

Government, by definition is the prime caretaker of the common good. Francis redefines the “common good” to include the rest of nature, animals, and future generations. He conscientizes basic concepts like “development” and “progress” to encompass the well being of nature and future citizens of the earth. He forcefully redefines the most morally pregnant word in our vocabulary owning.

There is no absolute ownership, he says; owning imports owing. There is a “social mortgage” on everything we own.

As Warren Buffet says, he could not have built his wealth in the Gobi desert. We receive from society more than we ever contribute. We owe back: taxes are not evil but are essential forms of social and distributive justice to repay part of that debt.

Francis condemns the speculative financial games played by the rich and the accumulation of “virtual wealth.” This casino economy is divorced from “the real economy.” It lacks contact with flesh and blood and soil.
As Nicholas Fargnoli says, it’s not capitalism; it is “greedalism.” And as Thomas Piketty has shown, this form of capitalist economy bleeds inequality. Pope Francis calls the dominant form of capitalism “structurally perverse.”

Are all these the words of an innocent impractical idealist? Hardly. What the Pope offers is what Franklin Delano Roosevelt late in his life said we need badly: an Economic Bill of Rights. Such rights-talk has to get down to facts and the Pope does. Francis calls for “steady employment for everyone, no matter the limited interests of business and dubious economic reasoning.”

As Economist Alice Rivlin says: “It does not seem, from an analytical point of view, that there is any magic number below which we cannot push unemployment. It is a question of the will and of choosing the right mix of politics.” It is a question, the Pope says, of ethics.

The practical wisdom of this encyclical talks details: we need “small scale food productions systems … using a modest amount of land and producing less waste.” We need to break the power of monopolistic seed providers, not mentioning Monsanto by name but referring to it and other “oligarchies.”

People need to be free of noise, overcrowding, lack of safety, poor quality food. The right to clean water is a “human right,” not a consumer item for those who can afford it. “Saving banks at any cost, making the public pay the price” is immoral as is the corporate love of socializing costs while privatizing profits.

None of the needed changes will occur without public pressure, including boycotts since purchasing is a moral act. A more attentive and passionate and less compromised press is needed to call constant attention to the ongoing wrecking of the earth. This Pope hits all of that and more.

Where the Pope Fails

Pope Francis has a problem with women – and it bedevils this encyclical. While citing the various groups who are exploited the Pope does not call special attention to the worldwide sexist exploitation of women and girls.

Moreover, he insists that “concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion.” In so saying he insults the millions of women who end their pregnancies for reasons they perceive as serious. A blanket condemnation of all these choice by women is wrong and even violates Thomas Aquinas’s insistence that “human actions are good or bad according to the circumstances.” This sorry part of the encyclical is a lamentable remnant of long-tenured woman-free Catholic ethics.

The Pope should realize that there is not a single topic he discusses in this otherwise marvelous encyclical that is not impacted by overpopulation. Every four and a half days a million people are added to our planet, most of those in the poor world. Yet, seemingly deaf to the limits of this planet, Francis says ”demographic growth is fully compatible with an integral and shared development.”
As biologist Harold Dorn says, no species can reproduce without limit: “There are two biological checks upon a rapid increase in numbers — a high mortality and a low fertility. Unlike other biological organisms [humans] can choose which of these check shall be applied but one of them must be.” Otherwise, famine and disease will do it for us and have already begun to do so.

**On the Art of Looking**

Pope Francis in this encyclical makes a point that is often missed. There is an inexorable link between aesthetics and ethics. He stresses that the disencha nted cannot save and serve this good earth. He repeatedly urges that we open our wizened hearts to the beauty of this blessed plot. A human spirit that is not alive to the splendor of life, to its poetry and its art, is ill fitted to do earth ethics.

Curious as it may seem, the Pope’s stress on aesthetics recalled to me the witness of my son, already terminally ill, when he was around five years old. Danny was severely retarded by Hunter’s Syndrome and would die at age ten. I took him one day to see the lovely lagune near our home which is also a kind of bird sanctuary.

I had passed this scene regularly on my way to Marquette University, thinking serious thought to be sure, but not really looking. When I first took Danny there, he took one look at the sparkling lagoon waters and the mallards and other water fowl bedecked in lovely colors. He grabbed my leg excitedly and shouted: “Daddy, look! Daddy look!!”

This little boy with blighted mind but exquisite affections was retarded but not blasé. He was stunned at the beauty of the scene, and he begged me to “look.” In his eulogy, I said that that one word “look” was Danny’s valedictory to the world, a world more retarded than he in the art of looking and relishing and rejoicing in the gift we have received on this privileged planet.

That too is the heart of the Pope’s plaintive appeal. Policy without ecstasy will be barren and ineffectual.

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**August 12, 2015**

The Peronist Roots of Pope Francis’ Politic

By Uki Goñi

New York Times
BUENOS AIRES — “I wish to join my voice to yours in calling for land, lodging and labor for all our brothers and sisters. I said it and I repeat it: These are sacred rights. It is important, it is well worth fighting for them.” The combative-sounding message of Pope Francis last month on his South American tour resonated deeply in a region where poverty continues to be the most pressing concern.

In Ecuador, an estimated one million people turned out to greet the Argentine pontiff. In Bolivia, where these words were spoken, Francis held an open-air Mass for hundreds of thousands beneath a giant sculpture of Christ the Redeemer. He asked an audience in Paraguay “not to yield to an economic model which is idolatrous, which needs to sacrifice human lives on the altar of money and profit.”

The pope’s strong words against the excesses of capitalism may have made conservatives wary in the run-up to his visit to the United States next month. But if Francis appears to some as a revolutionary in pontifical robes from a continent where a series of populist, left-wing governments have held power for the past decade and a half, that characterization fundamentally misunderstands the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church in South America that have shaped the pope’s political thought.

The Economist recently called Francis “the Peronist Pope,” referring to his known sympathies for Argentina’s three-time president, Juan Perón. In the 1940s and ’50s, the populist general upended Argentina’s class structure by championing the country’s downtrodden.

Less known is that Perón took his cue from the politicized Catholic leaders of ’30s Argentina. Church leaders back then sought the integration of Argentina’s new working class by promoting radical labor reforms. Bishops addressed some of the country’s first large rallies of workers, and Perón cut his teeth speaking at meetings of the Círculos Católicos de Obreros (Catholic Worker Circles).

Perón’s alliance with the bishops was sealed when the 1943-46 military regime, in which he was vice president, made Catholic education obligatory in Argentina’s previously secular public schools. The process culminated in 1944 when Perón decorated a statue of the Virgin Mary with a military sash and appointed her a “general,” accompanied by a 21-gun salute.

“Neither Marxists nor Capitalists. Peronists!” was the chant of Perón’s supporters. And it was borrowing from the church’s political thinking that enabled Perón to found his “Third Way.”

Today, the church in South America is threatened not by Marxism but by the gradual drift of its faithful toward evangelical Protestantism, which offers a more direct relationship with God. With the largest slice of the world’s estimated 1.2 billion Catholics, about 28 percent, living in South America, this is a slide the Vatican can ill afford to ignore.

It comes naturally, then, to Francis, who became a priest in Argentina’s politically engaged church hierarchy, to adopt a populist political tone to combat that drift. He speaks directly to the region’s poor with a fire found in the “liberation theology” that inspired South America’s leftist revolutionaries of the 1970s.
Pope Francis, who firmly disapproved of armed resistance, was not at first a supporter of liberation theology. But his thinking evolved. “If you were to read one of the sermons of the first fathers of the church, from the second or third centuries, about how you should treat the poor, you’d say it was Maoist or Trotskyist,” he said in 2010, when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires (and still known as Jorge Mario Bergoglio).

The catalyst for the fusion of ’70s liberation theology and ’30s conservative church activism that underpins Francis’ worldview can be traced to his encounter with a single extraordinary person. In about 1953, as a young apprentice at a pharmaceutical lab, he met Esther Ballestrino de Careaga, a chemist in her mid-30s who had campaigned for farm laborers’ rights in Paraguay and founded that country’s first women’s movement. “She’s the person who taught me to think,” Francis told Ms. Careaga’s daughter, Ana María, when the two met last month during the papal tour.

“When I hear him speak today about the poor, the excluded, about everybody’s right to work and a roof over their heads,” she says, “I hear my mother’s influence.”

Francis and Ms. Careaga remained friends during Argentina’s 1976-83 junta, when thousands of opponents were murdered by the military, but each dealt with the dictatorship in different ways. She went on a collision course with the generals. He reportedly worked behind the scenes to save whomever he could from the carnage. Nevertheless, their friendship lasted until Ms. Careaga’s murder in 1977 at the hands of the regime.

Francis has been criticized for failing to take a more public stand — other church leaders paid with their lives for denouncing the crimes of the regime. Bishop Enrique Angelelli of the northern province of La Rioja was killed in 1976 for investigating the murder of two priests. But if Francis did not make himself a martyr, neither was he one of the many collaborators within the church hierarchy. When proceedings began this April to make Angelelli a saint, Francis came out in support.

Although forged in the fiery crucible of the region’s politics, his outlook disavows the confrontational nature of most South American political thought — divided between Peronists and anti-Peronists, liberals and anti-imperialists, left and right. Francis’ blend of thought and tradition isn’t simply middle ground.

The friendship with Ms. Careaga holds the key. He did not share her ideology, but he adopted those values he found humanistic, universal and consistent with Christian teaching.

_Uki Goñi is the author of “The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Perón’s Argentina” and a contributing opinion writer._

August 13, 2015

The Pope and the Planet

By Bill McKibben
New York Review of Books

*Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*

an encyclical letter by Pope Francis
Vatican Press, 184 pp., available at [w2.vatican.va](http://w2.vatican.va)

On a sprawling, multicultural, fractious planet, no person can be heard by everyone. But Pope Francis comes closer than anyone else. He heads the world’s largest religious denomination and so has 1.2 billion people in his flock, but even (maybe especially) outside the precincts of Catholicism his talent for the telling gesture has earned him the respect and affection of huge numbers of people. From his seat in Rome he addresses the developed world, much of which descended from the Christendom he represents; but from his Argentine roots he speaks to the developing world, and with firsthand knowledge of the poverty that is the fate of most on our planet.

So no one could have considered more usefully the first truly planetary question we’ve ever faced: the rapid heating of the earth from the consumption of fossil fuels. Scientists have done a remarkable job of getting the climate message out, reaching a workable consensus on the problem in relatively short order. But national political leaders, beholden to the fossil fuel industry, have been timid at best—Barack Obama, for instance, barely mentioned the question during the 2012 election campaign. Since Francis first announced plans for an encyclical on climate change, many have eagerly awaited his words.

And on those narrow grounds, *Laudato Si’* does not disappoint. It does indeed accomplish all the things that the extensive news coverage highlighted: insist that climate change is the fault of man; call for rapid conversion of our economies from coal, oil, and gas to renewable energy; and remind us that the first victims of the environmental crisis are the poor. (It also does Americans the service of putting climate-denier politicians—a fairly rare species in the rest of the world—in a difficult place. Jeb Bush, for example, was reduced to saying that in the case of climate the pope should butt out, leaving the issue to politicians. “I think religion ought to be about making us better as people,” he said, in words that may come back to haunt him.)

The pope’s contribution to the climate debate builds on the words of his predecessors—in the first few pages he quotes from John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI—but clearly for those prelates ecological questions were secondary. He also cites the pathbreaking work of Bartholomew, the Orthodox leader sometimes called the “green patriarch”; others, from the Dalai Lama to Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu, have spoken eloquently on this issue as well. Still, Francis’s words fall as a rock in this pond, not a pebble; they help greatly to consolidate the current momentum toward some kind of agreement at the global climate conference in Paris in December. He has, in effect, said that all people of good conscience need to do as he has done and give the question the priority it requires. The power of celebrity is the power to set the
agenda, and his timing has been impeccable. On those grounds alone, *Laudato Si’* stands as one of the most influential documents of recent times.

It is, therefore, remarkable to actually read the whole document and realize that it is far more important even than that. In fact, it is entirely different from what the media reports might lead one to believe. Instead of a narrow and focused contribution to the climate debate, it turns out to be nothing less than a sweeping, radical, and highly persuasive critique of how we inhabit this planet—an ecological critique, yes, but also a moral, social, economic, and spiritual commentary. In scope and tone it reminded me instantly of E.F. Schumacher’s *Small Is Beautiful* (1973), and of the essays of the great American writer Wendell Berry. As with those writers, it’s no use trying to categorize the text as liberal or conservative; there’s some of each, but it goes far deeper than our political labels allow. It’s both caustic and tender, and it should unsettle every nonpoor reader who opens its pages.

The ecological problems we face are not, in their origin, technological, says Francis. Instead, “a certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us.” He is no Luddite (“who can deny the beauty of an aircraft or a skyscraper?”) but he insists that we have succumbed to a “technocratic paradigm,” which leads us to believe that “every increase in power means ‘an increase of “progress” itself’…as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such.” This paradigm “exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object.” Men and women, he writes, have from the start intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand.

In our world, however, “human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational.” With the great power that technology has afforded us, it’s become easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.

The deterioration of the environment, he says, is just one sign of this “reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life.” And though “the idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm…is nowadays inconceivable,” the pope is determined to try exactly that, going beyond “urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution” to imagine a world where technology has been liberated to serve the poor, the rest of creation, and indeed the rest of us who pay our own price even amid our temporary prosperity. The present ecological crisis is “one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity,” he says, dangerous to the dignity of us all.
Thus girded, the pope intervenes in a variety of contemporary debates. Automation versus work, for instance. As he notes, “the orientation of the economy has favoured a kind of technological process in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines,” which is a sadness since “work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth.” The example he cites demonstrates the subtlety of his argument. Genetic modification of crops is a way, in a sense, to automate or rationalize farming. There’s no “conclusive proof” that GMOs may be harmful to our bodies; there’s extensive proof, however, that “following the introduction of these crops, productive land is concentrated in the hands of a few owners” who can afford the new technologies.

Given that half the world still works as peasant farmers, this accelerates the exodus off the farm and into hovels at the margins of overcrowded cities; there is a need instead to “promote an economy which favours productive diversity,” including “small-scale food production systems...be it in small agricultural parcels, in orchards and gardens, hunting and wild harvesting or local fishing.” (And lest anyone think this is a romantic prescription for starvation, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization has in the last few years published one study after another showing that small farms in fact produce more calories per acre. Not per dollar invested—if you want to grow rich, you need a spread. But if you want to feed the world, clever peasant farming will be effective.)

It’s not just small versus large. The pope insists on giving priority to diverse culture over the “levelling effect on cultures” encouraged by a “consumerist vision,” which diminishes the “immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity.” In words that are somewhat remarkable coming from the head of an institution that first set out to universalize the world, the disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle...can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems.

Even more striking, in this regard, is his steadfast defense of “indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed,” because for them land “is a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values.” Compare that attitude with, say, the oil companies now destroying aboriginal land in order to mine Canada’s tar sands.

But the pope is just as radical, given current reality, when he insists on beauty over ugliness. When he demands the protection from development of “those common areas, visual landmarks and urban landscapes which increase our sense of belonging, of rootedness, of ‘feeling at home’ within a city which includes us and brings us together,” he is not just celebrating Frederick Law Olmsted—he’s wading into, for instance, the still-simmering Turkish revolt that began with plans to tear down Istanbul’s Gezi Park and replace it with a mall and luxury apartments.

He also insists on giving “priority to public transportation” over private cars. This was the precise phrase used by Jaime Lerner, the visionary mayor of Curitiba, Brazil, when a generation ago he launched the world’s best transit system. His vision of Bus Rapid Transit is now
spreading around the world, and it works best precisely where it most inconveniences autos, by insisting on dedicated bus lanes and the like. It makes getting around as easy for the poor as for the rich; every BRT lane is a concrete demonstration of what the Latin American liberation theologians, scorned and hounded by previous popes, once called “the preferential option for the poor.”

The pope is at his most rigorous when he insists that we must prefer the common good to individual advancement, for of course the world we currently inhabit really began with Ronald Reagan’s and Margaret Thatcher’s insistence on the opposite. (It was Thatcher who said, memorably, that “there’s no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families,” and that’s that.) In particular, the pope insists that “intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us.”

Think of the limitations that really believing that would place on our current activities. And think too what it would mean if we kept not only “the poor of the future in mind, but also today’s poor, whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting.” We literally would have to stop doing much of what we’re currently doing; with poor people living on the margins firmly in mind, and weighing the interests of dozens of future generations, would someone like to write a brief favoring, say, this summer’s expansion by Shell (with permission from President Obama) of oil drilling into the newly melted waters of the Arctic? Again the only applicable word is “radical.”

But as I say, we’ve seen this kind of neither-liberal-nor-conservative radicalism before—from critics like Schumacher or Berry or, in the formulation of New York Times columnist David Brooks, other “purveyors of “1970s-style doom-mongering about technological civilization.” Indeed any serious effort to alter or even critique the largest trends in our civilization is now scorned, often by the theoretical left as well as the right. Brooks is united with, for instance, n+1 editor Mark Greif, who in his recent The Age of the Crisis of Man (2015) heaps contempt on those who would do precisely what the pope undertakes:

Anytime your inquiries lead you to say, “At this moment we must ask and decide who we fundamentally are…” just stop. You have begun asking the wrong analytic questions for your moment…. Answer, rather, the practical matters…and find the immediate actions necessary to achieve an aim.

For some, this would mean don’t talk about individualism versus the common good; talk about some new scheme for carbon credits. In Brooks and Greif we hear the “real world” talking.

By contrast, at least since the Buddha, a line of spiritual leaders has offered a reasonably coherent and remarkably similar critique of who we are and how we live. The greatest of those critics was perhaps Jesus, but the line continues through Francis’s great namesake, and through Thoreau, and Gandhi, and many others. Mostly, of course, we’ve paid them devoted lip service and gone on living largely as before.
We’ve come close to change—opinion surveys at the end of the 1970s, for instance, showed that 30 percent of Americans were “pro-growth,” 31 percent “anti-growth,” and 39 percent “highly uncertain,” and President Carter held a White House reception for Schumacher. But Reagan’s election resolved that tension in the usual way, and the progress we’ve made, before and since, has been technological, not moral; people have been pulled from poverty by expansion, not by solidarity. The question is whether the present moment is actually any different, or whether the pope’s words will fall as seeds on rocky ground.

If there’s a difference this time, it’s that we seem to have actually reached the edge of the precipice. Schumacher and the visionaries of the 1970s imagined that the limits to growth were a little further off, and offered us strong warnings, which we didn’t heed.

Take water, which the pope addresses at length. We probably should not need his words to know that “access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival.” We all know it should not be wasted, and yet we continue to waste it because doing so is beneficial to the rich and powerful: for instance, insurance companies have planted enormous almond groves across California in recent years even as water supplies have started to shrink, and agribusiness planters have drawn down the aquifers of the Midwest.

In the same week that the pope’s encyclical emerged, a huge new study showed that those aquifers are now overdrawn in regions that provide food for two billion people—the data come from satellites measuring the earth’s gravitational field, which means that the water losses are so large they’re affecting the planet on that scale. In the American West alone, the drought has become so serious that last year those satellites showed the evaporation of 63 trillion gallons of groundwater, weighing nearly 240 billion tons, a loss of enough weight that the Sierra Nevada mountains became measurably higher. New data also show that California’s drillers must now go so deep to find groundwater that the supplies they tap have been in the ground for 20,000 years.

Or take biodiversity, where the pope rightly notes that “caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation.” But that alarm sounds somewhat louder when, in the same week as the encyclical, a new study in a prestigious journal found that extinctions were now happening at 114 times the normal background rate, and that the planet’s “sixth mass extinction is already underway.” In view of such empirical data, we can understand the pope’s rare flicker of real anger when he refers to those “who turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life.”

His profound sadness about the inequality among people, and the toll it exacts on the poor, is also undergirded by remarkable new data that separate it from earlier critiques. The data show right now that inequality is reaching almost absurd heights: for instance, the six heirs to the Walmart fortune have more assets than the bottom 42 percent of all Americans combined; the two Koch brothers (together the richest men on the planet) have plans to spend more than the Republicans or the Democrats on the next federal election. If you want to understand why the Occupy movement or the early surge toward Bernie Sanders caught the usual political analysts by surprise, consider those facts. (The pope suggests that “many professionals, opinion makers,
communications media and centres and power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor with little direct contact with their problems.”

Above all, the empirical data about climate change make it clear that the moment is ripe for this encyclical. A long line of gurus, of whom Francis is the latest, is now converging with a large number of contemporary scientists; instead of scriptures, the physicists and chemists consult the latest printouts from their computer models, but the two ways of knowing seem to be making the same point. So far we’ve melted most of the sea ice in the summer Arctic, made the oceans 30 percent more acidic, and started the apparently irreversible slide of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet into the surrounding ocean. We are, to put it another way, systematically destroying the largest physical features on the planet, and we are doing it at a rapid pace.

Given that, who’s the realist? The pope, with his insistence that we need a rapid cultural transformation, or David Brooks, speaking for the complacent, with his insistence that “over the long haul both people and nature are better off with technological progress”? The point is, there no longer is any long haul. Those who speak, in the pope’s words, the language of “nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions” no longer have a tenable case. What he calls the “magical conception of the market” has not, ultimately, done what Reagan promised; instead it has raised, for the first time, the very real specter of wholesale planetary destruction, of change that will be measured in geological time.

It’s quite possible—probable, even—that the pope will lose this fight. He’s united science and spirit, but that league still must do battle with money. The week the encyclical was released, Congress approved, in bipartisan fashion, fast-track trade legislation, a huge victory for the forces of homogenization, technocracy, finance, and what the encyclical calls “rapidification.”

It’s not that markets shouldn’t play a part in environmental solutions: everyone who’s studied the problem believes that the fossil fuel industry should pay a price for the damage carbon does in the atmosphere, and that that price, if set high enough, would speed up the transition to renewable energy. But the climate movement has largely united behind plans that would take that money from the Exxons of the world and return it to all citizens, which would have the effect of giving poor and middle-class people, who generally use less fossil fuel, a substantial net gain. The new fast-track agreements, by contrast, apparently explicitly forbid new climate agreements as a part of trade negotiations.

Anyway, if the outcome of the real-world battle is uncertain, the pope carries the intellectual contest. Brooks, for instance, makes the centerpiece of his attack on the encyclical the notion that the promising technocratic approach is, fortunately, expanding fracking, because burning natural gas produces less carbon than burning coal. This is scientifically obtuse (as I explained in these pages, an emerging body of evidence shows that fracking instead liberates vast quantities of methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas), but in any event the extent of the damage we’ve already done to the climate means we no longer have room for slightly less damaging fossil fuels. We have to make the leap to renewable power.

And the good news is that that’s entirely possible. Thanks to the engineers whose creativity the pope celebrates, we’ve watched the price of solar panels fall 75 percent in the last six years
alone. They’re now cheap enough that a vast effort, rooted in pragmatic physics, could ensure before the decade was out that there would hardly be a hut or hovel that lacked access to energy, something that the fossil fuel status quo has failed to achieve in two hundred years. Such a change would be carried out by small-scale entrepreneurs of just the sort the pope has in mind when he describes the dignity of work. And it would mean a very different world. Instead of centralized power in the hands of a few oil and gas barons like the Koch brothers, the earth would draw its energy from a widely diffused and much more democratic grid. Building that system in time would require aid to the poorest nations to jumpstart the transition. It would require, for instance, a world much like the one the pope envisions, where concern for the poor counts as much as, in Brooks’s sad words, the “low motivations of people as they actually are.”

Brooks, Reagan, and Thatcher summon the worst in us and assume that will eventually solve our problems—to repeat Brooks’s sad phrase, we should rely on the “low motivations of people as they actually are.” Pope Francis, in a moment of great crisis, speaks instead to who we could be individually and more importantly as a species. As the data suggest, this may be the only option we have left.


August 18, 2015

Major Islamic Climate Change Declaration Released

Press Release

Istanbul, Turkey - Islamic leaders from 20 countries today launched a bold Climate Change Declaration to engage the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims on the issue of our time.

Adopted by the 60 participants at the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium, (Istanbul, 17-18 August) the Declaration urges governments to deliver a strong, new international climate agreement in Paris this December that signals the end of the road for polluting fossil fuels by creating architecture that will give us a chance of limiting global warming above pre-industrial levels to 2, or preferably 1.5, degrees Celsius.

The Declaration presents the moral case, based on Islamic teachings, for Muslims and people of all faiths worldwide to take urgent climate action. It was drafted by a large, diverse team of international Islamic scholars from around the world following a lengthy consultation period prior to the Symposium. It has already been endorsed by more than 60 participants and organisations including the Grand Muftis of Uganda and Lebanon. The Declaration is in
harmony with the Papal Encyclical and has won the support of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace of the Holy See.

The Declaration calls for a rapid phase-out of fossil fuels and a switch to 100% renewable energy as well as increased support for vulnerable communities already suffering from climate impacts. It can be seen as part of the groundswell of people from all walks of life calling for governments to scale up the transition away from fossil fuels. Wealthy and oil-producing nations are urged to phase out all greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. All people, leaders and businesses are invited to commit to 100% renewable energy in order to tackle climate change, reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Amongst keynote speakers at the Symposium were three senior UN officials - from the UN Environment Programme, the secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN Secretary-General’s climate change team. Presentations were also made by scientists, NGO leaders and academics. Also attending were religious leaders from many other faith traditions.

That the Symposium was held in Istanbul is significant - for the first time in history, the G20 summit will be organized by the presidency of Turkey, a country with a majority Muslim population. Just two weeks before the Paris Summit, leaders from the world’s largest 20 economies will gather in an attempt to reach agreement on how international financial stability can be achieved. The economic implications of climate change and the huge amounts of subsidies given by G20 countries to the polluting fossil fuel industry will also be on the agenda.

**Reactions:**

“On behalf of the Indonesian Council of Ulema and 210 million Muslims we welcome this Declaration and we are committed to implementing all recommendations. The climate crisis needs to be tackled through collaborative efforts, so let’s work together for a better world for our children, and our children’s children.” - Din Syamsuddin, Chairman of the Indonesian Council of Ulema

“I am proud to be associated with the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change released in Istanbul today. As a Muslim I try to follow the moral teachings of Islam to preserve the environment and help the victims of climate change. I urge all Muslims around the world to play their role in tackling the global problem of climate change.” - Dr Saleemul Huq, Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development, Dhaka, Bangladesh and Senior Fellow, International Institute for Environment and Development,

“The basis of the declaration is the work of world renowned islamic environmentalists, it is a trigger for further action and we would be very happy if people adopted and improved upon the ideas that are articulated in this document.” - Fazlun Khalid, Founder, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences

“It is with great joy and in a spirit of solidarity that I express to you the promise of the Catholic Church to pray for the success of your initiative and her desire to work with you in the future to
care for our common home and thus to glorify the God who created us.” - His Eminence Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican City

“A clean energy, sustainable future for everyone ultimately rests on a fundamental shift in the understanding of how we value the environment and each other. Islam’s teachings, which emphasize the duty of humans as stewards of the Earth and the teacher’s role as an appointed guide to correct behavior, provide guidance to take the right action on climate change.” - Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary, UN Framework Conference on Climate Change

“Civil society is delighted by this powerful Climate Declaration coming from the Islamic community, which could be a game changer, as it challenges all world leaders, and especially oil producing nations, to phase out their carbon emissions and supports the just transition to 100% renewable energy as a necessity to tackle climate change, reduce poverty and deliver sustainable development around the world.” - Wael Hmaidan, International Director of Climate Action Network


August 18, 2015

A Pilgrimage to the Tar Sands

By Mary Pendergast, RSM
Ecospirituality Resources

“The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant life-style linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as altering ecosystems.”

#145  Laudato Si’

In July, I had the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage, a meaningful journey to a sacred place, in order to deepen my life’s purpose: to do the Great Work of our times. (Thomas Berry urged all of us over 30 years ago to engage in the Great Work of bringing forth a mutually enhancing Earth/human relationship.) Sister Maureen Wild, SC, and I followed Athabasca River (in western Canada) from its source in the Columbian ice fields. We saw her acquire strength and power and tumble into the Athabasca Falls in Jasper National Park. We observed some of the places where she had carved rock with torrents and rivulets a long time and where she flowed lazily through quiet towns sculpting a path north. The Athabasca has one mission, to bless all life in its path with pure glacial water; but to do it she has to pass through hell. She does not come out unscathed.

Maureen and I tailed the river to Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada where she is used by the tar sands industry for its mining operation in the world’s last remaining “oil” field. Second only to Saudi Arabia, the region is said to contain up to 2.5 trillion barrels of “oil,” but to get at it entails
destroying an ecosystem and an indigenous way of life. The number one market for bitumen is the United States.

To extract a barrel of bitumen requires the excavation of two tons of Earth and sand and three barrels of fresh water from the Athabasca. That water use is equivalent to the water use of a city of two million people for a year! Much of the water gets “recycled” in tailings ponds, used to settle out solids in the oil, water, chemical mix. The ponds are covered with the sheen of oil, so small cannons boom to keep birds from landing, 24 hours a day.

If the “oil” is too deep to mine, the industry also uses another method of extraction called in situ. It is a method that steams out the bitumen, but it burns natural gas to boil the water into steam. Estimated use of natural gas in boiling water — enough to heat six million North American homes every day!

If this is beginning to sound like an energy intensive, unsustainable method to obtain bitumen which requires even more diluting and refining to become something that will actually flow through a pipeline, I think you are on to something! Worst of all, each barrel of bitumen produces three times the greenhouse gas as conventional oil, putting us in the ever deepening hole of global emissions fueling climate change.

Maureen has First Nation elder friends in Fort McKay, Celia and Ed Harpe, who live just down river from the industry. They invited us to a dinner of moose meat and new potatoes. They shared stories of their traditional way of life. They no longer drink the water from the Athabasca, nor do they eat her fish which have been documented to have tumors, cancers and lesions, nor do they swim in the river or pick the berries and herbs growing wild. They say that the wildlife has disappeared along with the forest and I wonder what the moose and the beaver are drinking wherever they are?

Celia is an outspoken critic of the Tar Sands industry. She says there have been no frogs on the river for 40 years. Canaries in the proverbial coal mine, they cannot survive in a toxic environment. The people, too, have come down with asthma and lupus and cancers I couldn’t even pronounce. Celia said every family had someone who was sick, or already dead including her own. Her husband Ed has lung cancer. Her sister Dorothy died of lupus. Celia’s grandson, 32, was recently killed in an industry accident. We happened to be there for his memorial service.

A way of life has been supplanted by an industry. A people’s culture and health have been compromised. The people, caribou, bear, moose, fish and owl have to deal with a brew of heavy metals including arsenic, thallium and mercury in the Athabasca, while she continues her journey to the Arctic Ocean forever changed.

The words of Thomas Berry ring as true as ever:

We might summarize our present human situation by the simple statement: that in the 20th century, the glory of the human has become the desolation of the Earth and now the desolation of the Earth is becoming the destiny of the human.
Mary Pendergast, RSM has been Director of Ecology for the Sisters of Mercy Northeast since 2009. She is also involved with Mercy Ecology, Inc. A Montessori teacher for many years and singer with Carolyn McDade, she studied the New Story with Miriam MacGillis, OP at Genesis Farm. For more information and photos of Mary and her pilgrimage: www.riverpilgrims.net.

Contact: mpendergast@mercyne.org

http://ecospiritualityresources.com/2015/08/18/

August 19, 2015

The Islamic Climate Change Declaration Could Be More Effective Than Pope Francis’s Encyclical

By Emma Foehringer Merchant
New Republic

Pope Francis may have soaked up headlines earlier this summer when he published a whopping 192-page encyclical on climate change, but this week Muslims issued a declaration that could influence an even larger population than the Catholic decree. The declaration, announced Tuesday as part of the two-day International Islamic Climate Change Symposium in Istanbul, further exemplifies the trend of faith-based climate activism ahead of the U.N. climate change summit in December.

Like the papal encyclical, the Islamic Climate Change Declaration calls for a rejection of human greed for natural resources, respect of nature’s “perfect equilibrium,” and recognition of the “moral obligation” to conserve. More concretely, it hopes to rally the world’s wealthiest and oil-producing countries—several of which are predominantly Muslim—to act as leaders in cutting emissions and helping less affluent governments make the same reductions. Corporations were asked to commit to waste-free business plans and divest from economies driven by traditional fuel sources.

The Muslim legacy of environmentalism has long been overshadowed by Christian-focused environmental stewardship, but the declaration could potentially have a larger reach than its Catholic counterpart. According to an April Pew study, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world, with around 1.6 billion followers. By 2050, there will be as many Muslims as there are Christians of all denominations. The global population of Catholics barely tops 1 billion.

Many Muslims also live in areas highly vulnerable to climate change, with predicted increases in drought, floods, and other extreme weather events as a result of higher temperatures. In late July, Turkey, where the symposium was held, experienced extreme heat waves. Earlier this month, temperatures in Iraq rocketed so high the government declared a four-day holiday.

Predominantly Muslim countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates are among the countries with the worst air pollution in the world, according to a 2014 World Health Organization report. Worst of all was Pakistan, a country that heavily prioritizes economic growth over environmental issues.
Though Tuesday’s declaration may not have a political impact on countries like Pakistan, faith-based appeals could have resounding effects in public perception and encourage conversation on climate change, as the recent encyclical has.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Islamic philosopher and professor at George Washington University, said that faith has much greater power to reach Muslims than politics. For instance, Egypt and other countries in the Nile basin have attempted to restrict the river's pollution, but it’s unlikely for residents to stop their dumping practices without religious impetus from a local mosque, said Nasr. “Islam is still very powerful in the Islamic world,” he said. “If a priest says, ‘Don’t cut a tree, because it’s a sin,’ it will have much more effect.”

Muslim interest in climate change may only be a few decades old, but environmental stewardship is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. According to Islamic Relief Worldwide, one of the organizers of the conference, the Qu’ran includes 700 verses that concern the environment and climate. Certain interpretations of the holy text also argue it explicitly decries manmade pollution: “Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought,” one translation reads. Just last year, Indonesia’s top Islamic clerical body declared a fatwa against wildlife trafficking—the first of its kind worldwide.

http://www.newrepublic.com/article/122575/islamic-climate-change-declaration-more-effective-encyclical

August 19, 2015

Can Islamic scholars change thinking on climate change?

Declaration calls on Muslims to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

By Davide Castelvecchi, Quirin Schiermeier, & Richard Hodson
Nature

Fewer than four months before politicians gather in Paris to try to hammer out an international climate agreement, Islamic scholars have underscored the urgency of halting climate change.

The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, drawn up by a group of academics, Muslim scholars and international environment policy experts, was announced this week at a symposium on Islam and climate change in Istanbul. It calls on the 1.6 billion Muslims around the world to phase out greenhouse-gas emissions from fossil fuels and switch instead to energy from renewable sources. Unlike Catholicism, for example, there is no central religious authority in Islam, but the declaration suggests Muslims have a religious duty to tackle climate change.

Nature explains the intent of the declaration and what it might achieve.
What does the statement say?

In a nutshell, it says that climate change resulting from fossil-fuel burning must urgently be halted, lest ecosystems and human civilization undergo severe disruptions.

“This current rate of climate change cannot be sustained, and the earth’s fine equilibrium (mīzān) may soon be lost,” it reads. “Excessive pollution from fossil fuels threatens to destroy the gifts bestowed on us by God, whom we know as Allah — gifts such as a functioning climate, healthy air to breathe, regular seasons, and living oceans.”

Citing a 2014 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it warns that components of Earth's system are at risk of experiencing abrupt and irreversible change.

The declaration also laments the slow progress of international climate-change negotiations: “It is alarming that in spite of all the warnings and predictions, the successor to the Kyoto Protocol which should have been in place by 2012, has been delayed. It is essential that all countries, especially the more developed nations, increase their efforts and adopt the pro-active approach needed to halt and hopefully eventually reverse the damage being wrought.”

How significant is this?

Indonesia, which is predominantly Muslim, is among the top ten carbon emitters if land-use change and forests are taken into account, according to the World Resources Institute, an environmental think tank based in Washington DC. Most of the island nation's footprint comes from deforestation and the draining of carbon-rich peat bogs. India — which is not a Muslim country but has a large Muslim population — is also in the top ten emitters.

Although other Islamic countries, especially major fossil-fuel producers in the Persian Gulf, make small contributions in absolute terms, they have some of the highest per-capita emissions. These come from the intensive use of electric power for energy-intensive applications such as air conditioning and desalination.

Changes in these nations could be important on a global scale, says Saleemul Huq, director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and one of the authors of the declaration. Huq says “I do believe that our appeal will help reduce emissions”.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a Persian-born theologian at the George Washington University in Washington DC who has written on Islam’s teachings on the environment, thinks that the main value of the declaration will be to remind Muslims that “nature is not just a machine; it has a spiritual meaning”. But he’s sceptical that it will affect policies and says he is not sure it is going to change the minds in governments.
Is the Islamic world behind in addressing climate change?

Some oil-rich nations, including Saudi Arabia, have been reluctant in the past to restrict the recovery and use of fossil fuels. Their stance might prove a hurdle to the negotiations surrounding emission cuts in Paris in December.

But some predominately Muslim countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, are also threatened acutely by more-frequent periods of extreme heat and precipitation and by accelerating sea-level rise. Aware of these threats, Bangladesh has installed more than 3.5-million solar home systems in the country's rural areas. And Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates has, in recent years, grown into a hot spot for solar research.

Where do other faiths stand on climate change?

The rallying cry to the Muslim community is not the only intervention by religious leaders in recent times. In June, Pope Francis issued a similar message to the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics, in the form of a 192-page letter to bishops, known as an encyclical. A day later, faith leaders in the United Kingdom issued an updated version of their Lambeth Declaration on Climate Change — the original was published in 2009.

The three declarations share many ideas, including acknowledgement that climate change currently being seen is human-induced and the call for rich nations to do more to support poorer countries that are most vulnerable to the effects of such change.

“All the faiths are talking about climate change,” says David Shreeve, environmental advisor to the Church of England’s Archbishop’s Council. “It's great that the Muslims are putting out a declaration, because whatever your faith, it’s a great opportunity for the faiths to stand up and say we really are concerned about this.”

http://www.nature.com/news/can-islamic-scholars-change-thinking-on-climate-change-1.18203

August 27, 2015

Why Social Conditions Matter to the Pope

By Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Rev. Jesse Jackson
Huffington Post

We Christians tend to focus on personal piety. When dealing with others, we become legalistic and concentrate on dos and the don'ts, mostly of other people. We delight in creating 11th commandments like, “thou shall not drink nor smoke” instead of treating each of these as a medical issue, which they are.
Piety and expressions of personal holiness are important. We praise piety but piety is personal, not communal. Piety did not free the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. They had to convincingly plead genuine hardship and demand freedom before they could march out of slavery.

God is not only concerned about personal piety but with the social condition in which we find ourselves. During the prosperous kingdoms of Judah and Israel, the prophetic message to the people of Israel who had gone astray was not to increase their piety. It was a call to eschew luxury (Amos 6:4-6) do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Indeed the prophets routinely criticized the people for putting personal piety ahead of addressing oppression and doing justice.

Jesus preached piety, but only when it was rightly connected with right behavior, as taught by the Torah. His ministry, described in the gospels, focused on the social conditions in which many people found themselves. His concern centered on people who were poor, hungry, and cast out. He sought to meet their needs and to critique the systems which ignored their needs.

We see similarities to Jesus in the latest actions of Pope Francis. He has preached changes to the discourse of Christianity by challenging the idolatry of symbols, material wealth. He has preached a concern for those in need and those who are oppressed. Many are familiar with his radical acts of compassion that are symbolic and tangible. In one striking example, the Pope washed the feet of 12 prisoners, men and women from different parts of the world on Maundy Thursday.

The Pope is not concerned about the status quo. He challenges the status quo.

In his statements and actions, Pope Francis reveals a commitment to emulate the earthly ministry of Jesus. This is particularly clear in the Pope's focus not only on the condition of humanity's inner selves, but even more so on the conditions in which so much of humanity lives.

In his encyclical, Laudato Si', the Pope drew the world's attention not only to our social context, but also to the condition of the earth. Pope Francis reminds us we cannot continue to ignore the devastation caused by pollution in the air, poison in our waterways, and abuse of the land. We are called to care for God's creation entrusted us as stewards.

As the world prepares for COP21 (Conference of the Parties, a United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Paris, we have to acknowledge the Pope's concern for climate change and sustainability. The Pope's encyclical was released 6 months before COP 21 which is a crucial meeting as it will frame global action for the next 5 years and beyond.

The Pope has created a World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on September 1, 2015 to bring attention to how we are living and how we can protect the environment. In his visit to the UN in September, the Pope will address the issue of sustainability and climate justice.

Climate change deeply affects people living in poverty. The condition faced by the world's poorest people is a specific concern for the Pope. Climate change affects those in poverty the most as they lose their land (as they have done with the spread of the Sahara desert into formerly
arable lands in the Sahel, the grasslands to the south of that great desert), or are forced to migrate, search higher grounds, and live off polluted soil. The greed of people and corporations in wealthy countries demands cheap production, thereby exhausting the land and creating new deserts. The irony is that, although people living in poverty may have contributed to exhausting the fertility of the land, the poorest have contributed the least to the causes and effects of climate change. As a result, climate change is a concern of social justice.

Pope Francis reminds us that God is not merely concerned about the condition within us, but the conditions within which we find ourselves. In Egypt God heard the groans of the people. God did not deliver only those who believed in him; God did not deliver only the pure in heart, God did not deliver only the souls of the people. God delivered the people--all the people.

How we treat the least of our neighbors--how we care for the physical needs of their bodies--was a priority of Jesus. The Pope follows in the lineage of Jesus as he calls us to care for our brothers and sisters. Pope Francis challenges us to examine not only our inner selves, but the conditions that we are creating for our neighbors and for the rest of the world.

We need to be concerned about the social injustice, racial injustice and climate injustice. We need to work towards changing the injustices that harm individuals, communities and God's good earth.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/grace-jisun-kim/why-social-conditions-mat_b_8049398.html

August 28, 2015

Obama to seek unity with Pope Francis on many issues

The Indian Panorama

WASHINGTON (TIP): Sweeping into office in 2009, President Barack Obama captured near rock-star status around the world among millions who saw him as the embodiment of a new sense of social purpose. Now, that baton has largely been passed to Pope Francis, whose visit to the White House next month will put his common cause with Obama on vivid display.

Obama has made no secret of his affection for the outspoken pope, calling him a “transformative leader” whose influence has transcended the Roman Catholic community. The pope has embraced many of the issues Obama has sought to advance, including global warming, poverty and diplomacy with Iran and Cuba.

Vice-President Joe Biden, a Catholic, said the pope’s Sept 23 visit will mark an important moment not only for Catholics but also for all Americans.

“One Pope Francis has breathed new life into what I believe is the central mission of our faith: Catholic social doctrine,” Biden said in a statement to The Associated Press. Invoking key
elements of Obama’s agenda, Biden added that Francis “has become a moral rudder for the world on some of the most important issues of our time, from inequality to climate change.”

The pope’s brief visit to the White House is part of his highly anticipated trip to the US and Cuba. It’s a reunion of sorts for Obama and Francis, who first met when the president visited the Vatican last year.

Despite deep differences on some social issues such as abortion, Obama and the pope are expected to focus on areas of agreement. The White House said economic opportunity, immigration and refugees, and protection of religious minorities were high on the agenda.

“It’s going to be a come-to-Jesus moment _ no pun intended _ for the many politicians who want to claim the mantle of Pope Francis,” said Michael Wear, a former White House official who led faith outreach for Obama’s 2012 campaign.

For Obama, the visit offers a chance to imbue his remaining goals with a sense of moral authority as he approaches the end of his presidency.

Viewed as largely above politics, Francis is extremely popular in the US. Tickets to his speech to Congress are such a hot commodity that an overflow crowd of thousands is expected to watch on Jumbotrons from the National Mall, the grassy expanse that leads to the Capitol.

“In a way, Pope Francis has become a conscience for this age of the world. When President Obama came to office, he too had that aura for at least the first couple of years,” said Stephen Schneck, who runs the Catholic politics institute at Catholic University of America. “But Pope Francis’ message is moral and religious. He’s not going to be talking about legislation.”

The White House has praised Francis for involving himself in issues usually left to politicians. In a rare move, Francis personally intervened to help the US and Cuba restore relations, writing leaders of both countries and hosting their delegations at the Vatican for final talks. And on climate change, a cornerstone of Obama’s desired legacy, Francis added the weight of the pulpit by publishing a landmark encyclical calling climate change real and man-made.

Yet there are risks for Obama if he glosses over other, stark differences in views.

When he visited Francis early last year, Obama contradicted the official Vatican account of their meeting by saying they hadn’t discussed social issues in any detail. Papal aides insisted the two leaders indeed discussed religious freedom, life and conscientious objection _ buzzwords for abortion, birth control and parts of Obama’s health care law.

“That’s the delicate dance,” said Julian Zelizer, a presidential historian at Princeton University. “The idea is to point out common areas of concern, rather than say, ‘We are total allies.”

A Lot of American Catholics Have Never Heard of Pope Francis' Most Important New Message
But his visit to the United States could change all that.

By James West
Mother Jones

Pope Francis has so far had a tough time selling his high-profile climate campaign to Americans—even to the faithful. Two recent national surveys asked whether American Catholics were familiar with the pope's call for action, and the results were decidedly mixed.

Polling data released Monday by the Public Religion Research Institute and the Religion News Service shows that one in five Catholics are still unfamiliar with the pope's position on climate change, outlined in his landmark encyclical—or papal letter—in which he said humans were contributing to the "unprecedented destruction of ecosystems." PRRI describes that number as "substantial" but notes that it's similar to other hot-button political issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage. A separate poll, released two weeks ago by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and researchers from Yale University, found an even larger proportion of Catholics who were unaware of the pope's views: only 40 percent had heard about the papal letter and its themes of environmental and economic justice.

Still, there's plenty of good news in both polls. According to the PRRI survey, American Catholics are much more likely to side with the pope's position on global warming than to oppose it—47 percent compared with 24 percent. The earlier AP-NORC/Yale survey found that a majority of Catholics (64 percent) said they thought it was appropriate for the pope to take a stand on global warming.

The PRRI survey also found that support for government action to prevent global warming is high: Nearly two-thirds of the general public, and more than 70 percent of Catholics, believe the government should do more to address climate change. Fully 86 percent of non-white Catholics support increased climate action. Non-white Catholics also report hearing about climate change in church more frequently than white Catholics.

Robert Jones, the CEO of PRRI, says the unfamiliarity with the pope's message may not be about climate change per se, but a lack of awareness of Francis's political views more generally. Timing might also be key. "I think with news in the summertime as people head to vacation, it's often a difficult time to break through," said Jones. That means the pope's visit to the United States in late September will be crucial. "After his visit, these numbers will look a little different," Jones said. The papal visit "will give him a platform to highlight priorities and put issues on the front burner."

Leading experts on Catholicism and the environment say it's still too early to gauge the impact of the pope's climate initiative, and they agree that his US visit will bring it to a much larger audience.
Mary Evelyn Tucker, a director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University, anticipates that the pope's message will seep into actual sermons given in American churches and Catholic schools. She also said the pope's timing was tricky: The encyclical's release came during intense media coverage of the Charleston church massacre. "What was anticipated for well over a year was completely trumped by a very, very tragic story," she said.

But Tucker also said she wouldn't expect the needle to move on this issue just a month after its release. "This is extremely challenging," she said, referring to the pope's letter. "It says ecology and the economy and equality are all intertwined. And that's a very unusual mix for Americans, who regard these as separate issues."

"These are some things that some people don't want to hear," she added. Republican candidates for the White House were quick to criticize Francis' climate pitch at the time of its release, and anti-climate action groups such as the Heartland Institute began encouraging followers to send letters and emails to the pope and to push climate skepticism within their local congregations.

"Faithful Catholics look to the Holy Father for guidance of the spirit, not instruction on scientific matters," Heartland spokesman Jim Lakely told Mother Jones. "Pope Francis is not an expert on the climate, and the scientists he has relied on for guidance have led him astray. Most Catholics can see that."

"As always, Francis' heart is in the right place," Lakely added. "But his decision to follow the policy advice of the alarmist scientists at the United Nations would only hurt the poor by making vital energy more expensive and less reliable."

Given that level of opposition, Dan Misleh, executive director of the environmental advocacy group Catholic Climate Covenant, is encouraged by the early polling. "Is it where we would like it to be as an organization? Certainly not," he said in an interview after the AP-NORC survey was released. "It's a big population. So not everybody is paying attention."

"Is it where we need it to be to affect policy?" he added. "It's not ideal, but it's way bigger than anything in my recent memory."

Tucker agreed. "There's always going to be pushback," she said. "This is part of the arc of justice. We have to take a historical perspective."

James West is senior producer for the Climate Desk and a contributing producer for Mother Jones. He wrote Beijing Blur (Penguin 2008), and produced award-winning TV in his native Australia. He's been to Kyrgyzstan, and also invited himself to Thanksgiving dinner after wrongly receiving invites for years from the mysterious Tran family.

http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2015/08/pope-francis-climate-american-polls

September 15, 2015
What Pope Francis Should Say In His Upcoming UN Address

Yale Environment 360

Pope Francis will speak to the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 25 about poverty, the environment, and sustainable development. In a Yale Environment 360 forum, seven leading thinkers on the environment and religion describe what they would like to hear the pope say.

In his groundbreaking June encyclical, Pope Francis issued a call for robust individual action and a sweeping transformation of global economic and political systems to deal with the dual threats of climate change and environmental degradation. On Sept. 25, he will bring aspects of that message to the United Nations. Yale Environment 360 asked experts on the environment and religion what they would like the pope to say before the U.N. While many said the pope’s encyclical was a potentially transformative moment for stewardship of the planet, others would like Pope Francis to speak out about issues he overlooked or dismissed, including the role of population growth in environmental problems and the vital part that the private sector must play in combating global warming.

Bill McKibben is a scholar in residence at Middlebury College and a founder of 350.org, a campaign to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide levels to 350 parts per million worldwide.

I think the pope has already done more than anyone could possibly ask: beautifully framed climate change for what it is, which is less an ‘environmental issue’ than an existential problem requiring a new/old way of looking at the planet. In concrete terms, the Roman Catholic Church does have large financial assets, which it uses to underwrite its many missions. It would be sweet if the pope said they were being divested from the fossil fuel industry, but really that work is up to the rest of us — in parishes, at Catholic colleges and universities, and so on. Because he’s given us all that we need to work with: an encyclical that describes our recent past as a civilization in unflinching terms, and lays out a straightforward (if daunting) prescription for transformation.

Katharine Hayhoe is an atmospheric scientist and associate professor of political science at Texas Tech University, where she is director of the Climate Science Center. She has worked at Texas Tech since 2005.

The pope gets what we scientists have known for a long time: Science doesn’t hold all the answers. Not for life, and certainly not for such a difficult and polarized issue as climate change.

There is a lot science can tell us. It can tell us that climate is changing; that — for the first time in the history of this planet — humans are responsible; and that our choices matter. The more carbon we produce today, the greater the risks and even the dangers we will face tomorrow.

But science can’t tell us what to do; that’s where our values come in. And for more than 80
percent of Americans, at least some of their values come from their faith. That’s why it's so important that the pope gets it.

The pope is crystal clear on the connection between Christian values and climate change. He’s laid out in detail the relationship between God, people, and the planet. He’s connected the dots between poverty, vulnerability, and climate impacts. He’s left nothing to the imagination when describing the challenge we face today, and the attitudes we’ll need to conquer this challenge in the future.

There’s just one thing he hasn’t said — yet. He hasn’t called out those who are using God’s name as a cover for greedy, short-term thinking, for actions and attitudes that reflect love of self more than love of others.

Will he do it? I don’t know. But I do know this: He’s the right person to make that call.

Robert N. Stavins is the Albert Pratt Professor of Business and Government at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government and a lead author of reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

There is much in Pope Francis’ climate change encyclical that is commendable, but where it drifts into matters of public policy, it is less helpful. First, the pope neglects the causes of climate change. It is an unintended negative consequence of meritorious economic activity by producers producing the goods and services people want, and consumers using those goods and services. That’s why the problem exists, and hence it’s important to work through the market to solve the problem. Because of its global commons nature, international cooperation is necessary. Without properly recognizing this, it is difficult to identify meaningful solutions.

The pope rejects the use of carbon credits, because they “could give rise to a new form of speculation” and would “support the super-consumption of certain countries and sectors.” This rhetoric is straight from the playbook of the ALBA nations, the small set of socialist Latin American countries that are fearful of free markets and uncooperative in climate negotiations.

If the pope intended to refer only to offset systems and not cap-and-trade, the rhetoric might be less objectionable, but no distinction is made. Such an attack on market-based climate policies is out of step with the thinking of policy analysts around the world, who recognize that we can do more, faster, and better with the use of carbon taxes and/or cap-and-trade systems. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has been outspoken in this regard.

Sadly, parts of the encyclical could ultimately work against effective climate policy at the international, regional, national, and sub-national levels. I hope these mistakes are not repeated in the pope’s U.N. speech.
**Robert Bullard** is Dean of the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University.

Climate change is the number one global environmental justice issue of our time. No nation will be immune to this problem. We need Pope Francis to be the world’s number one climate justice champion, since the people least responsible for this global climate calamity will feel the hurt first, worst and longest — with the most damaging impacts felt by people who are already socially, economically, culturally, politically, and institutionally marginalized.

We urge him to use his bully pulpit to advocate for a just global climate action plan, including rich nations paying climate reparations to poor nations. We need him to use the world stage and his moral authority to insist government plans meet the highest ethical standards — standards best distilled in a quote by Mahatma Gandhi: “A nation’s greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members.” We urge him to speak for the billions of voiceless — even when their leaders are silent or deny the existence of climate change. And finally, we urge him to challenge world leaders to rid their nations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance which drive social inequality, fuel inter-group violence, cross-border conflict, and create millions of forced migrants and climate refugees.

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**Robert Engelman** is a senior fellow at the Worldwatch Institute, where he directs a project assessing research on family planning, population, and environmental sustainability.

Considering humanity’s long future on earth, the most environmentally beneficial statement Francis could make would be to reverse the Catholic Church’s ban on effective modern contraception. That’s unlikely, of course. But the pope could at least acknowledge that his much-noted respect for science failed him when he dismissed reductions in birth rates as helpful to the preservation of climate and “Mother Earth” that his encyclical aims to encourage.

Francis asserted that “extreme and selective consumerism on the part of some” is to blame for climate change, with no contribution from population growth. Yet the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has identified population and economic growth as tandem drivers of rising greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution began. Dozens of peer-reviewed scientific papers published in the past decade affirm that population growth contributes, as well, to other environmental problems that worry the pope, particularly those that most threaten the poor.

At the United Nations, I would like to see Francis recognize not just the importance of population but the right of women to decide for themselves if and when to bear a child. I would like to hear him call for education and empowerment of women. I would like to hear him endorse couples’ use of family planning methods the Church can support. Few words he could say would more effectively point humanity toward a sustainable relationship with the earth and its climate.
Mary Evelyn Tucker, is a senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale University, where she teaches in a joint master’s degree program between the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Divinity School.

The Papal Encyclical and Pope Francis’s upcoming speech at the U.N. provide an opportunity for us to rethink the interconnection of ecology, economics, and equity. Pope Francis proposes an "integral ecology" whereby issues of poverty, social justice, and environmental degradation are seen as one set of challenges.

This is an important moment for the environmental movement, which until recently has kept these issues rather separate. But now, with an invitation to integration, the pope is setting the stage for something fresh and path-breaking.

This is what I would like to see him carry forward at his speech at the U.N. What are the implications of this integrative perspective for how we live on a planet with diminishing resources and growing population? Or another way of saying it is, “What does it mean to envision ourselves as part of a common home?”

These are big picture questions, for the encyclical represents a transformative moment for our planetary awakening. It is a call to consciousness regarding our interdependence and a call to conscience regarding our responsibility for the Earth community.

How, then, can we break through the rhetoric of politics, the models of science, the limits of economics, the prescription of law, and the ambiguity of technology to see ourselves as part of a shared planetary future? While all of these disciplines are necessary to solve our looming environmental/social crisis, they are not sufficient without an even more integral approach.

This will be the challenge for Pope Francis, to deepen the call of St Francis to a shared kinship with all creatures by inviting us into the perspective of a vast unfolding universe out of which all life has emerged. Will this not elicit from many the wonder and awe for sustained transformative action for the flourishing of our common home? Is this not the ultimate source of renewable energy for our times?

Evan Berry is an associate professor of philosophy and religion at American University and Co-Director of the Ethics, Peace, and Global Affairs master's program.

Pope Francis’ encyclical, Laudato Si, offered a lucid, engaging application of Catholic social teaching to questions of global sustainability. The Holy See has done a remarkable job publicizing this document and using it to engage policy makers, civil society groups, and various public constituencies, both inside and outside the Church.

Although many of the encyclical’s critics are broadly dismissive of the threats posed by climate change, others raise more concrete objections. Most notably, there are those who worry that Laudato Si is anti-technological, expressing concern that it does not strike the right balance between solidarity with impoverished communities and the embrace of technological changes.
that will be required to implement a post-carbon economy.

Many experts agree that urbanization and continued innovation in energy production are essential to global efforts to sustain the more than seven billion people who now inhabit the planet. Efforts to combat climate change cannot rely on any large-scale return to subsistence agriculture without a substantial reduction of the human population. I would like to hear Pope Francis speak to this question and to address the under-appreciated tension between technophilic and traditionalist means of implementing sustainable development.

http://e360.yale.edu/feature/what_pope francis should say in his upcoming un address/2910/

September 15, 2015

The Pope: Not just for Catholics anymore

By Jessica Ravitz
CNN

(CNN) - An ordained reverend raised as a conservative Baptist admits to having a "man crush" on the guy. A rabbi long-steeped in the climate crisis credits him for mobilizing Jews to action. An imam from Syria thanks him for protecting his family and people.

Pope Francis may be the head honcho of the world's largest Christian church, but since he stepped into the papacy in March 2013, he's captured hearts across religious -- and even nonreligious -- lines.

From his acts of compassion, such as his embrace of a severely disfigured man, to his strong statements on the environment and his forgiveness of those who've had abortions, this pontiff has sparked a lovefest among non-Catholics. One self-described "staunch atheist" called the Pope a "cool cat" on Twitter. Plenty others also have spread the tweet love.

The much-touted "Francis effect" extends beyond Catholics, that much is clear. But what exactly draws non-Catholics to this pontiff? We reached out to a variety of people across the faith spectrum to find out.

'Falling in love'

Growing up in a conservative fundamentalist Baptist home and community, Benjamin Corey was taught to be skeptical of Catholics. They were different from him. They worshipped idols, celebrated saints and couldn't be trusted.

But as he grew, went to seminary and earned several master's degrees, Corey's perspective changed. He emerged from his schooling more accepting of others and decidedly on the progressive end of Christianity.
An ordained reverend, he's taken on pastoral roles in a few churches, most recently as a co-pastor of the Church of All Nations in his hometown of Auburn, Maine, where he served asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

At 39, the full-time writer, speaker and blogger behind Formerly Fundie more than respects Pope Francis.

"I've definitely got a man crush on him," he says with a laugh.

Corey wrote a blog post entitled, "10 Reasons Why I'm Falling in Love With Pope Francis." In it he gushes about the pontiff's commitment to social justice, his outreach to the marginalized, his condemnation of "unfettered capitalism," his modest dress, his lack of judgment of those in the LGBT community -- and more.

What he sees is "a Pope who looks a heck of a lot more like Jesus than any predecessor in collective memory," Corey wrote. "I never imagined that I would find myself connecting with a Pope, and even cheering him on, but this is where I have found myself."

The Pope has encouraged people of all faiths, and no faith, to find common ground, says Corey. He lives "in an apartment instead of a palace" and has been known to "sneak out for pizza."

And that time when the Pope washed the feet of juveniles in a detention facility? The image will forever be branded in Corey's mind.

"The most powerful Christian figure in the world was washing the feet of those who are often the most despised in our culture," he says. "I just love how he's just a real person."

A form of pranam

That moment of washing prisoners' feet also moved Padma Kuppa, an Indian-born Hindu American living in Troy, Michigan.

In Hinduism, she explains, foot touching is a form of pranam, a respectful greeting reserved for elders and others worthy of deep admiration such as priests, gurus or deities.

"You're saying, 'I'm humble before you,'" she says of the gesture. And the Pope's actions suggested to her that he believes "no individual is less than him."

Kuppa, a 50-year-old IT project manager, writer and mother of two, is a community and peace activist who celebrates pluralism, focuses on interfaith outreach and serves on the board of the Hindu American Foundation.

In a blog post she wrote for the national advocacy group, she praised the Pope's inclusion of "don't proselytize; respect other's beliefs" in his secrets for happiness. She likened his stance to that of Mahatma Gandhi, who called proselytizing "the cause of much avoidable conflict between classes and unnecessary heart-burning."
Kuppa speaks of the fourfold pursuits of life in Hinduism. They include *artha* (prosperity), *kama* (pleasure) and *moksha* (liberation). But first and foremost, and most important to her, is *dharma*.

"It has multiple meanings, but for me it means justice," she says. She's drawn to the Pope because of his "*dharmic* sensibilities" and believes he "embodies that pursuit of *dharma*."

She says "equality and *dharma* go hand-in-hand," and Pope Francis "lifts up those who don't have fairness."

**A kindred spirit**

For five years, Maggie Leonard, a Presbyterian pastor, has served the underserved. She's an associate pastor at [Mercy Community Church](#) in Atlanta, a nondenominational church with a mostly homeless congregation.

No plates are passed on Sundays for offerings where she is. Since she draws a paltry salary, she babysits on the side to help pay bills.

Leonard, 32, sees in Pope Francis a kindred spirit.

Beyond the simplicity with which he lives and in how he dresses, she points to his pastoral care and his commitment to giving people dignity.

She rattles off developments around Vatican City under this pontiff that make him worthy of extra praise: The newly installed showers, so the homeless who flock to the area have a place to wash. The volunteer barbers who show up each Monday to give free haircuts. The Vatican-issued sleeping bags given out to the homeless who increasingly camp out near St. Peter's Square. The enlistment of the homeless to help pass out prayer books when the Pope gives his weekly address.

At her church, most of the volunteers live on the streets. Members are offered meals, prayer and classes -- including art, yoga and writing. The congregation rents space from another church and isn't able to build showers -- but it welcomes people to take birdbaths in its sinks. Volunteers from other local churches pick up and do laundry for the homeless, allowing the church to fill its clothing closet with clean options so no one need leave feeling ashamed.

Like others, Leonard points to the time in 2013 when Pope Francis washed the feet of juveniles in a detention facility. It was Holy Thursday, a day when she says popes traditionally wash the feet of bishops and priests.

A girl asked Francis why he was doing this, Leonard says, and he answered, "Things from the heart don't have an explanation."

"He doesn't have to rationalize it," she says, "because he knows where he's being led."
Bridges of understanding

From the get-go, the Pope's name choice carried special meaning for Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat.

The pontiff's namesake crossed enemy lines to meet with the sultan of Egypt during the Crusades in the 13th century. While St. Francis of Assisi's intention may have been to convert the sultan, he instead walked away calling for peace between Muslims and Christians.

"He was impressed by the level of spirituality within the Muslim community and saw something he'd never seen before," says Arafat, the president of the Baltimore-based Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation, which works to bring people together in peace. "It was a transformative experience, and he came back completely against the Crusades."

This respect for others is manifested in Pope Francis, Arafat says, and for that this imam could not be more grateful.

Arafat came to the United States from Syria 26 years ago but has family still in Damascus. So even as he serves as the president of Maryland's Islamic Affairs Council, lectures at universities, leads programs through the U.S. State Department and with U.S. embassies, his mind and heart often turn to his concerns for those struggling abroad.

Pope Francis, early on in his papacy, spoke out against military strikes in Syria -- emerging as a pro-peace voice at a time when Arafat felt it was needed most.

As a guest of the U.S Embassy to the Holy See in October 2013, the imam was able to visit the Vatican, address various groups in Rome and share his appreciation -- not just for Pope Francis' opposition to military strikes in Syria but also for visiting the Italian island of Lampedusa. There the Pope prayed for migrants who'd been lost at sea. Among the dead are thousands who've fled violence and despair in Syria. Earlier this month, the Pope called on Europe's Catholic parishes to take in refugee families.

The Pope has stood for those who are hopeless. He's built bridges of understanding. And he's a model of what is needed, Arafat says. Theological differences should be set aside in the pursuit of a better world for all.

"I see him trying to emulate St. Francis in outreach," the imam says. "It is our responsibility as a Muslim community to raise our voices and say thank you."

Space for others

The pope's first full day in the United States will be spent in Washington meeting with President Barack Obama, praying with U.S. bishops and canonizing a Spanish-born Franciscan friar.

Meantime, at the Lincoln Memorial, Rabbi Arthur Waskow will help lead a special Yom Kippur service open to all faiths on the Jewish Day of Atonement.
Collectively, Waskow says, the group will atone for the "misdeeds of all cultures in dealing with the world" and, using a play on words, "reaffirm at-one-ment with the Earth and with God."

After this service, Waskow and others plan to attend a Franciscan led multireligious celebration in honor of the Pope.

What drives this 81-year-old rabbi, a longtime political activist and founder of Philadelphia's Shalom Center, is his concern about the climate. It's been the focal point of his work for a decade and has spawned events like a pre-Passover service to challenge the "Carbon Pharaohs" and the Koch brothers.

Inroads have been made in stirring up interest in the Jewish community, he says, but advance word that the Pope was drafting an encyclical on the environment galvanized efforts.

"We knew the Pope was going to mobilize the kind of energy that very few religious leaders can do in the world," Waskow says. "There had to be a Jewish statement. ... We felt a coming together in all of this, a response to the crisis and a response to the presence of God in the world."

Thus was born "A Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis," originally drafted by Waskow and honed through a collaboration with others. It has been signed by more than 400 rabbis from across various Jewish denominations. It references Torah text, extends respect to scientists and outlines concerns and suggestions for action. It is a "call for a new sense of eco-social justice -- a tikkun olam [healing of the world] that includes tikkun tevel, the healing of our planet."

Already it has paid dividends, prompting at least one citywide Jewish action conference planned for later this year in Philadelphia. A smaller conference in northwest Philly, which will include synagogues and churches, will be held on October 4. That day is significant in that it falls on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the Pope's namesake, and during Sukkot, a Jewish harvest festival that also marks the 40 years that Israelites wandered in the desert.

The last time Waskow remembers being this excited about a pontiff was more than half a century ago. That was when Pope John XXIII, whom Pope Francis canonized, intervened during the Cuban Missile Crisis, releasing a papal statement calling on world leaders to avoid disaster and issuing a 1963 encyclical on peace and nuclear disarmament.

Just as that encyclical inspired Waskow's earlier focus on combatting the nuclear arms race from a Jewish perspective, so too has Pope Francis' encyclical bolstered The Shalom Center's top cause today.

"The fact that he was moving on this," the rabbi said, "opened up a lot of space for others."

Standing firm

While many non-Catholic fans are drawn to the Pope because of his progressive ideals and openness to others, that's not true for everyone.
The Rev. Bill Owens Sr. is president and founder of the Coalition of African American Pastors, which works to promote traditional family values.

"When it comes to homosexuals, we don't condemn them. We don't put them out. We should be open to fellowship. But when it comes down to marriage, that's where I draw the line," says Owens, who splits his time between Memphis, Tennessee, and Henderson, Nevada.

Owens, who's had ties to the National Organization for Marriage and was a featured speaker at this year's March for Marriage, has been outspoken in his criticism of President Obama for endorsing same-sex marriage. In an address to the National Press Club in 2012, Owens compared the president to Judas for betraying black voters, saying he's "a disgrace and we are ashamed."

"The President is in the White House because of the civil rights movement, and I was a leader in that movement," Owens said. "I didn't march one inch, one foot, one yard for a man to marry a man and a woman to marry a woman."

Owens, 76, sees in the pontiff an ally he doesn't have in Obama. He applauds Pope Francis because he has "stood firm on the fact that marriage is between a man and a woman" -- even though the pontiff has famously said of gays, "Who am I to judge?"

"We may not agree with all of [the Pope's] decisions," says Owens. "But I wish more of our leaders would follow his lead in being vocal despite all the criticisms they may get."

A friend and fellow lobbyist

Anthony Manousos of Pasadena, California, calls himself a "convinced Quaker." Now 66, he became convinced in his 30s.

What faith was he before?

"The better question is: Was there a faith I wasn't part of?" he says with a laugh, before rattling off his spiritual road map. Among the stops he made along the way: He was baptized Greek Orthodox, raised Episcopalian and became agnostic as a teen. He followed Timothy Leary and found Christ after college before becoming a Quaker. Since then, he's spent months in a Zen Buddhist center, enjoyed a 20-year-marriage to a Methodist pastor until she passed away, and is now married to an Evangelical Christian. Ever since 9/11, he's fasted during Ramadan and has also fasted on Yom Kippur.

"Though I'm a Christian Quaker," he says, "I see the light in every religion."

He's never been a Catholic, but the former college English professor and Quaker magazine editor has watched the pontiffs and has opinions.

"I think [Pope Benedict] meant well, but he seemed to be more interested in shoring up the church than in issues of social justice," says Manousos. "This Pope seems to be putting the concerns of the poor, social justice and the environment ahead of everything else."
He points to the Pope's encyclical and calls it a "game changer." Yes, it is a strong statement on the global climate crisis, but it also includes talk about "toxicity of war." And that is significant to Quakers, who see the world through an anti-war lens.

"Pope Francis calls on all people to care for God's creation and recognizes that one of the greatest threats to the environment, and to human betterment, is war," Manousos wrote in a blog post.

"The Pope is clearly aware that conflicts over resources, caused by climate change and political systems dependent on war, will escalate unless steps are taken to live sustainably," he wrote. "I would argue that we cannot solve our ecological crisis if we don't dismantle the war system that pollutes and dominates the world."

The fact that the Pope chose his name from a saint who shunned the Crusades only adds to his appeal. In Francis, this Quaker sees "a lobbyist par excellence" and a friend.

**Watching with fascination**

Around the same time Sherilyn Connelly came out as an atheist, she also came out as transgender.

This double whammy in her 20s is what inspired her contribution, "The Permanent Prodigal Daughter," to a book entitled "Atheists in America."

Connelly, 42, a writer, film critic and librarian based in San Francisco, refers to herself as a "lapsed Catholic." And it's from this position, as an outsider looking in, that she follows Pope Francis with deep curiosity.

"I really appreciate and find it fun to watch how he's completely rattling the mainstream Christian firmament," she says. "Just look at the s**tstorm that erupted when he washed the feet of the Muslim prisoners. ... It's fascinating."

Growing up, Connelly says, Catholicism felt like an intrusion in her life. She hated being dragged out of bed on Sunday mornings and forced into nice clothes -- and not just because they were boys' clothes. She doesn't disparage the actual church and has fond memories of plenty of the people she knew then, "but the whole God thing never made any sense to me at all."

At a certain point it dawned on her that it was just by chance that she was born into a Catholic family. Had she been born in India, she suspects she would have been Hindu or Muslim. And that realization "blew the logic of the whole thing," she says, leading her to realize no one belief system could claim to be the right one.

That said, she sees in the current pontiff a refreshing commitment to being nice and merciful to others. But like the 89% of ex-Catholics who, even with their appreciation for the Pope, told a Pew survey they can't imagine returning to the Catholic fold, neither can she. Not least of all
because she still doesn't believe in God. Pope Francis, though, has given her "a degree of faith ... that compassion is returning to religious thought."

And for that, Connelly says amen.


September 17, 2015

Where is Pope Francis? A schedule of his U.S. visit

By Christine Rushton
USA Today

Where in the states is Pontifce Francisco?

Pope Francis starts his visit to the USA on Sept. 22 and plans to stop in Washington, D.C., New York City and Philadelphia. Whether you want to catch a glimpse of the Roman Catholic Church's leader or avoid the traffic, follow his six-day schedule below.

See the full schedule at


September 2015

Official Schedule For Pope Francis’ Visit to U.S.

Pope Francis Visit 2015

Pope Francis Visits Washington D.C.

- **Tuesday, September 22, 2015**
  - **4pm:** Pope Francis arrives in D.C. at Joint Base Andrews at 4 p.m.

- **Wednesday, September 23, 2015**
  - **9:15 a.m:** White House Welcoming Ceremony and personal meeting with President Barack Obama
  - **11:00 a.m.** Papal Parade along the Ellipse and the National Mall
  - **11:30 a.m:** Midday Prayer with U.S. bishops at Saint Matthew’s Cathedral in D.C.
4:15 p.m: Junipero Serra Canonization Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception

Thursday, September 24, 2015
- 9:20 a.m: Arrival at Capitol
- 10 a.m. Speech to the Senate and House of Representatives (Joint Session of Congress)
- 11 a.m. Brief appearance on West Front of Capitol
- 11:15 a.m: Visit to St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in D.C. and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington
- 4 p.m: Departure for New York from Joint Base Andrews (D.C.)
- 5 p.m. Arrival at John F. Kennedy International Airport (New York)
- 6:45 p.m. Evening prayer at St. Patrick’s Cathedral (New York)

Pope Francis Visits New York

Friday, September 25, 2015
- 8:30 a.m United Nations General Assembly
- 11:30 a.m Multi-religious service at 9/11 Memorial and Museum, World Trade Center
- 4 p.m. Visit to Our Lady Queen of Angels School in East Harlem
- 5 p.m. Papal motorcade through Central Park
- 6 p.m. Madison Square Garden Mass

Pope Francis Visits Philadelphia

Saturday, September 26, 2015
- 8:40 a.m Departure for Philadelphia from John F. Kennedy International Airport
- 9:30 a.m Arrival in Atlantic Aviation hangar at Philadelphia International Airport Pennsylvania
- 10:30 a.m Mass at Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul
- 4:45 p.m Visit to Independence Mall
- 7:30 p.m Visit to Festival of Families at Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Prayer Vigil with World Meeting of Families

Sunday, September 27, 2015
- 9:15 a.m Papal meeting with Bishops at St. Martin’s Chapel, St. Charles Borromeo Seminary
- 11 a.m Visit to Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility
- 4 p.m Papal Mass for World Meeting of Families
- 7 p.m. Visit with organizers, volunteers and benefactors of the World Meeting of Families at Atlantic Aviation
- 8 p.m Departure for return to Rome

* This is the official schedule for the Pope Francis’ visit to the U.S. The site will be updated as needed to reflect any changes.
September 17, 2015

Pope Francis’ Visit to the United States

Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

Dear Forum colleagues,

This coming week, Pope Francis will visit the United States. During this momentous visit, he will address a joint session of Congress on September 24 at 10am, as well as the United Nations General Assembly on September 25 at 8:30am. In addition to visiting Washington D.C. and New York City, he will also visit Philadelphia.

The Pope’s visit is a very important event in support of the encyclical on the environment, “Praised Be: On the Care of Our Common Home” (Laudato Si’), in which Pope Francis highlights issues of “integral ecology,” namely concerns for people and the planet. There are a number of resources on the Forum site (fore.yale.edu) to provide you more information on the encyclical.

For the Pope’s schedule, visit:


Many events are being organized throughout the United States in light of the Pope’s visit. For details, please see below.

We encourage you to download a free Pope Francis’ Encyclical Climate Action Kit that Interfaith Power & Light has put together in conjunction with the Catholic Climate Covenant. You can download it here:


Warmly,
Week of Moral Action for Climate Justice

September 21-25, 2015
Washington, DC

https://actionnetwork.org/event_campaigns/week-of-moral-action-for-climate-justice

Wednesday, September 23
All-night, multi-faith vigil
Lincoln Memorial
Hosted by the Franciscan Action Network

Thursday morning, September 24, the Pope will address a joint session of Congress. There’ll be Jumbotrons set up at the Capitol and on the Mall for viewing. After the address, join us for a rally on the National Mall between 4th Street NW and 7th Street SW.

Friday, September 25, we’ll lobby Congress to demonstrate real leadership on this defining moral issue of our time.

Rally for Moral Action on Climate Justice

A gathering of top musicians, faith leaders and climate activists

September 24, 2015 at 7am – 12:30pm

National Mall between 3rd and 7th Streets
Washington, DC


Light the Way - Multi-faith Prayers for Action Supporting Pope Francis’ Call for Climate
**Action**

September 24, 2015 at 4:30-5:30pm

Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza (47th St. & 1st Ave)
New York, NY, USA

[http://ourvoices.net/newyork-lightstheway](http://ourvoices.net/newyork-lightstheway)

The festival will be followed by a vigil in Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. This vigil is one of many taking place around that world. For more, visit: [http://ourvoices.net/lighttheway](http://ourvoices.net/lighttheway)

Multi-faith Vigil through the Night
September 24, 2015
Begins at 8:00 pm
Church of Our Saviour
59 Park Avenue (38th street)

**Coming Together in Faith on Climate**

An evening of celebration at Washington National Cathedral supporting Pope Francis's call for action on climate change.

September 24, 2015 at 7:30 - 9:00pm ET

Washington National Cathedral
3101 Wisconsin Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20016

Event Organizers: Washington National Cathedral, Blessed Tomorrow, Convergence, Faith in Public Life, and Auburn Seminary

This is a free, but limited, event which will be live-streamed and echoed at congregations nationally.


**Coming Together Faith Leader Meeting--Building Support for Climate Solutions**

Washington National Cathedral
Washington, D.C.

September 25, 2015 at 7:30-11:30am

Hosted by Blessed Tomorrow, Faith in Public Life, Convergence, Washington National Cathedral, and Auburn Seminary

http://www.eventbrite.com/e/coming-together-faith-leader-meeting-building-support-for-climate-solutions-tickets-18035877796?aff=utm_source%3DDeb_email%26utm_medium%3Demail%26utm_campaign%3Dnew_event_email?utm_term=eventname_text

Climate Vigils and Events around Pope’s Visit

Many of the state affiliates of Interfaith Power & Light have planned vigils and other climate action events in support of the upcoming visit by Pope Francis to Congress. Check below to find out how you can participate. Check for updates to this list at http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/2015/09/climate-vigils-and-events-around-popes-visit/

Arizona
Phoenix – 09/23, 6:30pm; Prayer Vigil; Sen. John McCain’s Office, 2201 E. Camelback Rd., Suite 115, Contact: Rev. Doug Bland, doug.bland@tempeccc.com

Arkansas
Little Rock – 09/23, 7:00pm; Interfaith Sunset Prayer; Arkansas House of Prayer at St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church, Contact: Scharmel Roussel, scharmel2008@gmail.com

California
Los Angeles — 09/25, 9:00-10:30am; Press Conference and Rally; University of Southern California Caruso Catholic Center, 34th and Hoover, http://www.pandopopulus.com/pandomonium/
Oakland – 09/23, 6:30am and 6:30pm; Interfaith Vigil; Skyline United Church of Christ, Contact: Rev. Laurie Manning, revlauriemanning@gmail.com

Colorado
Denver – 09/24 5:30pm; Climate Prayer Vigil; 1st Baptist Church, Contact: Rev. Jessica Abell, revjessicaabell@gmail.com

Delaware
Wilmington – 09/23, 4:00-4:45pm, or 5:30-6:15pm; Vigil; First & Central Presbyterian Church, Contact: Lisa Locke, lisa.locke@deipl.org

Iowa
Des Moines – 09/23, 6:30pm; Prayer Vigil; Holy Trinity Church  
09/24, 8:00am; Live Watch Party; Immanuel United Methodist Church  
09/24, 6:30pm; Rebroadcast Party; St. Pius X Catholic Church  
Contact: Susan Guy, director@iowaipl.org

Massachusetts  
Chestnut Hill – 09/23, 6:30-7:00pm, Candle Light Prayer Vigil; St. Ignatius RC Church  
Contact: Vincent Maraventano, vincemara3@gmail.com

Minnesota  
Minneapolis – 09/23, 6:00-8:00pm; Pope Francis Welcome Party; St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Church,  
http://mnipl.org/calendar-new/welcome-pope-francis-party.html  
Contact: Julia Nerbonne, julia@mnipl.org

Missouri  
St. Louis – 09/20, 1:00pm; March  
Contact: Tracy Howe-Koch, thowekoch@gmail.com

Nebraska  
Omaha – 09/24, 7:00-9:00pm; Group viewing of Pope Francis’ address to Congress, and discussion; Aksarben Cinema,  
Contact: Rev. Kim Morrow, kim@nebraskaipl.org

New Mexico  
Albuquerque – 09/23, 6:30-7:30pm; Interfaith Candlelight Vigil; Old Town Plaza  
Carlsbad – 09/23, 6:30-7:30pm; Interfaith Candlelight Vigil  
Gallup – 09/23, 6:30-7:30pm; Interfaith Candlelight Vigil; Courthouse Plaza  
Silver City – 09/23, 7:30pm; Interfaith Candlelight Vigil; Gough Park  
Contact: Sister Joan Brown, joankansas@swcp.com

New York  
Buffalo – 09/24, 4:00 (pre-rally) and 5:00pm; Interfaith Rally; Niagara Square  
New York City – 09/24, 4:30-5:30pm; Multi-Faith Prayers for Action; Dag Hammarskjold Plaza,  
http://www.ourvoices.net/newyork-lightthesteway  
Rochester – 09/23, 4:00pm; Prayer Vigil; St. Marianne Cope Parish at Good Shepherd Chapel  
Contact: Janna Stieg Watkins, jswatkins@nyipl.org

North Carolina  
Asheville – 09/24, 6:00-8:00pm; Viewing of Pope Francis’ address to Congress followed by discussion; St. Eugene’s Catholic Church,  
http://www.ncipl.org/event/9-23-st-eugene/  
Durham – 09/24, 7:00-8:30pm; Interfaith Prayer Vigil; Immaculate Conception Catholic Church,  
http://www.ncipl.org/event/immaculate-conception-vigil/  
Greensboro – 09/23, 7:00-8:00pm; Ecumenical Prayer Service; St. Mary’s Catholic Church,  
http://www.ncipl.org/event/esg-vigil/  
09/24, 9:20am; Viewing of Pope Francis’ address to Congress; St. Paul the Apostle Catholic
Oregon
Portland – 09/23, 6:00pm, 7:45-8:30pm; Screening of “Merchants of Doubt,” followed by Interfaith Prayer Vigil; St. Francis Catholic Church
Contact: Jenny Holmes, jholmes@emoregon.org

Pennsylvania
Philadelphia – 09/16, 5:30-8:00pm; Forum and Vigil; Friends’ Center,
Contact: Cricket Eccleston Hunter, chunter@paipl.org

Rhode Island
Providence – 09/23, 5:00pm; Prayer Vigil; State House lawn
Contact: Kathy Black, kathy@ri-ipl.org

South Carolina
Spartanburg — 09/24, 1:00-2:20pm; Seminar, “Understanding Laudato Si”; Wofford College
Contact: Ron Robinson 864-597-4051

Texas
Fort Worth – 09/24, 6:00pm; Pope and Potluck; University Christian Church of Fort Worth, room 207, http://txipl.org/content/youre-invited-fort-worth-ipls-pope-and-potluck
Contact: Yaira A. Robinson, yaira@texasinterfaith.org

Vermont
Burlington — 09/24, 10:00am and 7:00pm; Live and rebroadcast showing of the Pope’s address to Congress; First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington
Middlebury — 09/24; Live showing
Montpelier — 09/24, 7:00pm; Rebroadcast showing of the Pope’s address to Congress; St. Augustine Catholic Church
Contact: Betsy Hardy, info@vtipl.org

Washington
Seattle — 09/24, 7:00pm; Evening of interfaith ritual, word, and song; Chapel of St. Ignatius at Seattle University, http://earthministry.org/event/committing-to-our-common-home-an-interfaith-response-to-pope-francis-encyclical-on-the-environment/
Contact: Jessica, jessica@earthministry.org

Washington DC Area
Washington DC – 09/23-24, 7:00pm-7:00am; Prayer Vigil; National Mall between 4th Street NW and 7th Street SW, http://www.moralactiononclimate.org/
Contact: Janine Walsh, walsh@franciscanaction.org

Wisconsin
Madison – 09/24, 6:00-7:30pm; Music, prayer, and candlelight procession; James Madison Park
09/25, 6:30am; Gathering for quiet contemplation at sunrise; Monona Terrace, Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. entrance
09/25, 8:00am; Video shorts on climate justice, followed by Live-stream viewing of Pope Francis’ address to the UN; First United Methodist Church, https://www.facebook.com/events/149401165402190/
Contact: Huda Alkaff, interfaith.earth@yahoo.com

http://fore.yale.edu/calendar/item/pope-francis-visit-to-the-united-states/

September 18, 2015

Amid pope’s visit, Jews are incorporating his teachings into Yom Kippur traditions

By Perry Stein
Washington Post

Rabbi Mordechai Liebling is traveling from Philadelphia to Washington next week to help organize a Yom Kippur service against the backdrop of Pope Francis’s visit, a seemingly discordant trip that he says makes perfect sense if you understand this pope’s teachings.

In his sweeping environmental encyclical, for example, the pope called on global residents to recognize man-made damage to the environment and reduce consumption. More broadly, Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish year, asks Jews to recognize their wrongdoings and atone for them.

Connecting these themes, Liebling’s sermon will focus on Pope Francis’s encyclical and the responsibility humankind must take to repent for harm inflicted upon the Earth.

“The pope is actually calling on the whole world to engage in atonement, and Yom Kippur is calling on the Jewish people to atone,” said Liebling, the director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. On Thursday, Liebling and other organizers will participate in a climate change rally on the Mall timed to the pope’s speech to Congress.

The pope’s visit to Washington squarely coincides with Yom Kippur, which starts at sunset Tuesday and ends at sunset the following day. For the Washington-area’s Jews, that means ditching pope-related activities altogether or, like Liebling, incorporating the pope’s teachings into Yom Kippur traditions.
And whether or not they want to acknowledge the pope’s arrival, many Jews will have to contend with the traffic the pope will bring as they make their way to synagogue.

One Washington prayer group — which calls itself Fabrangen, a Yiddish word meaning “bringing together” — that has met at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church on Yom Kippur for 29 years is expecting significant congestion. The downtown location is just outside the security perimeter for Wednesday’s parade, making it difficult for 400 or so worshipers, most of whom are commuting from Maryland and Virginia, to drive to services.

Clare Feinson, Fabrangen’s coordinator, said she’s advising congregants to take the Metro. If they can’t walk to services from the Metro station, a driver will shuttle them.

“We can hardly ignore it; we’re right there,” Feinson said. “We were sort of faced with a bad choice: We lose people if we stay in the church this year, and we lose people if we move, but I think we’ll lose less if we stay.”

Logistical hurdles aside, Feinson has a sense of humor about the situation and created stickers for worshipers that read “Good Yontif Pontiff.” (“Yontif” is Yiddish for holiday and “pontiff” is Latin for pope.)

Other temples, such as Adas Israel, a large conservative synagogue in Cleveland Park, and Washington Hebrew Congregation, a reform synagogue near where the pope will stay at the Vatican’s embassy, expect more limited disruptions, communicating with congregants on how to avoid nearby road closures.

The White House, which is organizing an arrival ceremony for the pope with 15,000 guests, acknowledged that the timing isn’t ideal but noted that the pope’s visit is planned around the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. Religious leaders from various faiths will be in attendance at the White House event, although there probably won’t be rabbis present.

“There are also going to be opportunities for people of different faiths to participate in events in the New York and Philadelphia legs of the pope’s visit,” said Melissa Rogers, the executive director of the White House’s Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. “The Holy Father has a very complicated schedule for this trip, so we worked with that schedule as best we could.”

Jack Moline, a rabbi and executive director of the Interfaith Alliance, said conflicts with Yom Kippur aren’t unusual, and he hasn’t heard many complaints from Jews about this one.

Just last year, a Washington Nationals playoff game fell on the night of Yom Kippur. Moline, a Nationals season-ticket holder himself, said that conflict elicited more complaints than the pope.

“He is a great man and a holy man, but every human being makes a decision as to what his or her values are, and if they are going to be true to those values, they have to make sacrifices sometimes,” Moline said. “This is one of those times when immersing oneself in Jewish life is more important than for what, for a Jew, is just a celebrity sighting.”
But, Moline said, the purpose of rabbis’ sermons is to connect ancient texts with contemporary sensibilities, so referencing Pope Francis on Yom Kippur is in keeping with Jewish traditions.

Rabbi Rachel Gartner, the director of Jewish Life at Georgetown University, said the excitement around the pope’s visit on the Catholic and Jesuit university’s campus is contagious.

Instead of seeing the pope, though, Gartner will be leading a Yom Kippur service on campus, where she’ll discuss the pope and his principles. Specifically, Gartner’s sermon will touch on the encyclical and the pope’s declaration that 2015 is the year of mercy.

“There is an incredible synergy between a lot of what the pope seems to stand for and the High Holy Days,” she said. “When the pope comes into the halls of power and says all people have God-given human dignity and inalienable human rights, it is very much in line with what we are trying to remind ourselves in the High Holidays.”


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September 21, 2015

Yom Kippur at the Lincoln Memorial

Washington Peace Center

City: Washington
State/Region: DC
Date: Tuesday, September 22, 2015 - 6:30pm to Wednesday, September 23, 2015 - 7:30pm

A bold, public Yom Kippur prayer service will take place next week at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, inspired by the Pope's encyclical on the climate crisis.

Spearheaded by Rabbi Arthur Waskow and Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, progressive spiritual leaders from Philadelphia, YOM KIPPUR AT THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL is scheduled for sundown to sundown from September 22 to 23.

“Yom Kippur is the day of both Atonement and At-One-ment. At this moment in history we humans are in need of atonement for the ways in which we have desecrated the Earth. This desecration is the result of our lack of At-One-ment -- our separation from all life -- our separation of ourselves from the Earth of which we are in truth an interwoven thread,” Rabbis Waskow and Liebling said, in a joint statement.
As Yom Kippur occurs immediately before Pope Francis’s unprecedented address to a joint session of Congress, this year, Rabbis Waskow and Liebling seized the opportunity to act. While drawing upon the structure of the traditional Yom Kippur liturgy, the rabbis will also invite other faith traditions to participate during the day, asking them to bring their prayers of atonement.

The schedule for Yom Kippur at the Lincoln Memorial is as follows:

9/22 Kol Nidre -- 6:30 to 8:30 pm at the Lincoln Memorial

9/23 Morning Services -- 10 am to 1:30 pm, Sept 23 at the Lincoln Memorial

9/23 Ne’ilah and Interfaith Vigil -- 5:00 to 7:40 pm at John Marshall Place Park, 4th and C Streets, NW

The event is being presented and co-sponsored by The Shalom Center, Interfaith Action on Climate Change, and Moral Action on Climate.

“We offer this Yom Kippur service at the Lincoln Memorial as an invitation for our Jewish community, along with people of all faiths, to come together, acknowledging our shared need for atonement. And we will gather as one of a number of faith-based events planned for that week in support of Pope Francis’ response -- the encyclical Laudato Si -- to the climate crisis and its roots in world-wide social crisis,” added Rabbi Waskow and Rabbi Liebling.

For further information, visit the website.

http://washingtonpeacecenter.org/node/15813

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September 22, 2015

Earth Charter International joins University of Wisconsin Oshkosh’s Earth Charter Week on October 8th

Earth Charter International

Earth Charter International and the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh are joining forces to co-organize a hybrid live/virtual event during UW Oshkosh’s annual Earth Charter Week to celebrate Earth Charter +15.

Every year, UWO holds the Earth Charter week, a week of events in the name of the Earth Charter to highlight sustainability issues. This year, UW Oshkosh and Earth Charter International, based in Costa Rica, are co-organizing a hybrid live/virtual event to bring three speakers together to discuss relevant topics. The topics will include sustainability ethics, the Earth Charter and its role in international law, the Wisconsin legacy and contribution to sustainability ethics of Aldo Leopold, and reflections on the state of sustainability in Wisconsin
and the world. Some speakers will be physically present with a live audience in Oshkosh, and, at the same time, other speakers and participants will join virtually via Earth Charter International’s online platform.

The format of the event will be a one and a half hour lecture with both live and virtual facilitators, three speakers, and a question and answer and group discussion among the speakers.

Join us on October 8th at 20:00 UTC, 4PM New York Time. Click this link to enter: http://www.wiziq.com/online-class/3134517-sustainability-ethics-the-earth-charter-and-aldo-leopold

The event welcomes three esteemed speakers.

Jim Feldman is an Associate Professor of Environmental Studies and History at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. He is the author of A Storied Wilderness: Rewilding the Apostle Islands. His current research and teaching interests include the history and sustainability of radioactive waste management and the campus sustainability movement.

Clare Palmer has written three single-authored books, including Animal Ethics in Context and has just completed Companion Animal Ethics. She has edited or co-edited a number of collections including Linking Ecology and Ethics for a Changing World, and Killing Animals. She was the founding editor of the journal Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion, and held the position of President of the International Society for Environmental Ethics from 2007-2010. She also serves on the editorial board of a number of journals, including Environmental Values, Agricultural and Environmental Ethics, and the new journal Environmental Humanities.

Curt Meine, PhD, is a conservation biologist, historian, and writer who serves as senior fellow with the Aldo Leopold Foundation and with the Center for Humans and Nature, and as associate adjunct professor at the UW–Madison. In addition to coordinating the Wisconsin Academy’s original Waters of Wisconsin project, Meine has written several books, including Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work and Correction Lines: Essays on Land, Leopold, and Conservation, and is the on-screen guide in the documentary film Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time.

September 22, 2015

Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource is here!

By Terri MacKenzie, SHCJ
Ecospirituality Resources

I am very happy to announce the availability of my 5-session resource: Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource: On Care for Our Common Home. Many people contributed to its completion, and I am grateful to each and all!
Goals of Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource

Pope Francis writes: *I would like to enter into dialog with all people about our common home.* (par. 3) That dialog is one goal of *Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource.* Others include gathering for prayerful reflection on this document, and deepening our appreciation of integral ecology and our call to care for our common home.

Advantages of Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource

- Reading, praying, and discussing quotes from the Encyclical together provide a powerful experience and motivate further study;
- Devoting the first of five sessions to the encyclical’s Introduction establishes a solid foundation for accepting the full document;
- Scripture excerpts are useful now or any time, including Lent;
- Pertinent videos and hymns enrich the sessions;
- Practical weekly action suggestions lead to lasting commitments;
- Material is free and 5-sessions are manageable.

Reactions to Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource

The enthusiasm of pilot participants convinced me to change this resource from being a Lent resource to one of use now or any time (though it can be useful for Lent).

Here is an unsolicited response to this resource from Loreta N. Castro, Executive Director of the Center for Peace Education and a Professor at Miriam College, Quezon City, Philippines:

*I love both the content and process! I think it gives a great balance between knowing about Laudato Si and its core messages and feeling the love, empathy and connectedness with Mother Earth. I also appreciated the last section on “Suggested Actions...”*

Continuity of Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource

For over ten years I have provided resources that integrate Scripture, Christian faith, and care of Earth in the setting of the Universe Story, our resulting interconnectedness, and their connections to poverty, peace and justice in our world imbued with divinity. Past programs have focused on Air, Water, Soil, Energy/Light, Peace, Species/Habitats, and Ecospirituality. *Laudato Si’ Reflection* was originally intended for Lent (and its Scripture excerpts are from Lent’s readings, so it will be useful then), but pilot groups proved that it is effective now.
Availability of Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource

*Laudato Si’ Reflection Resource: On Care for Our Common Home* is now available at: [LaudatoSi’.ReflectionResource.OnCare.2](http://ecospiritualityresources.com/2015/09/22/)

Gather a group — family, friends, students, parishioners, neighbors, whomever — and experience the inspiration and transformation that Pope Francis’ words can bring.

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**September 22, 2015**

Rabbis Honor Pope's Climate Message With Yom Kippur Service In DC

Their "temple" for the day is the famous Lincoln Memorial.

By Antonia Blumberg
Huffington Post

With Pope Francis's arrival in Washington, DC on Sept. 22, a group of rabbis gathered in the capital on Tuesday afternoon to begin a Yom Kippur service unlike any other.

The venue for the service, which begins Tuesday evening and runs into Wednesday, is none other than the Lincoln Memorial, a "pre-eminent American symbol of our collective responsibility to work for freedom and democracy for all people with 'malice toward none, and charity for all,'" writes The Shalom Center on the event's website.

Yom Kippur is known as the day of atonement, when Jews ask for forgiveness for the wrongs they have committed. The DC service will focus specifically on climate change, according to Rabbi Arthur Waskow, who founded The Shalom Center and organized the event with Rabbi Mordechai Liebling, director of the Social Justice Organizing Program at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

"We'll be atoning for the way in which the human race has treated the Earth, especially in the last hundred years or so," Waskow told The Huffington Post.

While the service is happening, Pope Francis will be making appearances around the city and gearing up for his address to Congress on Thursday, Sept. 24. The Catholic leader's visit comes at an important time for faith communities working on climate justice, Waskow said.

"The fact that the pope has spoken out so powerfully and so clearly [on climate change], and the fact that he is going to be speaking at the UN and Congress and meeting with the president, means that the work many of us have been doing for years is on the front page," Waskow told HuffPost.
Climate change is an issue close to Waskow's heart. The rabbi was one of seven Jewish leaders across denominations who wrote a statement on the climate crisis earlier this year to coincide with the release of the pope's encyclical on the environment. More than 400 rabbis had signed the declaration as of late August, according to the Shalom Center.

"We call for a new sense of eco-social justice – a tikkun olam that includes tikkun tevel, the healing of our planet," the statement read. "We urge those who have been focusing on social justice to address the climate crisis, and those who have been focusing on the climate crisis to address social justice."

The Yom Kippur service at Lincoln Memorial will weave in not only passages from this rabbinic statement on climate change, but also portions of the pope's encyclical, Waskow said.

"Just as we developed the rabbinic letter, many different religious and spiritual communities are developing out of their own theology and tradition positions and views which come out to be fairly similar," Waskow told HuffPost. The pope's unwavering emphasis on caring for creation "takes the work we're doing it and gives it front and center place in people's consciousness."

The service will include the traditional Kol Nidre prayer, sung at the start of Yom Kippur, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday. Wednesday's portion will begin at 10 a.m. and include Torah readings and commentary. At 5 p.m., the rabbis will move from the Lincoln Memorial to the city's John Marshall Place Park to host the Ne'ilah, closing services for Yom Kippur, and an interfaith vigil.

Participants are invited to join the Yom Kippur fast, the event's website stated, and wear white "to signify our intention to purify our souls and our lives."

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/rabbis-honor-popes-climate-message-with-yom-kippur-service-in-dc_56019959e4b08820d91a5e78?0g722o6r

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September 24, 2015

Pope Francis on Climate Change: Some Questions

By Roger S. Gottlieb
Huffington Post

For the many of us--clergy and laypeople, academics and plain citizens, in the U.S. and throughout the world--who for decades have been saying that the environmental crisis calls for a religious perspective and an activist religious response Pope Francis' bold words are a wonderfully welcome addition.

At least three things give those words special weight: first, as the years pass the reality of both global warming in particular and the other dimensions of the crisis (including the vast scale of pollution, species loss, and environmental illness) have become increasingly clear. Second, Pope
Francis has established himself as a humble, intelligent, and authentic spiritual leader. If political conservatives resent his critique of capitalism, and cultural conservatives wish he would condemn homosexuals, an awful lot of other people (Catholic or not) see him as a man trying to live up to the traditional Christian virtues of love, forgiveness, and humility.

Third, and perhaps most important: Francis is clearly and unambiguously (for the most part, at least, skirting population control) calling a spade a spade: he rejects consumerism and unfettered capitalism, anthropocentrism and turning the earth into "an immense pile of filth." He does not take refuge in vague generalities or idealistic appeals to nonthreatening platitudes.

As an essentially secular person, I am delighted. Every (serious) environmentalist needs every other (serious) environmentalist. If there was ever an "issue" on which religious and secular, scientists and critical theorists, people of all races and nations and cultures might agree, it is this one.

We are left, however, with some serious questions. First: to what degree will anything said by the Pope, or any other religious leader from the head of the World Council of Churches to the Patriarch of Orthodox Christianity, make a difference? Some years ago I read that American Catholics use birth control at the same rate as non-Catholics. As a predominantly Christian country the overwhelming consumerist and militarist U.S. is clearly paying scant heed to Biblical admonitions against wealth, violence, revenge, or arrogance. As one woman from Italy interviewed on the radio said about his environmental stand: "I like this Pope--so I will do what he says." The implication being, of course, that if she didn't like him she might not.

In the end it may be that for the vast majority of people religious virtues are simply too demanding to live up to. Loving your enemy (even loving your neighbor), overcoming desire, truly seeing Allah as the only God (as opposed to wealth, power, or masculine privilege), and so forth are observed much more in the breach than in reality throughout the world's religious communities. Perhaps the values and virtues of religious environmentalism--care and respect for other creatures, concern for the future of the earth, carefully avoiding any industrial policy which harms the most vulnerable--are just too hard to follow as well.

The second question concerns the behavior of the Catholic Church itself: its vast wealth and property, the institutions it directs, the level of consumption of its leading figures (from bishops and cardinals to the presidents of Catholic universities and heads of Catholic hospitals). How much property could be sold, with proceeds going to green the ones that are left? How many cuts in salary or benefits would the top men be willing to accept in order to do their part? What kinds of sacrifices will the Church advocate for its better off members throughout the world: that they should eat more locally, stop consuming meat, drive less, fly less, challenge existing ecologically destructive policies and powers, and start being really careful with everything they throw "away"? Where is the church's wealth invested and when will that wealth be disinvested from the fossil fuel industry? When will powerful lay members of the church, what we Jews call the "big givers," hear that wealth derived from global warming or other forms of pollution is no more acceptable than wealth derived from prostitution rings or drug sales?

The sad truth is that the Catholic Church, like the university which pays my salary, like almost
all the concentrations of wealth and power in the world, depend heavily on an economy and industrial system that are environmentally destructive. It is fine and fitting for Francis to scold governments and corporations and greedy consumers. But the scolding must include his own huge community, and given his position a series of detailed environmental guidelines--perhaps not orders but definitely stronger than mere suggestions--need to follow.

Finally, there are the related questions of hope and despair. While the Pope's declaration is one among many positive signs, the overall tendency in environmental matters has been continuing deterioration. The sheer quantity of refuse we've deposited in earth, air, and water; the crushing number of extinguished species; the rising costs to economies, cities, villages and islands. As well, and most significant, the way the majority of the most powerful commit themselves to only minor variations in business as usual. What is a realist to do, but despair of our species?

Theists have one advantage over those of us whose sense of the sacred is limited to the natural universe. This advantage resides in the belief that there is, at the heart of existence, an Intelligence and Intention that is fundamentally on the side of goodness, love, and care. Like the cowboys who used to ride over the hill to come to the rescue at the end of the movies I saw as a child, belief in God serves as a beacon of trust that Someone, Somehow, is On Our Side.

Exactly how this will work out in practice is somewhat vague, and surely every believer is aware of all the times--the wars, plagues, famines, abused children, and genocides--when at least in the short run only evil triumphed. Yet we do not have to know how God is on our side to be comforted by the thought that She is. Indeed it is one of the characteristics of both institutional religions and non-denominational and eclectic spirituality to believe that whatever happens in the short run, by a mysterious cosmic calculus every good act matters--somehow. While some will talk of Heaven and others of Karma, and others not know what to say, there is a trust that it makes some kind of difference to live with love, even if we cannot see what kind of difference that is. Again: those of us who are, for want of a better term, "naturalists," can have no such faith or hope.

Yet perhaps, and here I speak simply for myself, the ultimate outcome is not what matters most. Ask yourself: if you possessed a completely accurate crystal ball that could foretell the future with unerring accuracy; and the ball showed you a future in which completely acidified oceans, near constant overwhelming droughts and floods, tens of millions of climate refugees, and decimated agriculture have all come true--well, what then?

Would it then make sense to give up our work, leave the fridge door open, buy a gas guzzler, stop teaching and writing and talking to people we know and demanding that governments and corporations and churches and universities change their ways? Even if we won't win, should we stop trying to live with love?

I don't think so and in whatever ways we disagree about God, Heaven, Scripture, or the role of gender in religious institutions, I am reasonably sure the Pope doesn't think so either. Let our work continue. Let us live lives of love. Whatever the future holds, it's the best way to live today.
Roger S. Gottlieb is professor of philosophy at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. This essay is adapted from the just published For Our Common Home, edited by John B. Cobb. Two of Gottlieb's most recent books are the Nautilus Book Award winners =Spirituality: What it Is and Why it Matters and Engaging Voices: Tales of Morality and Meaning in an age of Global Warming.


September 24, 2015

Faith in clean energy

By Tom Steyer and Sister Simone Campbell

The Hill

Faith and politics share a common burden. In our best moments, being a member of a faith community or political movement requires us to act in the interests of our fellow humans—an appeal that places responsibility squarely on our shoulders and demands that we take action. The best leaders—both political and spiritual—channel this responsibility to help us come together and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. They honor the platform they have been given to call for a better world, leading by example in the process.

This week, Pope Francis’ leadership on both counts will be evident when he addresses the United States Congress and renews his call for the global community to confront one of the urgent challenges of our time—climate change.

With his encyclical on climate change, the Pope calls on all of us to end a culture of indifference and embrace concrete solutions. He tells us, “It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable plane to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us.”

Amongst the growing chorus calling for action, no voice has been more influential—or more compelling—than Pope Francis. His message has already resonated with millions across our country—and breathed new life into the fight for a healthier and more prosperous planet for all. More and more religious, business and military leaders across the country are answering the Pope’s call to action and joining the fight to build a clean energy future for our children. Now it’s time for Congress to join them.

There is wide agreement in the United States on Pope Francis’ call for action on climate change. A recent poll from Quinnipac University found that nearly two-thirds of American voters agree with the Pope “calling on the world to do more to address climate change,” including 67 percent of independents.
As people of faith—and as members of the American electorate—we have a profound duty to one another, and to our children, to care for our environment and protect the next generation. Pope Francis challenges us to look beyond ourselves and act in the interests of our fellow humans, reminding us of our moral obligation to take action on climate to create a cleaner and more prosperous future for the generations who will follow us. The risks of inaction could not be higher, but our opportunity to create a more prosperous clean energy economy has also never been more real.

The solutions that we need to realize a cleaner future for our children are in hand. Nationally we are seeing clean energy starting to compete head-to-head with fossil fuels—and win. In the first half of 2015, renewables account for more than two-thirds of new electricity generation across the United States. But this is only the beginning.

Our nation and our economy are transforming before our eyes—and America’s leaders must embrace this transformation or risk being left behind. This week, Pope Francis will challenge our Congressional leaders to embrace solutions that combat climate change, protect our common home, strengthen our economy, and secure our children’s future.

We sincerely hope they listen.

Steyer is a California businessperson, philanthropist, clean energy advocate and President of NextGen Climate. Campbell is the executive director of NETWORK, a National Catholic Social Justice Lobby.


September 25, 2015

How Pope Francis helped awaken a deep religious tradition for care for the environment

By Mark Stoll
Huffington Post

Just about every person who led and shaped the American conservation and early environmental movements grew up Protestant. What irony, then, that the one person who has done more to get people talking about the environment than anyone in decades is the supreme pontiff of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis.

Every pope since Paul VI has addressed environmental issues, but Francis’s encyclical this summer made many people aware for the first time of a Catholic concern for the environment. Even dedicated environmentalists might have a hard time naming a major Catholic environmentalist.

The average person could probably more easily name the seven Catholic Republican presidential candidates, who deny or downplay environmental problems like climate change.
Up through the 19th century, Protestant ministers wrote most of the great works about nature as the creation of God. The pantheon of great heroes of environmentalism is thoroughly Protestant — Henry David Thoreau, Theodore Roosevelt, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, David Brower, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey. Exceptions have generally been Jewish, like Paul Ehrlich or Michael Pollan.

Francis’s encyclical framed global warming and environmental issues in a very Catholic way, in terms of their injustice to the poor. Since Vatican II in the 1960s, the Catholic Church has made social justice central to its teaching. It’s no accident, then, that the environmental justice movement is exactly where Catholics have participated most enthusiastically in American environmentalism.

The deeply devout Cesar Chavez might be said to have been the first major Catholic environmental leader in the late 1960s and 1970s, when his farm worker movement protested workers’ exposure to agricultural chemicals.

But the first Catholic to become nationally known for environmental activism was Lois Gibbs. Developers had built Love Canal, her neighborhood in Niagara Falls, N.Y., on top of 20,000 tons of buried toxic waste. Horrific health problems, especially for children, finally made headlines in 1978.

Gibbs organized homeowners and successfully led activists to demand government action. She went on to form and direct the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, a clearinghouse for local activists fighting problems of toxic waste.

After Love Canal, Catholic Latinos began to protest toxic pollution in their communities. Although the church hierarchy did not get involved, priests often joined the causes. Mothers of East Los Angeles scored notable successes in the late 1980s, defeating a toxic waste incinerator, for example. In another successful action, Tucson activists demanded that polluters clean up chemicals that contaminated groundwater under a Hispanic neighborhood.

In addition to environmental justice, other Catholics have advocated reverence for nature as the creation of God, which they see as the necessary foundation for environmental progress. Since the late 20th century, Catholic priests, friars and theologians, not Protestant clergy, have produced the popular works on God’s presence in creation.

Francis’s encyclical emphasized the need to recognize God as Creator and to see ourselves as part of interconnected creation. He cited French priest Pierre Teilhard du Chardin, who a century ago envisioned cosmic history as a grand unfolding of the divine plan, which works through evolution and ends with the salvation of humanity.

Teilhard’s philosophy has been popularized in America by his disciple Thomas Berry. Berry, a priest in the Passionist order who died in 2009, inspired his own Catholic followers Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at Yale University and Brian Swimme. They believe that if people understood the Earth as the ongoing creation of God in a grand divine cosmological drama, we could begin the process of healing the Earth.
Two well-known Catholic writers and teachers have been Matthew Fox and Rosemary Radford Ruether, who took advantage of the freedom that Vatican II gave theologians to explore new directions. Fox, a Dominican friar (later defrocked by an increasingly conservative Vatican), advocated an ecstatic and mystical “creation spirituality.” Theologian Ruether was a major voice in the new field of eco-feminism, exploring the intersection of theology, feminism and environmentalism.

Aside from environmental justice and eco-theology, several Catholic religious orders have promoted environmental goals in their communities. They planted organic gardens or retrofitted buildings to make them more energy-efficient.

Inspired by the Earth-friendly prayers and sermons of their founder (and the pope’s namesake) St. Francis, Franciscans have been particularly committed. A movement among American nuns calling themselves “green nuns,” “eco-nuns” or “green sisters” has received a lot of attention. Many nuns have engaged in political activism or sponsored workshops on eco-theology or environmental justice.

The arrival of Pope Francis will raise renewed attention to the environmental crisis and to the plight of the poor. Perhaps, too, his visit will shine a spotlight on a half-century of American Catholic environmental thought and action, which in many ways has grown more vigorous than the environmentalism of Protestants.

Mark Stoll is associate professor of history and director of the Environmental Studies program at Texas Tech. He is author of “Inherit the Holy Mountain.”


October 7, 2015
Earth Keeper Newsletter

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=70b057a399&e=d85b57a294

October 8, 2015
Laudato Si’ panel event encourages hope amidst ecological challenges

By Andrea Simmonds (MDiv ’18) and C. Mark Batten, Office of Communications
Wake Forest University
On Tuesday, October 6 in front of an audience of nearly 200, three Wake Forest University professors – a theologian, journalist, and biologist – gathered to engage in a panel discussion on *Laudato Si’ (Praise Be)*, the latest encyclical published by Pope Francis, and its call for a holistic approach to climate change. The panel was convened by the School of Divinity’s Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative in partnership with the University’s Center for Energy, Environment and Sustainability (CEES) and The Humanities Institute.

The panelists were Elizabeth O’Donnell Gandolfo, Earley Assistant Professor of Catholic and Latin American Studies at the School of Divinity, Justin Catanoso, Director of the Journalism Program and Associate Professor of the Practice in the College, and Miles Silman, Andrew Sabin Family Foundation Presidential Chair of Conservation Biology in the College, all of whom have ties to Latin America, one of the regions most impacted by the earth’s changing climate. The panel was moderated by Fred Bahnson, Assistant Professor of the Practice of Ecological Well-Being at the School of Divinity. Bahnson also is the director of the Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative.

An encyclical is a papal document that is produced by the Pope and sent out to all bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. While it is an official document sent to the bishops it is addressed to everyone and can be accessed online. Pope Francis’ encyclical deals with the issue of “our common home” and how people are to live in communion with the Earth rather than just using it for its resources. Each panelist was invited to give a 10-minute presentation on the takeaways, related to their specific discipline, from the encyclical.

Gandolfo focused on what she called the Roman Catholic Church’s best kept secret, its Social Teaching. “Our dignity as human beings depends on living in relationships of solidarity and care with other beings, creatures, and creation as a whole,” she said. “Human beings are no longer at the center of things, but are at the heart of the matter. Our dignity is at stake.”

Silman focused on the changing climate patterns of the planet and expressed the urgency of the issue of global warming. He used a series of charts and time-lapsed illustrations to demonstrate the way the Earth is heating up. “When a biologist looks at the Earth they see a love letter,” Silman stated. “Every year the Earth provides 125 trillion dollars worth of resources and energy.”

“We are all linked on an annual cycle,” Silman continued. “If my young children live the rest of their lives in Winston-Salem, they will die in the climate of north Florida. This is the world we have created for ourselves.”

Catanoso discussed his reporting work in La Oroya, Peru – the most populated city in the country – speaking with local activists who are trying to keep their home from becoming more polluted by a planned copper mine. It is a delicate situation to consider. While the mine would provide jobs it would drastically increase the rate of pollution.

“We are creating an Earth that is angering Mother Nature,” Catanoso said. “How do you feel when your temperature goes up to 106-degrees? Dead. The encyclical is not a five-point fix. It is
an awareness phrasing document to empower all of us to get our head around the ecological crisis and push forward to fix it.”

Each professor brought a nuanced way of viewing the encyclical with their experiences and the way the document calls everyone to live in communion and solidarity with the Earth. Even though the panel spoke of the horrific reality of global warming and the urgent need to act, they also shared their sense of hope in preparing the planet for future generations.

“We are called to reconcile ourselves with nature to help extend it,” Silman noted in response to a question raised to the panel. Gandolfo added, “Laudato Si’ invites a deep spiritual conversion away from consumerism, an invitation for humans to change their habits.”

First-year Master of Divinity student Leanna Coyle-Carr said that the panel gave her encouragement. “I have been converted,” she said, referring to the ecological conversion Pope Francis is hoping for. “The question before us has become, ‘now what?’”

Jude Swanson, a Master of Divinity and Masters of Arts in Sustainability joint degree student, felt a sense of hope following the panel conversation. “In light of the many predictions that the human race is bound toward a fiery end, the very fact that the encyclical has led to intense conversations, like this panel, across the globe is a positive transition.”

The School of Divinity will convene at least two similar panel events in Asheville and Charlotte. More details will be available at divinity.wfu.edu/food-and-faith/.

October 12, 2015

Can the pope bridge the climate divide?

_Catholics in the West are responding to his call. Will Congress?_

By Elizabeth Shogren
High Country News

Pope Francis, in his first-ever visit to the United States in late September, lauded President Barack Obama’s response to climate change and challenged Congress to take “courageous action.” But it’s going to take a lot more than the pontiff’s passionate plea to bridge the wide divide between Republicans and Democrats. Not only have congressional Republicans — and some Democrats from fossil-fuel states — blocked comprehensive climate legislation for many years, but some are also trying to undermine Obama’s Clean Power Plan, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the electricity sector.
Even if Francis has yet to accomplish the miracle of reconciling U.S. politicians’ wildly divergent views on climate change, he still may play a transformational role by inspiring ordinary Catholics in the American West — and around the globe — to take the health of the planet more seriously and even to start voting for candidates who prioritize slashing emissions.

Still, the pope clearly wants to influence the political elite. He not only urged Congress to steer the nation away from fossil fuels and the destruction of ecosystems, he also implored political leaders to stop feuding. “We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all,” he said.

And he added a note of optimism, saying, “I’m convinced that we can make a difference. I’m sure,” a statement that provoked long applause and a standing ovation from many of the congressional representatives, Supreme Court justices and cabinet members gathered in the Capitol.

The pope has already started to inspire change in local church congregations, in the West and elsewhere, with his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, which was released this summer. Pedro Lopez, for example, works for the League of Conservation Voters in Arizona. Before the pope unveiled his encyclical, Lopez and his team would attend mostly Latino Catholic churches around Phoenix and struggle to connect the priests’ messages with climate change in short talks after Mass. “Now that we have the encyclical, it’s an open door for us to make a call to action to Catholics,” Lopez says.

Some priests have even begun to do the activists’ work for them, summarizing the encyclical for their congregations and encouraging members to pray and work to solve the climate crisis. Lopez believes that, in time, the pope’s message will inspire Latinos, who represent a growing share of eligible voters, to support candidates who are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and ushering in renewable energy. “We can change the whole political landscape,” he says.

Democratic senators are hoping for just such a shift: They introduced a new climate change bill — deliberately timed for the pope’s visit — that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions nationwide by at least 2 percent a year, provide more tax incentives for renewable energy and remove some fossil fuel subsidies.

Western Republicans’ responses to the pope’s visit ran the gamut. Just prior to it, 11 Republicans, including David Reichert, D-Wash., introduced a resolution to address the causes and effects of “measured changes to our global and regional climates including mitigation efforts and efforts to balance human activities that have been found to have an impact.”

On the other extreme, Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., decided to boycott Francis’ historic speech, the first time a pope has addressed the U.S. Congress. “If the Pope wants to devote his life to fighting climate change then he can do so in his personal time. But to promote questionable science as Catholic dogma is ridiculous,” Gosar wrote at the conservative website Townhall.com.
Nor did the first Jesuit pope sway Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, R, who was taught by Jesuits. “The pope speaks for the Lord when it comes to matters of faith or morality, but not on issues of economics or the environment,” Barrasso told Fox News. Barrasso then attacked the Democrats’ new climate bill, saying it would weaken the economy and make electric power less reliable.

If the pope could move any congressional Republican, it may be Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who chairs the Senate Energy Committee. Murkowski, a Catholic, recorded a video about her encounter with Francis, who briefly held her hands when he was in the Capitol on the way to give his speech. “It was a moment I will always remember; the feeling of his presence; the love that this man radiates. It was extraordinary,” Murkowski said. Her statement echoed the pope’s call for “dialogue,” but avoided mentioning climate change, which has already impacted her state especially hard.

Some Western Democrats, however, seemed hopeful that Francis’ words will resonate long after the media excitement dies down. “The pope gave an enormous wakeup call today to everyone who thinks unregulated consumption is an unending free ride. Now we need to turn that wakeup call into lasting action,” said Rep Raúl M. Grijalva, D-Ariz. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said: “This is an important moment for our country. When the pope speaks, we all listen.”

https://www.hcn.org/issues/47.17/can-the-pope-bridge-the-climate-divide

October 19, 2015

Jane Goodall at Parliament: Pope Francis gives me hope on environment

By Anne Marie Hankins
Religion News Service

SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) Jane Goodall is a world-renowned primatologist, anthropologist and a United Nations Ambassador of Peace. Through her groundbreaking research with chimpanzees she helped the world understand humans’ relationship with wildlife and the environment. At the Parliament of the World’s Religions, which concluded its five-day run in Salt Lake City Monday (Oct. 19), Goodall, 81, spoke about uniting religious and spiritual communities to save the environment, one of the conference’s main areas of concern. She sat down with Religion News Service to describe her new program, Roots & Shoots, an organization that equips children to tackle environmental problems.

Q: What do you think about Pope Francis’ call to action for Catholics and other religious groups to take care of the Earth?

A: I think Pope Francis should be canonized on the spot. He’s absolutely amazing and he gives me more hope than almost anybody else alive at this time today. He’s brave, he’s tackling some very ancient customs which are not good ones, he has not been afraid to speak out and perhaps one of the major things is, he walks his talk. Imagine another pope going around in New York in a little tiny car!
Q: What are some ways you feel religions and religious organizations can come together to preserve our environment?

A: I can only say I hope that more and more children from different religions will come together in our (Roots & Shoots) youth program, which is emphasizing the need to live in peace and harmony with each other as well as nature.

Q: What significance does the pope’s championing of the environment bring to the cause?

A: I hope it brings a lot. I hope that hundreds and thousands of young Catholics who might not have been concerned with the environment will become concerned. I hope they’ll all come in and join our people in this world movement, Roots & Shoots, because it’s only when we all get together and consolidate and cooperate instead of fighting that we’re going to save the world.

Party politics is terribly destructive, but so too is the divisiveness between many religions and many kinds of cultures. One of the most important words in the language, which I believe Pope Francis embraces, is respect. Let’s respect each other and respect other life.


October 20, 2015

Religious Leaders Urge Ambitious Climate Agreement

International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) Reporting Services

UNFCCC Executive Director Christiana Figueres received a statement from a delegation of 154 faith and spiritual leaders representing different faith groups, headed by South African Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, calling for an ambitious climate agreement, reminding governments to commit to emission cuts and climate risk reduction, and pledging contributions from their own faith communities, including fossil fuel divestment.

The statement calls for the UNFCCC COP 21 to: translate ecological stewardship into concrete climate action; show inter-generational responsibility; ensure climate justice; and initiate individual and structural transformation.

More specifically, it calls for: phasing out fossil energies and reaching zero emissions by mid-century; a robust mechanism to review and ratchet up ambitions, transparency and accountability rules applicable to all; and the provision of finance and support to poor and vulnerable countries.

The religious leaders also call for delivery of the internationally agreed US$100 billion in climate finance annually by 2020, and express support for the goal of 100% renewable energy worldwide by 2050.
The statement builds on a number of recent calls from faith groups, notably Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si', the declaration of the New York Interfaith Summit, the Lambeth Declaration and the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change, according to the ACT Alliance, one of the coordinators of the statement. [UNFCCC Press Release] [Statement by Faith and Spiritual Leaders] [ACT Alliance Press Release]


October 20, 2015

Dalai Lama says strong action on climate change is a human responsibility

Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader says humans caused global warming so must now take action to protect fragile environments including Himalayan glaciers

Associated Press
The Guardian

The Dalai Lama on Tuesday urged strong global action to limit global warming and to protect fragile environments, including the Himalayan glaciers and Tibetan plateau.

Calling climate change a “problem which human beings created,” the 80-year-old Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader said all of humanity was now responsible for taking action. But instead, he said, “we are relying on praying to God or to Buddha. Sometimes I feel this is very illogical.”

He issued his plea in a pre-taped video released as part of a campaign launched by the Tibetan government-in-exile in the north Indian hill town of Dharmsala, where the Dalai Lama has been based since fleeing a Chinese military crackdown in Tibet.

The government-in-exile said the campaign would continue through this year’s UN climate change talks, where nations hope to conclude a new treaty for limiting climate-warming gas emissions. The exiled government will also send its own delegate to the talks, which start 30 November in Paris, though it will not have a vote of its own.

“This is not a question of one nation or two nations. This is a question of humanity. Our world is our home,” the Dalai Lama said. “There’s no other planet where we may move or shift.”

Acknowledging his advanced years, the Dalai Lama appealed to younger generations to “take a more active role in protecting this planet, including the Tibetan plateau.”

Temperatures for Tibet’s high-altitude plateau — referred to as the Roof of the World — are rising about three times faster than the global average, and are 1.3C higher than they were 50 years ago. The Himalayas are also called the Third Pole, referring to the fact that they are covered in snow and ice and are particularly susceptible to climate change, like the North and South poles.
The government-in-exile also argued that Tibetans should be restored as the “true stewards” of the plateau, which has been under Chinese rule for decades and where Tibetans accuse Beijing of mining indiscriminately while forcing nomadic communities to move elsewhere.

“Tibetans must have a say on what happens on their land,” said the exiled government’s prime minister, Lobsang Sangay. “Tibetan nomads are the expert custodians of the alpine pastures, and their knowledge and experience must be recognized.”

China has long understood the plateau’s environmental importance and vulnerability, with some 40% of the world’s fresh water locked into the frozen Himalayan glaciers and feeding seven major rivers that run through China, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences studies environmental and climate change from its Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research in the region — a 2.5m sq km (966,000 sq m) area that includes the Tibetan Autonomous Region as well as most of China’s Qinghai province, parts of Sichuan and the southern Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.

Up to 70% of the plateau is covered in permafrost, with large reserves of both carbon dioxide and methane trapped within the ice. Scientists say thawing could release long-stored emissions of both greenhouse gases. Methane can be 30 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping Earth’s heat.

Watch the Dalai Lama’s video message on global warming and the Paris climate summit:


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October 26, 2015

World's bishops appeal to COP 21 delegates for 'just and legally binding' climate deal

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The world’s bishops have a clear message for world leaders set, in barely a month, to enter the latest and perhaps most significant round of international climate negotiations: Get the deal done in Paris.

In Rome on Monday, the heads of six continental bishops’ conferences, along with leaders of national conferences in the United States and Canada and of the Catholic patriarchs of the Orient, made the collective call -- “on our own behalf and on behalf of the people for whom we care” -- to the negotiating parties who are set to arrive Nov. 30 in Paris for the annual United Nations climate change conference, formally known as the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21).
“We join the Holy Father in pleading for a major break-through in Paris, for a comprehensive and transformational agreement supported by all based on principles of solidarity, justice and participation,” the bishops said in their appeal, which drew heavily from Pope Francis’ encyclical, “*Laudato Si’*, on Care for Our Common Home.”

Delegates to COP 21 are expected to finalize a global deal committing all nations to self-set pledges aimed at limiting greenhouse gas emissions in order to bypass the worst impacts of climate change.

In the appeal, the bishops outlined 10 points to what would qualify as a successful agreement: one that is “just and legally binding,” links climate change to social injustice and exclusion, with special concern for the poor and most vulnerable, places the common good before national interests, and puts in writing enforcement and review measures for each country’s pledge to reduce emissions.

Such an agreement, they said, would also reflect the ethical and moral dimensions of climate change and accept the view that the climate and atmosphere are “global common goods” belonging to all and meant for all. In addition, the bishops challenged leaders to “strongly limit a global temperature increase” and to devise “climate compatible” models of development and lifestyle that address inequality and offer an outlet from poverty. “Central to this,” the bishops wrote, “is to put an end to the fossil fuel era, phasing out fossil fuel emissions and providing affordable, reliable and safe renewable energy access for all.”

“Reliable scientific evidence suggests that accelerated climate change is the result of unrestrained human activity, working to a particular model of progress and development and that excessive reliance on fossil fuels is primarily responsible,” they said.

The latest round of U.N. climate summit runs Nov. 30-Dec. 11 in Paris. COP 21 has drawn heightened attention as it is expected to ratify the first global climate accord since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, with this version binding all 195 COP member nations (to differentiating degrees, based on historical responsibility), rather than solely the industrialized world.

During the Monday press conference, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, president of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, called the appeal “a very historical occasion,” and represented the first time in his memory that all the heads of the continental bishops’ federations have, first, come together, and second, around such a collective document.

“We’re here to, in a way, respond to what the Holy Father has asked for in *Laudato Si’*, and also because of the urgency all of us have felt,” he said.

Of the appeal’s nine signatories, six were presidents of continental bishops’ conferences: Gracias of Bombay, India (Asia); Cardinals Peter Erdő of Esztergom-Budapest, Hungary and Reinhard Marx of Munich, Germany (Europe); Cardinal Ruben Salazar Gomez of Bogota, Colombia (Latin America); Archbishop Gabriel Mbingi of Lubango, Angola (Africa); and Archbishop John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (Oceania). Also penning their names were the heads of the U.S. and Canadian bishops’ conferences, Archbishops Joseph Kurtz and David
Douglas Crosby, respectively, and Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, president of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Orient.

Gracias and his fellow bishops described the present-day experiences of the effects of climate change in their corners of the world, from more frequent and intense cyclones in India and typhoons in the Philippines, to more recurrent flooding of Bangkok, to the relocation of the people of the Carteret Islands to Bougainville, both off the coast of Papua New Guinea.

“It is taking some time to do so,” said Ribat, president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania, of the resettlement. “The people are not readily willing to go because they fear that their culture will go, will disappear. And all other things that belong to them will no longer be there. And their fear also at this time as they go settle on this place they’re given to resettle, will they be accepted easily and peacefully?”

The Papua New Guinea archbishop said his plea is that all people do what they can to encourage an ambitious, binding and fair agreement in Paris and beyond. “Ask politicians to guarantee the future existence of Oceania,” he said.

The seeds of the global bishops’ appeal germinated in July at a post-encyclical conference in Rome organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and CIDSE, an international coalition of Catholic development agencies. During an informal side meeting, representatives of various continental bishops’ conferences came to the conclusion they should take some type of collective action. Leading the way were the Asian bishops, according to one of the document’s organizers.

“FABC played the strongest role in the whole initiative,” said Bernd Nilles, CIDSE secretary general, who collaborated in the construction of the joint statement.

In particular, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, president of Caritas Internationalis (another organization assisting the appeal), was central in building a bridge between bishops from climate vulnerable regions, like his native Philippines and parts of Oceania, and those on continents home to the historical output of carbons emissions.

“You need lead figures … in the last steps to get really everybody on board. That was very important,” Nilles said.

Meetings among the eventual signing parties picked up in September and continued through the Synod of Bishops on the family, which formally concluded Saturday. The text was finalized Thursday. While different proposals were studied, scrutinized and modified, the appeal’s starting point was always bedrocked in *Laudato Si’*, with the bishops eager to show a united front in support of the pope and the encyclical. Throughout the encyclical, Francis challenged for greater courage among political leaders to take responsibility to reduce greenhouse gases and work toward the global common good.

A second text provided further inspiration: a plea last December for a climate agreement from nine bishops made during the U.N. climate talks in Lima, Peru. In their statement (also
coordinated by CIDSE), the bishops, themselves representing four continents and five countries, called for “an end to the fossil fuel era” and endorsed the goal of holding average global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

An early version of the global bishops’ appeal echoed the Lima bishops in calling for the 1.5 degrees target, but was ultimately left out of the final iteration. Conversations weighed including a specific temperature target, Nilles said, but it became clear it was not an area of comfort for the bishops, who found it “kind of tricky” as pastors to pinpoint the proper decimal.

Speaking with journalists in Rome following the press conference, Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski, who acknowledged U.S. bishops opposed inclusion of the 1.5 degrees limit, made much the same point: “To say 1.5 or 1.6 or 1.7, that seemed to be more the competencies of a scientist than the competencies of a pastor,” in that advocating a specific number could lead people to question why bishops viewed themselves adept to even make such an argument.

“What they say is something which leads to a similar result in the end,” Nilles told NCR.

In the appeal the bishops hinted at a target, Gracias said, in proposing the Paris agreement “strongly limit a global temperature increase and to set a goal for complete decarbonisation by mid-century, in order to protect frontline communities suffering from the impacts of climate change, such as those in the Pacific Islands and in coastal regions.”

Ribat, for his part, invoked the 1.5 degrees goal at the press conference in saying the world community has the means and alternatives available to change course and limit temperature rise below that level. In briefly contrasting the limits of 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees warming, Jean-Pascal van Ypersele de Strihou, former vice-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said the science has outlined the potential scenarios but ultimately, it comes to a value judgment: “For example, are the lives of those who would be drowned under such a long-term sea level increase worth saving or not?”

According to the 2014 IPCC report, to limit warming to 1.5 degrees by 2100 would require slashes in emissions of 70-90 percent below 2010 levels by 2050; Continuing down the status quo could result in 4 degrees of temperature rise. Scenarios aiming for a max 2 degrees rise would require the near-elimination of fossil fuel use by century’s end, a timeline that ratchets up as the temperature goal shrinks.

“That’s what the IPCC says, so de facto, the bishops are not naming a temperature, but they are very clear: If you want to protect vulnerable communities, you need to phase out fossil fuels and decarbonize,” Nilles said.

Even without a specific temperature target, the CIDSE director hailed the appeal as “a major achievement across continents,” and in particular noted the positive movement on the climate issue occurring in North America -- in the U.S., given greater momentum through the papal visit in September. Though the appeal comes from some of the highest echelons of church hierarchy, Nilles stressed it doesn’t represent a message “from the ivory tower,” but one embedded in “the concrete reality of people.”
“Who decides in the end in Paris are the national governments, so the bishops can play now an important role to bring that in their continents to the table. So it’s not just something coming from the Vatican, from the pope, it’s really something from the local church that asks their politicians to do,” he said.

Gracias said he understood the political challenges posed by taking the necessary steps to curb global warming, in that par for politicians is to think and operate within the confines of their term in office, whereas climate change is an issue impacting generations. The church’s duty, he continued, is to bring forward the ethical and moral principles for adopting a long-term lens in matters concerning the climate.

“We are therefore wanting to make an earnest appeal on behalf of our people. Because the ones who will suffer, if decisions are not taken by governments, will be our people,” Gracias said.

Read “World bishops' appeal to COP 21 negotiating parties”


October 26, 2015

Catholic Church Leaders Issue Appeal on Climate Change

By Elisabetta Povoledo
New York Times

VATICAN CITY — Roman Catholic cardinals, patriarchs and bishops from around the world on Monday appealed to climate-change negotiators to approve a “fair, legally binding and truly transformational climate agreement” when they meet at a widely anticipated United Nations conference in Paris next month.

Representatives of the church from five continents signed the appeal in Vatican City. They said it was inspired by Pope Francis’ sweeping encyclical on the environment, “Laudato Si,” issued in June, which forcefully calls for action to stem environmental destruction and climate change.

The prelates’ appeal calls for a “major breakthrough in Paris” that puts “the common good ahead of national interests,” and advances a 10-point policy proposal “drawing on the concrete experience of people across the continents, and linking climate change to social injustice and the social exclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable of our citizens,” they wrote.

The proposal includes putting “an end to the fossil fuel era,” phasing out emissions by midcentury and providing “affordable, reliable and safe renewable energy access for all.” It also calls for the development of “new models of development and lifestyle.”
Governments must also set limits to global temperature increases, the appeal stated. Decisions made in Paris must be legally binding, the prelates said.

“It’s not a wish or a recommendation but something that is going to tie the hands of governments, we hope,” Cardinal Oswald Gracias, archbishop of Mumbai, India, said at a news conference Monday.

The church has a duty, he said, to bring “ethical considerations” to the forefront of the climate talks in Paris from Nov. 30 to Dec. 11.

The appeal, Cardinal Gracias said, was a “historic occasion” and the first time that Catholic leaders representing all regional and national bishops conferences had presented a joint appeal.

The reason for the petition was simple, he said: “We are experiencing very much the effects of climate change.”

Archbishop John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, who is the president of the Federation of Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, said islands had been especially hard hit by climate-induced rising sea levels. “Our life,” in Oceania, “is at stake,” he said.

He called the Paris meeting a critical turning point. “Business as usual is neither viable nor respecting human dignity, cultures that have evolved over ten thousand years will be extinguished,” if Paris fails, he said.

Pope Francis has made care for the environment one of the platforms of his papacy, and the Vatican has organized international conferences to press the issue.

“It’s very important to have a variety of actors like the church who take a stance, because the changes that are required involve much more than decisions at the political and economic level,” said Prof. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele of the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, a former vice president of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. “They involve a cultural change everywhere around the planet. The church can be a very important player in that context.”

The church has also been attuned to the social injustice effected by climate change. “A common rule is that the poor are the most vulnerable, while they are also the least responsible for the greenhouse-gas emissions,” Professor van Ypersele said, describing it as a “double injustice.”

But the rich, he said, should not believe that they can escape the impact of climate change. “We all share the same planet, the same boat,” he said. “If we sink to the bottom of the ocean, we all sink together.”

October 27, 2015

The Blessing of the Bikes

Churches are encouraging bike travel by holding rituals to Bless the Bicycles.

Yale Climate Connections

In 1999, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City held the world’s first organized blessing of bicycles. Now this new ritual has spread to different denominations and to cities as far away as Melbourne, Australia.

As part of the ritual, riders have their bikes blessed with holy water, remember cyclists who have died, and say a prayer for safe biking.

The Trinity St. Paul’s United Church in Toronto just hosted its sixth annual blessing of the bikes in June of this year. For this church, the event is also an important way to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

Lyn Gaetz of the Church’s Center for Faith, Justice, and the Arts says the cyclists who participate understand the importance of making daily choices to reduce carbon emissions.

GAETZ: “Making the decision, even in the dead of winter some of them, to leave their car in the garage and cycle is taking a big step to contributing to climate justice.”

The importance of personal responsibility was reinforced by the Pope’s recent Encyclical – one of the Catholic Church’s most authoritative documents – in which he expressed the moral duty we all share to protect the earth’s climate.

GAETZ: “We feel a responsibility for the generation coming that’s going to have to live with the results of our lifestyle.

http://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2015/10/the-blessing-of-the-bikes/

October 29, 2015

Buddhist Leaders Call For Climate Change Action At Paris Talks

By Lydia O’Connor
Huffington Post

"The earth is not just our environment. The earth is our mother."

A dozen Buddhist authorities, in what they're calling an unprecedented effort, appeal to world leaders to take strong climate change action at next month's Paris conference.
In the letter released Thursday and titled "Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders," the Dalai Lama and 11 other signatories urge the phasing out of fossil fuels and movement toward 100 percent use of renewable energy. This letter, the authors note, is the first time this so many Buddhist leaders have united to take a stance on a global issue.

Protecting the planet, they write, is a pillar of Buddhism:

Our concern is founded on the Buddha's realization of dependent co-arising, which interconnects all things in the universe. Understanding this interconnected causality and the consequences of our actions are critical steps in reducing our environmental impact. Cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our planet. Buddhist leaders have been speaking about this for decades. However, everyday life can easily lead us to forget that our lives are inextricably interwoven with the natural world through every breath we take, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Through our lack of insight, we are destroying the very life support systems that we and all other living beings depend on for survival.

"When we harm the earth, we harm ourselves," said signatory Sister Chan Khong of the Plum Village International Community of Engaged Buddhists in a related press release. "The earth is not just our environment. The earth is our mother. We are all children of the earth, and we must help one another as brothers and sisters of one big planetary family. We must take action, not out of a sense of duty but out of love for our planet and for each other."

She added, "The Buddha has shown us that we can all live simply and still be very happy."

The Buddhist leaders' contention that their spiritual beliefs compel them to embrace conservation echoes that of Pope Francis, who made the same argument about Catholicism in his encyclical on the environment.

"We are not God," the pope wrote in his encyclical, released in June. "The Earth was here before us and was given to us."

There are more than a billion Roman Catholics and between 500 million and a billion Buddhists (depending on how you count them). Although they won't all fall in step behind their religious leaders, their numbers amount to a quarter or more of the world's population.

The Dalai Lama also spoke out in support of climate change action earlier this month in a video he released through a campaign launched by the Tibetan government-in-exile.

"This is not a question of one nation or two nations. This is a question of humanity. Our world is our home," he said in that video. "There's no other planet where we may move or shift."

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/buddhists-climate-change-letter_56310898e4b00aa54a4c4208
October 30, 2015

15 Buddhist leaders pen climate change statement to world leaders

Lion’s Roar

On Thursday, 15 Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Karmapa, and the King of Bhutan issued a Buddhist Climate Change Statement, calling on world leaders to completely phase out fossil fuels.

The statement is the latest effort by the Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective, which was formed in September 2015 to facilitate a Buddhist contribution to COP21, the United Nations conference on climate change, happening in Paris from November 30 to December 11.

Already, in the lead-up to COP21, the Dalai Lama made comments about climate change, activists called for 24 hours of meditation for the environment, One Earth Sangha issued a Buddhist declaration on climate change, and Buddhist teacher Bhikkhu Bodhi gave a talk on “The Four Noble Truths of the Climate Crisis” at the White House.

The new statement reads, “Our concern is founded on the Buddha’s realization of dependent co-arising, which interconnects all things in the universe.”

The Buddhist leaders also called on the global Buddhist community to, “recognize both our dependence on one another as well as on the natural world. Together, humanity must act on the root causes of this environmental crisis, which is driven by our use of fossil fuels, unsustainable consumption patterns, lack of awareness, and lack of concern about the consequences of our actions.”

Sister Chan Khong of the Plum Village International Community of Engaged Buddhists shared on Facebook, “We must take action, not out of a sense of duty but out of love for our planet and for each other. The Buddha has shown us that we can all live simply and still be very happy.”

http://www.lionsroar.com/15-buddhist-leaders пен climate change statement to world leaders/

October 31, 2015

Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders 2015

Plum Village

Thay, Sister Chan Khong and over 40 Plum Village Dharma Teachers from all over the world signed the Buddhist Climate Statement to World Leaders yesterday, October 29th, 2015.
This new declaration builds on Thay’s powerful message “Falling in love with the Earth”, submitted to the United Nations last year, and his call to action in his bestselling books on Buddhism and ecology, *The World We Have* (2008) and *Love Letter to the Earth* (2013).

>> Offer your own signature here.

Yesterday’s declaration was also signed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Buddhist leaders from over a dozen countries – making it one of the most inclusive statements of its kind ever issued by Buddhist leaders. It has received positive media coverage, including from the BBC, the Huffington Post, the Christian Science Monitor, PBS, the Bangkok Post and China Post.

We hope that this statement will lay the foundations for the global Buddhist community to engage at all levels to offer our practice, insights, compassion and support towards successful Climate Talks in Paris this December.

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**Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders**

**Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective**

October 29th, 2015

We, the undersigned Buddhist leaders, come together prior to the 21st Session of the Conference of Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris, in order to add our voices to the growing calls for world leaders to cooperate with compassion and wisdom and reach an ambitious and effective climate agreement.

We are at a crucial crossroads where our survival and that of other species is at stake as a result of our actions. There is still time to slow the pace of climate change and limit its impacts, but to do so, the Paris summit will need to put us on a path to phase out fossil fuels. We must ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, through visionary and comprehensive mitigation and adaptation measures.

Our concern is founded on the Buddha’s realization of dependent co-arising, which interconnects all things in the universe. Understanding this interconnected causality and the consequences of our actions are critical steps in reducing our environmental impact. Cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our planet. Buddhist leaders have been speaking about this for decades. However, everyday life can easily lead us to forget that our lives are inextricably interwoven with the natural world through every breath we take, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Through our lack of insight, we are destroying the very life support systems that we and all other living beings depend on for survival.
We believe it imperative that the global Buddhist community recognize both our dependence on one another as well as on the natural world. Together, humanity must act on the root causes of this environmental crisis, which is driven by our use of fossil fuels, unsustainable consumption patterns, lack of awareness, and lack of concern about the consequences of our actions.

We strongly support “The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change,” which is endorsed by a diverse and global representation of Buddhist leaders and Buddhist sanghas. We also welcome and support the climate change statements of other religious traditions. These include Pope Francis’s encyclical earlier this year, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, the *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*, as well as the upcoming *Hindu Declaration on Climate Change*. We are united by our concern to phase out fossil fuels, to reduce our consumption patterns, and the ethical imperative to act against both the causes and the impacts of climate change, especially on the world’s poorest.

To this end, we urge world leaders to generate the political will to close the emissions gap left by country climate pledges and ensure that the global temperature increase remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels. We also ask for a common commitment to scale up climate finance, so as to help developing countries prepare for climate impacts and to help us all transition to a safe, low carbon future.

The good news is that there is a unique opportunity at the Paris climate negotiations to create a turning point. Scientists assure us that limiting the rise in the global average temperature to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius is technologically and economically feasible. Phasing out fossil fuels and moving toward 100 percent renewable and clean energy will not only spur a global, low-carbon transformation, it will also help us to embark on a much-needed path of spiritual renewal. In addition to our spiritual progression, in line with UN recommendations, some of the most effective actions individuals can take are to protect our forests, move toward a plant-based diet, reduce consumption, recycle, switch to renewables, fly less, and take public transport. We can all make a difference.

We call on world leaders to recognize and address our universal responsibility to protect the web of life for the benefit of all, now and for the future.

For these reasons, we call on all Parties in Paris:

1. To be guided by the moral dimensions of climate change as indicated in Article 3 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. To agree to phase out fossil fuels and move towards 100 percent renewables and clean energy.
3. To create the political will to close the emissions gap left by country climate pledges so as to ensure that the global temperature increase remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels.
4. To make a common commitment to increase finance above the US$100 billion agreed in Copenhagen in 2009, including through the Green Climate Fund (GCF), to help vulnerable developing countries prepare for climate impacts and transition towards a low-carbon economy.
The time to act is now.

Yours sincerely,

His Holiness the Dalai Lama Tenzing Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, Patriarch of the Plum Village International Community of Engaged Buddhists

His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Head of the Karma Kagyu

His Holiness Dr. Dharmasen Mahathero, The Supreme Patriarch (Sangharaja) of the Bangladesh Sangha

Rev. Hakuga Murayama, President, All Japan Young Buddhist Association (JYBA)

His Eminence Jaseung Sunim, President, Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism

Bhante B. Sri Saranankara Nayaka Maha Thera, Chief Adhikarana Sangha Nayaka of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

His Eminence Rev. Khamba Lama Gabju Demberel, The Supreme Head of Mongolian Buddhists

His Holiness Dr. Bhaddanta Kumarabhivamsa, Sangharaja, and Chairman State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, Myanmar

His Eminence Agga Maha Panditha Dawuldena Gnanissara Maha Nayaka Thera, Mahanayaka Thero, The Supreme Prelate of the Amarapura Maha Nikaya, Sri Lanka

His Holiness Thich Pho Tue, Supreme Patriarch of All Vietnam Buddhist Sangha

Venerable Lama Lobzang, Secretary General of the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC)

Venerable Olivier Reigen Wang-gen, President, Buddhist Union of France (UBF)

Venerable Bhikku Bodhi, President, Buddhist Association of the USA

Royal Highness Ashi Kesang Wangmo Wangchuk, Bhutan

Download PDF Buddhist Climate Statement Oct 29

November 2015

Green Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=68&key=65f2bef1e5794e4773ce99fa868ed2a0&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

November 2015

The Francis Effect

Yale Project on Climate Change Communication

We are pleased to announce the release of a special report from our new study: *The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis changed the conversation about global warming*. Today more Americans and more American Catholics are worried about global warming than six months ago and more believe it will have significant impacts on human beings. Some of these changes in Americans’ and American Catholics’ views can be attributed to the Pope’s teachings, as 17 percent of Americans and 35 percent of Catholics say his position on global warming influenced their own views of the issue.

The report’s results draw from a unique study design of within-subject surveys of a nationally representative sample of American adults conducted in the Spring, prior to the release of the Pope’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*, and again in the Fall, after the Pope’s visit to the United States.

Key findings include:

Americans have become more concerned about global warming

- More Americans say that global warming is happening (Americans: from 62% in March to 66% in October, +4 points; American Catholics: from 64% in March to 74% in October, +10 points).
- More Americans have become worried about global warming (Americans: from 51% in March to 59% in October, +8 points; American Catholics: from 53% to 64%, +11 points).
- More Americans say that the issue of global warming has become very or extremely important to them personally (Americans: from 19% to 26%, +7 points; American Catholics: from 15% to 23%, +8 points).

More Americans think global warming will harm people here and abroad

- More think global warming will cause a great deal or moderate harm to people in developing countries (Americans: from 48% to 63%, +15 points; American Catholics: from 45% to 62%, +17 points).
- More think global warming will harm the world’s poor (Americans: from 49% to 61%, +12 points).
points; American Catholics: from 42% to 62%, +20 points).
• More think global warming will harm future generations of people (Americans: from 60% to 70%, +10 points; American Catholics: from 63% to 74%, +11 points).
• More Americans (from 48% to 57%, +9 points), and more American Catholics (from 45% to 58%, +13 points), think global warming will harm people in the United States a great deal or a moderate amount.

Aligned with Pope Francis’s message, Americans are more likely to think global warming is:

• A moral issue (Americans: from 32% to 38%, +6 points; American Catholics: from 34% to 42%, +8 points).
• A social fairness issue (Americans: from 21% to 29%, +8 points; American Catholics: from 21% to 25%, +4 points).
• A religious issue (Americans: from 8% to 12%, +4 points; American Catholics: from 6% to 13%, +7 points).

The report includes many more fascinating results, including public views of Pope Francis, the salience of global warming as an issue, changes in key beliefs, feelings and thoughts about global warming, changes in how the issue is conceptualized by Americans, their moral responses, and their support for climate action.

Download the report:

“The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis changed the conversation about global warming”

http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/files/The_Francis_Effect.pdf
http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/article/the-francis-effect/

November 2015

The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis changed the conversation about global warming”

By the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication

http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/files/The_Francis_Effect.pdf

November 2015

Conservancy renames Tallgrass Prairie Preserve to honor Joseph H. Williams

By Kelly Bostian
Tulsa World
It is now the Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.

With a gathering Sunday at the 40,000-acre preserve north of Pawhuska, fellow founders, family and friends joined The Nature Conservancy in renaming the country’s largest preserved tract of native tallgrass prairie for the man credited with making it happen. He is former Williams Co. CEO, chairman of both the Oklahoma Board of Trustees and the National Board of Governors for The Nature Conservancy, and lifelong hunter, fisherman and conservationist, and his name is Joseph Williams.

“Without Joe Williams it simply would not exist,” said longtime Tallgrass Preserve advocate and its first director Harvey Payne.

Payne was there for initial meetings of a group of founders who began talking about the possibilities in 1984 and called themselves the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Association. Williams not only lent his experience and business acumen to the fledgling effort, he bought the envelopes and paid for the postage for the grass-roots group.

“I’d forgotten about that,” Williams said to his wife, Terry, as the nearly 80 people gathered at the Preserve headquarters on the 26th anniversary of the purchase of the 26,000-acre Barnard Ranch shared a laugh.

The purchase of the ranch cemented the future of the Preserve, but the opportunity to make that $15 million purchase came at a time when oil prices fell through the floor and Oklahoma’s economy tanked.

The effort needed — as Tallgrass Preserve Director Bob Hamilton put it, borrowing a NASA phrase made popular in the movie Apollo 13 — “a steely-eyed missile man.”

“What he said is, ‘we cannot not do the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. It is too important to let this opportunity pass,” Harvey Payne said.

Multiple speakers, including rancher Fred Drummond and Osage Nation Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear, lauded Williams for his leadership and determination in making the prairie preserve a reality.

“The Osage People did not always support this project, as you remember,” Standing Bear said, addressing Williams.

In convincing elder members of the Osage Tribe, including the late Ed Red Eagle, whose son Eddy offered the invocation for Sunday’s ceremony in his Native tongue, a new direction was set, Standing Bear said.

“We were convinced your vision should be our vision and we followed you, and we thank you for your leadership on this,” he said.
Standing Bear presented Williams with a woolen robe with bison designs on behalf of all in attendance. He explained that, in the Osage language, to “keep you warm” means to keep a person emotionally safe and extend the well wishes of the entire tribe.

“Not just one person to another person, it represents all of us to that person and under the shield of God... It is my honor to put this on you, ‘to keep you warm,’” he said.

Williams was emotionally touched by the gesture. “I’m so humbled and so honored, it is unbelievable,” he said. “I will treasure this forever.”

While he is known historically in Tulsa first as an oilman (and the event Sunday saw the gathering of four former and current Williams Co. CEOs), Williams’ friends and family speak of him as a bird hunter and conservationist and then an astute businessman and oilman.

Four of his children and three grandchildren attended the event. Son Jamie, who is national president of The Wilderness Society, recalled many mornings growing up that they accompanied their father to the woods in the early morning.

“He loved to sit quietly and see nature come alive around him and watch things, and learn,” he said. “He really instilled a love for nature in all of us.”

Joseph Williams said bird hunters in particular see ecological changes because they are in tune with the lands they walk and hunt. After spending 10 years working and living overseas, Williams said his eyes were opened when he returned to his home stomping grounds.

“I found places where I had hunted and fished when I came back had been built up in housing developments, planted over in crops instead of natural grasslands, and I began to become really worried about it,” he said.

Payne said the honor and renaming of the Oklahoma preserve is something that he sought for years. Williams said that, in the end, “it’s really hard to say ‘no’ to Harvey Payne.”

Williams’ efforts on the project carried an impact far beyond Oklahoma, as it changed the way the Nature Conservancy looked at its projects, Payne said. While it was a national organization, projects were tackled on a state-by-state basis.

With a need for $15 million in the late 1980s, Williams knew Oklahoma could not raise the money on its own, Payne said. “(Williams) galvanized the national board of directors,” Payne said.

For the Tallgrass, $6 million of the capital came from Oklahoma, the other $9 million came from outside the state. “That’s the time the Nature Conservancy adopted their line of ‘one conservancy,’ he said. “What he did was monumental.”

Williams now lives in South Carolina and remains involved in conservation efforts there and in Oklahoma.
November 3, 2015

Concern for Earth must be priority, cardinal from Ghana tells central Ohioans

By JoAnne Viviano
The Columbus Dispatch

A Roman Catholic cardinal who helped Pope Francis write a wide-ranging environmental document said on Monday that humankind must experience an ecological conversion to save not only the Earth, but also its poorest and most vulnerable inhabitants.

Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana told a packed auditorium at Ohio State University’s Wexner Center for the Arts that the way we treat the Earth and the way we treat one other — including the poor, the elderly and the disabled — are inextricably linked.

“The Earth, our mother, is crying badly from abusive treatment, just as the poor in our midst are also crying,” Turkson said.

“So, in this encyclical, two elements are crying, two fragile elements — the Earth abusively treated and segments of our society, which according to Pope Francis are excluded.”

Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, has been in Columbus for several days to spread the word about the pope’s Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home.

The 191-page encyclical, or teaching document, was released in June and is addressed to not just Catholics but all people. It has received support from climate-change experts and environmental advocates from various religious and academic backgrounds.

Along with his speech at Ohio State, Turkson discussed the encyclical at a Saturday conference that included representatives from all six dioceses in Ohio. On Sunday, he celebrated a Feast of All Saints Mass at St. Anthony Church on the North Side, which has a large Ghanaian immigrant population.

Earlier on Monday, he mingled with Ohio State students working to address environmental issues and spoke to Catholic schoolchildren at St. Francis DeSales High School on the North Side.
At the evening lecture and question-and-answer session, he said he was confident that the encyclical could provide “moral fiber” and “moral backbone” for world leaders who will gather in Paris beginning on Nov. 30 for the United Nations Climate Change Conference. He said various conferences of Catholic bishops have committed to encouraging political leaders to make decisions that lead to concrete action.

Turkson said the encyclical discusses climate change, but is about more than a single environmental issue and most importantly, about the abusive treatment of the Earth and inequality. He also noted that it tasks humanity with leaving its future generations a garden, not a desert, and stressed that a main thrust of the document is “care” for the environment, not simply stewardship.

The document suggests that three relationships — those between people and God, those between one another, and those between people and their world — are interrelated.

“No only with attentive care for these bonds, says Pope Francis, will we come to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today’s world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor,” Turkson said. “These problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests.”

He said that change will take dialogue among people of faith, scientific researchers, politicians and everyday people.

“Every voice and every opinion needs to be heard in this great task that we all face about protecting the Earth, our common home,” he said.

http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2015/11/02/Cardinal-takes-on-environmental-issues.html

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**November 3, 2015**

Science alone cannot save the planet, insists spiritual leader of Orthodox Church

Archbishop of Canterbury and Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople urge millions of followers around the world to back action on carbon emissions

By John Bingham, Religious Affairs Editor
The Telegraph

Science alone cannot save the planet the spiritual leader of an estimated 300 million Orthodox Christians has insisted, as he joined forces with the Archbishop of Canterbury urging followers around the world to fight climate change.
The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, insisted that global warming is a “moral crisis” requiring millions of people to change their day-to-day behaviour as much as politicians making treaties on the environment.

The two leaders hope to mobilise their churches’ support across the world ahead of the UN conference in Paris next month aimed at reaching a new global agreement to limit carbon dioxide emissions.

Patriarch Bartholomew joined the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, at Lambeth Palace for prayers and private talks on issues such as the refugee crisis and persecution of Christians in the Middle East.

They also joined other bishops addressing an audience of faith leaders and green activists discussing climate change.

The Church of England has been urging worshippers to dedicate one day every month to fasting and prayer for the planet as part of a major drive to instil green ideas in its followers.

It is also sending a delegation on a 250-mile walking “pilgrimage” to Paris in the run-up to the conference.

Patriarch Bartholomew was the first world faith leader to raise climate change as a key religious issue and was a major influence on Pope Francis’s recent encyclical on the environment.

Speaking in Lambeth Palace on Tuesday, he said that for Christians protecting the planet was a “sacred task and a common vocation”.

“Global warming is a moral crisis and a moral challenge,” he said.

“It is a crisis about and within the human heart.

“The solution to the ecological problem is not only a matter of science, technology and politics but also, and perhaps primarily, a matter of radical change of mind … a new ethos.”

He said that central to Orthodox theology is the idea of “metanoia” which he said could translate from the Greek as meaning a “shift of mind, a total change of heart”.

“This is very important because during the last century, a century of immense scientific progress we also experienced the biggest destruction of the natural environment,” he said.

“Science will inform us about the world but it cannot reach the depths of our soul and mind.

“Today we know and yet we still continue to act against our knowledge.

“Knowledge has not resulted in metanoia.”
He added: “Our world is in deep crisis yet never before in history have human beings had the opportunity to bring so many positive changes to so many people in the global community.

“There has never been so much turmoil on our planet but there has never been greater opportunity for communication, cooperation and dialogue.”

During questions, Caroline Spelman, the former Environment Secretary, who now speaks for the Church of England in the Commons, asked the patriarch and other faith leaders to “pray for” her colleagues at Paris.

She said: “Will you pray earnestly for those politicians who must reach a decision?

“Some are converted absolutely to the cause of combating climate change but others are apprehensive and we need those who have the political will to make the decision to feel the impact of your prayers.”


November 6, 2015

Keystone XL Rejection: Indigenous Resistance Exults, Trudeau ‘Disappointed’

Indian Country Today Media Network

Indigenous activists and environmentalists hailed President Barack Obama’s rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline on Friday November 6, calling it a victory for Mother Earth and a step toward shutting down the Alberta oil sands entirely.

“In the fight against Keystone XL our efforts as indigenous peoples, whether Lakota, Dakota, Assiniboine, Ponca, Cree, Dene or other, has always been in the defense of Mother Earth and the sacredness of the water,” said Tom Goldtooth, head of the Indigenous Environmental Network, in a statement. “Today, with this decision, we feel those efforts have been validated. With the rejection of Keystone XL we have not only protected the sacredness of the land and water but have also helped our Cree & Dene relatives at the source take one step closer to shutting down the tar sands. The black snake, Keystone XL, has been defeated, and best believe we will dance to our victory!”

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a Liberal who was sworn in on Tuesday November 4, expressed his disappointment. But unlike his predecessor, Conservative Stephen Harper, Trudeau said the rejection would not harm relations between the two countries. Although Trudeau had supported the oil sands project, he has also pledged to take a stronger stand on climate change than Harper did.
“We are disappointed by the decision but respect the right of the United States to make the decision,” Trudeau said in a statement. “The Canada-U.S. relationship is much bigger than any one project and I look forward to a fresh start with President Obama to strengthen our remarkable ties in a spirit of friendship and co-operation.”

Environmentalists invoked Indigenous Peoples in their praise of Obama’s move, in which he deemed the project to be not in the national interest.

“The pipeline’s rejection marks a historic victory for farmers, ranchers, tribal nations and the unlikely alliance that formed to fight this uphill, six-year battle that no one believed we’d ever win,” said Bold Nebraska, a group formed specifically to spearhead Keystone XL resistance in that state, in a media release.

Others called it a step in the right direction to combat climate change.

“This represents a courageous leap forward in the climate fight,” said Rhea Suh, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), in a statement. “Rejecting the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline is right for our nation, for our children and for our planet. It would have locked in, for a generation or more, massive development of among the dirtiest fuels on the planet—posing a serious threat to our air, land water, and climate. The proposal, pushed largely by the fossil fuel industry, was a recipe for disaster. In no way was the pipeline in America’s national interest.”

Further, his move should inspire others, Suh said.

“Dangerous climate change is the central environmental challenge of our time, and it’s time for everyone to step up now and meet that challenge,” Suh said.

Those sentiments were echoed by the Sierra Club, whose executive director, Michael Brune, also expressed relief and hope.

“Today President Obama said yes to clean energy and public health, and no to dirty oil and dangerous pollution,” Brune said in a statement. “Stopping the Keystone XL pipeline is a victory for the planet, for the health and well-being of the communities along the pipeline route, and for future generations to come. It also demonstrates the power of the millions of people who raised their voices in opposition to the pipeline, and of the growing movement to end our dependence on dirty fossil fuels.”

The Center for Biological Diversity, too, acknowledged the numerous voices and strong opposition that went into defeating the proposal.

“This is a historic moment, not just for what it means about avoiding the impacts of this disastrous pipeline but for all of those who spoke out for a healthy, livable climate and energy policies that put people and wildlife ahead of pollution and profits,” said Valerie Love with the Center for Biological Diversity, in a media release. “President Obama did the right thing, but he didn’t do it alone: Millions of Americans made their voices heard on this issue, and will continue pressing Obama and other political leaders to do what’s necessary to avoid climate catastrophe.”
November 6, 2015

Tribal, Grassroots, & Treaty Leaders Respond to President Obama Rejecting Keystone XL Pipeline

Indigenous Environmental Network

Washington D.C. – President Obama has rejected the Keystone XL cross-border application filed by TransCanada to the U.S. State Department. This is a huge victory for the Tribal Nations and communities along its proposed route that have been fighting this dirty tar sands project for the past seven years. This rejection is a sincere affirmation of the struggle to protect the sacredness of Mother Earth and her life blood, the water. The following are response statements by Tribal, grassroots and treaty leaders to President Obama’s rejection of Keystone XL cross-border permit application:

Dallas Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network KXL Campaign Organizer, “This is a tremendous victory for all the pipeline fighters who have spent several years fighting the TransCanada “black snake”, Keystone XL! The President’s decision is a clear affirmation of our struggle to defend the sacredness of Mother Earth and to protect the future generations of all our relatives, human and non-human alike. We celebrate this as a win and a powerful step to the greater goals of keeping fossil fuels in the ground and shutting down the tar sands at the source!”

Harold Frazier, Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, “On behalf of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe we are grateful to President Obama for rejecting the Keystone XL pipeline and give thanks to everyone who helped make this happen. We must continue to fight this war against tar sands. We need to stay united with all our Native brothers and sisters here in Canada, and around the world to stop the pollution of our water so our young people can grow up to live good healthy lives.”

Lewis Grassrope, Chairman of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, “In the greatest effort of all indigenous people’s to stop the kxl pipeline our prayers were heard. As its a great day for all as our connections spiritually were answered. Thank you to all for the perseverance, fortitude, humility, and courageous acts to stop this black snake from coming onto our lands. One giant step for our children’s future. A great victory today for all indigenous peoples.”.

David Archambault Jr., Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, “The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe applauds President Obama’s decision to deny the permit to the KXL pipeline project. After several years of vigorous debate by many parties, the president resolved the issue by focusing on the big picture. President Obama’s decision is consistent with Tribal values that respect the environment and honor our roles as guardians of our children’s’ futures.”
A. Gay Kingman, Executive Director of Great Plains Tribal Chairmans Association, “Wopila President Obama for rejecting the Keystone XL. Wopila to all our Relatives who stood strong to oppose the KXL. But, keep the coalitions together because there are more Pipelines proposed and we must protect our Mother Earth for our Future Generations.

Paula Antoine, Chairwoman of Rosebud NO KXL Spirit Camp, Oyate WahacankaWoecun (Shielding the People), “We, along with the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, are extremely honored by President Obama’s decision to reject the Keystone XL pipeline. We have stood united with all those who protect Unci Maka. Our children’s grandchildren will benefit and remember this day as a victory! We affirm our rights as the original caretakers and stewards of the land, resources and oyate. We remain, in solidarity shielding the People. One heart ~ one mind ~ one prayer.”

Faith Spotted Eagle, Ihanktowan Treaty Council Spokesperson, “This is what unity, hard work and breaking down barriers looks like….all for protecting sacred water and land for the generations. Today we stand in thankfulness for Obama, adopted son of the Crow Nation. We stood united in this struggle, Democrat, Republican, Native, Cowboy, Rancher, landowners, urban warriors, grandmas and grandpas, children….. and through this fight against KXL we have come to see each other in a new better, stronger way!”

Frank Waln, Sicangu Lakota, Music Producer and Artist, “For those of us whose homes were on the frontlines of this proposed pipeline, this is a huge step forward. Our efforts to resist all forms of colonization, including natural energy extraction on Indigenous lands are not in vain. I commend all my relatives who have dedicated their time, energy and lives to stopping this pipeline, when society and the government told us otherwise. Indigenous nations are rising. This is only the beginning!”

Aldo Seoane, Wica Agli, “We are excited by the president’s decision to reject Keystone XL. The project not only would have put the environment in harms way but it would have also put the women and children along the pipeline route at a higher risk of domestic and sexual violence. We are encouraged by the president’s choice of people and the environment over politics and big oil.”

Joye Braun, Community Organizer Cheyenne River Sioux reservation, “Today marks a historic day for the people of the Oceti Sakowin, and our allies. I say thank you to President Obama, and Secretary Kerry for seeing the truth behind the Keystone XL pipeline and rejecting the black snake. We must stay vigilant against tar sands and continue our support to our First Nation cousins in Canada who are on the frontline of this world disaster. We will continue to pray and support the fight against tar sands.”

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President Obama rejects Keystone XL pipeline

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

President Barack Obama rejected Friday the construction of the Keystone XL transnational pipeline, in part on grounds that approving the politically contentious project would have undercut U.S. leadership on the world stage in addressing climate change.

The proposed Keystone XL pipeline sought to move daily as many as 830,000 barrels of Canadian crude oil from Alberta tar sands fields to refineries in the Gulf of Mexico. The project would have stretched 1,100 miles, crossing the U.S.-Canadian border in Montana before linking with already-constructed Keystone pipelines. Unlike the southern leg, the northern leg, due to crossing an international border, required a presidential permit.

The president made the announcement before noon in Washington, flanked at the White House by Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry. He said Kerry had informed him Friday morning that "after extensive public outreach, and consultation with other Cabinet agencies, the State Department has decided that the Keystone XL pipeline would not serve the national interests of the United States."

"I agree with that decision," Obama said.

He added that for years Keystone has held an "overinflated role in our political discourse," with supporters and opponents each overstating its potential benefit or harm.

"It became a symbol too often used as a campaign cudgel by both parties rather than a serious policy matter. And all of this obscured the fact that this pipeline would neither be a silver bullet for the economy, as was promised by some, nor the express lane to climate disaster proclaimed by others," Obama said.

As it turns out, the debate over Keystone, first proposed in September 2008, stretched more than double the days (2,604) than the miles (1,179) it would have traveled.

In his comments at the White House, the president briefly outlined the State Department’s decision, saying it concluded the pipeline would not provide a long-term boost to the economy,
that it would not lower gas prices for Americans, and that it would not increase American energy security. In the absence of the pipeline, Obama touted the recent jobs report of 268,000 jobs created in October, and noted gas prices have lowered, down $1 per gallon from 2013. He said the U.S. has become more energy independent through producing more oil nationally while at the same time using less of it.

“So while our politics have been consumed by a debate over whether or not this pipeline would create jobs and lower gas prices, we’ve gone ahead and created jobs and lowered gas prices,” he said.

Steps to increase fuel efficiency and renewable energy while decreasing carbon pollution have established the U.S. as a world leader on climate change, the president said, and has led in part to nations representing almost 90 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions to put forward plans to cut pollution ahead of United Nations climate talks in Paris in December.

"America is now a global leader when it comes to taking serious action to fight climate change. And frankly, approving this project would have undercut that global leadership," he said.

Throughout the project’s lifespan, environmental activists have relentlessly raised Keystone as a "line in the sand" issue, with numerous religious groups joining the push against the pipeline. Many of the groups active in the anti-Keystone campaign celebrated Friday as a monumental victory.

“It has been a long struggle, but the call to care for the earth by turning away from fossil fuels is being heard,” said the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns in a statement.

Patrick Carolan, executive director of Franciscan Action Network (FAN), told NCR he was pleased the president reached a decision that was long overdue. FAN has advocated against the pipeline since 2010, with several of its members arrested at various points outside the White House while protesting. In October, he and other religious leaders met with the State Department to talk about Keystone.

“We wanted to get the message to the White House that we thought this would be a really strong, powerful statement to make before Paris,” he said.

Carolan also viewed the Keystone denial as sending a strong message on the power of grassroots organizing to make a difference.

“Five years ago everybody said Keystone was a foregone conclusion, there’s nothing we could do to stop it. … [When] people of all different faiths and different personalities and different political persuasions come together on an issue, I think we can stop everything from anything, and change can happen,” he said.

TransCanada, the company that sought to build the pipeline, attributed its application rejection to “misplaced symbolism” and said the decision ran counter to numerous studies that found the
pipeline a safer transport option to trains, trucks or tankers and posing minimal environmental impact.

“Through the course of its review, the U.S. State Department issued five very comprehensive and balanced scientific reviews of Keystone XL since 2010. Tens of thousands of pages of evidence from its own employees and agencies irrefutably show Keystone XL is the safest, most environmentally sound way to transport needed energy to Americans,” said Russ Girling, TransCanada president and CEO, in a statement.

TransCanada and its supporters projected the pipeline would create 9,000 U.S. construction jobs and as many as 40,000 related jobs throughout the U.S. supply chain, opponents challenged those figures.

Canadian leadership had supported the project since its proposal, extending to new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who expressed disappointment with the ruling but respected U.S. authority to do so. Obama said he called Trudeau this morning to inform of his decision. Both leaders stressed a desire for both countries to work closer together on numerous issues, including energy and climate change.

Back in the U.S., Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said he was not surprised by the president’s decision, and vowed it would not signal the end for a project important to North American energy independence: “The question remains not if but when Keystone will be built.”

“Our nation’s long-term need for the energy and jobs Keystone would provide will certainly outlast the little over a year remaining in the term of the current Administration,” said McConnell, who in January made Keystone the first order of business for the 114th Congress, in a statement.

Likewise, newly elected Speaker of the House Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) said Obama’s decision “isn’t surprising, but it is sickening. By rejecting this pipeline, he is rejecting tens of thousands of good-paying jobs,” while catering to special interests.

Rather than prioritize a Keystone revival, Obama challenged Congress to pass a bipartisan infrastructure plan he estimated would create more than 30 times as many jobs than the pipeline. In his own statement, Kerry said the U.S. needs to prioritize renewable energy opportunities and transition its manufacturing base to related jobs.

“Clean energy is not just the solution to climate change; it’s also one of the greatest economic opportunities the world has ever seen. If we continue to make smart choices, American businesses -- and American workers -- stand to benefit enormously,” he said.

In February, Obama vetoed a bill put forth through the Republican-led Congress that sought to fast track the pipeline’s construction and bypass the State Department review. On Wednesday, the State Department rejected a request by TransCanada to delay review of the project.
During the summer, Mercy Sr. Mary Pendergast visited the Alberta tar sands, comparing the large holes in the earth she saw there to a war zone where “sickening orange and yellow green pools of water fill smaller craters.”

The Sisters of Mercy, like other religious groups, have engaged the State Department about Keystone, most recently in 2014. The pipeline has been not only a national concern, but one for sisters in in Latin America, the Philippines and areas experiencing melting glaciers, rising seas and extreme weather, said Sr. Patricia McDermott, president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

“By this action, the President has signaled that we join the world in recognizing climate change and our dependence on fossil fuels as issues that must be addressed,” she said in a statement.

Dallas Goldtooth, the primary organizer against the pipeline of the Indigenous Environmental Network, said Obama’s decision validated the efforts of numerous tribes, particularly those living near the Canadian tar sands.

“With the rejection of Keystone XL we have not only protected the sacredness of the land and water we have also helped our Cree & Dene relatives at the source take one step closer to shutting down the tar sands,” he said.

Eli McCarthy, director of justice and peace for the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, saw significance in Obama’s connection of his decision to climate change, in that it created political space for him to operate in Paris.

“It sounds like he’s going to really make this a priority in the last part of his term, and I think there’s going to be more and more Catholics that are going to start to really support and try to move that forward,” said McCarthy, noting the past year has seen male religious prioritize creation care, culminating in a resolution passed in August.

“President Obama is the first world leader to reject a project because of its effect on the climate. That gives him new stature as an environmental leader, and it eloquently confirms the five years and millions of hours of work that people of every kind put into this fight,” said Bill McKibben, co-founder of 350.org and one of the anti-Keystone leaders.

May Boeve, 350.org executive director, added that the Keystone rejection, while “a clear sign” of the movement’s strength, doesn’t represent the end of the road, saying it “will not rest” until the U.S. economy shifts fully from fossil fuels.

http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/president-obama-rejects-keystone-xl-pipeline

November 8, 2015

Leeds Diocese 'Climate Change Conference'
The Leeds Justice and Peace Day on Saturday was opened by the Chair of the Justice and Peace Commission, John Battle, who reflected that the Commission has been highlighting the Church's social teaching for 40 years, and its current campaigns are: 'Poverty in the UK', 'Palestine', and 'Climate Change'. With the help of three speakers the Saturday event focused on Climate Change and links with the Pope's environment encyclical 'Laudato Si'. It was held at St Benedict's Parish Centre in Garforth, and, at the end of the day, panels along one side of the centre showed more than 200 actions which around 50 participants had suggested. A small group of participants had joined the day from Sheffield in Hallam Diocese.

Actions included studying 'Laudato Si' using the Columban study programme and supporting awareness raising work leading up to the Paris climate talks, plus signing the CAFOD Climate petition. Participants will also be examining their pension funds and looking into ethical investment. It was pointed out that the National Justice and Peace Network Environment Group recently wrote to all the bishops to give suggestions for a Diocesan Environmental Policy. Tackling vested interests would be followed up with Global Justice Now, the London Mining Network, the Ecumnical Council for Corporate Responsibility and Columbans UK. A 'Laudato Si' prayer card would be widely distributed throughout Leeds Diocese. Personal lifestyle changes were aired, with the aim of reducing carbon footprints.

Ellen Teague of Columban JPIC pointed out key issues in Laudato Si' - Climate Change, Biodiversity and Water - and the concept of integral ecology where Pope Francis says that we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. Climate Change is a moral issue and we must hear "both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor". Indeed, "ecological conversion" is called for.

Andy Challinor, Professor of Climate Impacts at the University of Leeds, spoke of his research work examining the impact of Climate Change on food production and security. He is currently working on the UK Food Security Risk Assessment - evaluating the risks to our own food security arising from Climate Change. Although the UK is more buffered than tropical regions, he said, already half a million British people lack good access to food and the European Union throws away 89 million tonnes of food each year. There needs to be more "systemic resilience" in food production. "There is no evidence for an optimistic view of Climate Change" he said, "but I am ever optimistic about human resilience and action by faith-based groups".

Alex Scrivener, the Policy Officer with Global Justice Now (formerly the World Development Movement), saw little evidence of political will mounting for a strong deal at the UN Climate talks in Paris at the end of this month. He suggested some "righteous anger" was needed to demand justice for poor countries suffering the world impacts of Climate Change. "If Climate Change is not a reason to have righteous anger then I don't know what is" he suggested. There should be significant lobbying of corporations, particularly over such trade deals as the TTIP, which undermine the rights of the nation states to protect their environment. "There is massive vested interest in continuing the fossil fuel economy", he warned, but felt faith-based groups
could be a powerful force for tackling economic powers. He agreed with Pope Francis that "a true ecological approach is a social approach" and thought 'Laudato Si' was a powerful and influential document.

The speakers were all impressed with the justice, peace and ecology commitment of St. Benedict's parish, which includes setting up a parish garden and supporting fair trade. The parish is working towards the Livesimply Parish Award, which is being promoted throughout Leeds Diocese.

Read more here: www.leedsjp.org.uk


November 9, 2015

How an Unlikely Coalition of Environmental Activists Stopped Keystone XL

By Anthony Swift, Canada Project Director, NRDC
Huffington Post

A decade ago, Susan Casey-Lefkowitz got one of her first eye-opening looks at the destruction wrought by the fast-expanding Canadian tar sands industry. A lawyer who specialized in international environmental issues, Casey-Lefkowitz was now a policy advocate at the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council, focused on the group's growing work in Canada.

Sitting in a darkened hotel conference room with allies from Canadian activist groups, Casey-Lefkowitz (the only U.S. representative in the room) watched a set of slides showing the extent of the industry's ugly spread in northern Alberta, and she knew that the environmental movement would need to mobilize against the devastation - and its potential consequences for the entire planet.

As she would later describe it:

"I didn't want to face my grandchildren 20 years down the road and know that I had made the wrong choice at a crossroads moment for fighting climate change."

Tar sands weren't an entirely new threat. At least as far back as the 1930s, boosters had been proclaiming the thick deposits of bitumen in the boreal forest "probably the largest potential oil field in the world."

By 2004, production had reached one million barrels per day, and oil companies were salivating over the possibility of more production and greater profits. But the challenge wasn't just getting the thick, silty deposits out of the ground -- which required some of the largest and most destructive open-pit mining operations on earth. Oil companies also had to get the deposits to
refineries, and then to market. If the industry were to keep expanding, that would mean more pipelines out of Canada and into the United States.

In the months after her eye-opening experience, Casey-Lefkowitz and her NRDC colleague Liz Barratt-Brown began working with their Canadian counterparts including the Pembina Institute, Environmental Defence Canada, and Greenpeace Canada to fight the industry's expansion. They created a strategy to raise public awareness about what was already happening -- and how much worse it could get if the industry's plans went ahead unimpeded.

Their fears were well founded. In September 2008, while U.S. senators Barack Obama and John McCain were still running for president, a powerful, well-connected Canadian company filed an application with the U.S. State Department. TransCanada wanted quick approval for a 1,700-mile pipeline that would ship tar sands crude directly to refineries on the Gulf Coast, where the oil could easily be exported overseas.

Along the way, the Keystone XL pipeline would cross environmentally sensitive and agriculturally important areas, including Nebraska's Sandhills and the Ogallala Aquifer. It would threaten tribal homelands and increase carbon pollution. Oil spills along its rout -- almost guaranteed, given the pipeline industry's safety record -- would expose farms, ranches, and communities to devastating economic and environmental damage. And yet despite all that, the project attracted little public attention at the time -- and, it seemed, there was scant chance of stopping it.

Well into President Obama's second term in office, after years of contentious debate and grassroots activism, Keystone XL has been rejected once and for all. This is the behind-the-scenes story of how a small group of unlikely allies turned what everyone expected to be a routine governmental approval process into one of the most heated environmental battles in U.S. history -- and prevailed.

**Forging Alliances**

In 2006, Canada brought its marketing campaign for tar sands oil to Washington, D.C., in the form of an exhibit at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall. Sponsored by the oil industry and the province of Alberta, it featured cheerful activities for children and a photographic display that purported to show how tar sands mines and wetlands could co-exist. NRDC and its allies were on the scene -- distributing fliers and explaining the real impact of tar sands mining, telling the performing musicians how ugly it was to see this industry portrayed as "folklife."

In those early days, the work to stop tar sands was unrewarding. Casey-Lefkowitz and Barratt-Brown trudged from congressional offices and federal agencies to the White House, armed with photos and sounding the alarm. They showed anyone who would listen images of Canada's lush green boreal forest and what happened once the industry dug in -- a lunar landscape of mines that stretched one to two miles across, surrounded by enormous mounds of sulfur and pet coke from refineries. Predictably, officials were horrified. But it was hard to get traction for what many
viewed as a Canadian problem. Twice, NRDC and its allies had fought pipelines that crossed the border to U.S. refineries; twice, they lost those battles.

Then TransCanada applied for a permit to build Keystone XL. This project was so large and potentially devastating, its consequences so far-reaching and grave, that it gave NRDC and other environmentalist activists the basis to launch a major campaign against the tar sands.

As a first step, NRDC joined forces with Corporate Ethics International, a nonprofit that works to promote corporate responsibility, including in the energy industry. CEI had commissioned research into tar sands oil and the awful consequences of its potential expansion, including the devastation in Canada and contribution to climate change.

CEI's Michael Marx became the coordinator of an international campaign against tar sands, and Kenny Bruno, who was affiliated with CEI, coordinated the U.S. effort. Working with NRDC, Marx and Bruno recruited other groups to the cause, including Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, the League of Conservation Voters, and Oil Change International.

Their task was daunting.

The American public knew almost nothing about tar sands production or its drawbacks. And tar sands boosters had a good storyline to sell: Why not get oil from friendly Canada instead of unstable, often unfriendly countries in the Middle East? Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper was a huge fan of tar sands, along with the well-funded and politically powerful oil industry and a host of influential Washington insiders. The rag-tag environmentalists were outnumbered and could easily be outspent.

Barratt-Brown called U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat and political leader on climate change issues, to ask for advice.

"He immediately shot back that we needed senators from along the proposed route," she recalls.

Local opposition would be critical to any stop-the-pipeline effort, and that meant Plains States senators would have to hear from their constituents. In largely conservative and often oil-friendly states (KXL would cross Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas), that seemed like a tall order.

**Political Pressure**

In 2009, President Obama planned to make his first trip abroad--to Canada, one of America's closest allies. For those who wanted to bring attention to the tar sands and the KXL project, it was a huge opportunity. The State Department would determine whether the pipeline was in the national interest, but it was the president who would have final say over whether to issue a permit.
Just before Obama left for his Canadian trip, NASA's James Hansen, one of America's leading climate scientists, wrote an op-ed warning that the tar sands were "one of our planet's greatest threats." Later, Hansen would famously say that if Canada were to fully exploit its vast tar sands reserves, it would be "game over" for the climate.

In Ottawa, Obama noted activists' concerns, saying:

We are very grateful for the relationship that we have with Canada, Canada being our largest energy supplier. But I think increasingly that we have to take into account that the issue of climate change and greenhouse gases is something that's going to have an impact on all of us.

Despite this encouraging signal, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would later say that her department was "inclined" to sign off on the KXL project. Clearly, one scientist's op-ed wouldn't be enough to reach the administration. In 2010, the State Department issued the first draft of an environmental impact report required before a pipeline permit could be issued. The finding: Keystone XL would have "limited adverse" impacts. Tar sands proponents celebrated.

But the State Department wouldn't make the decision alone; other federal agencies needed to weigh in, and the Environmental Protection Agency countered that State's assessment was "inadequate." It recommended reviewing a broader range of environmental issues, including the potential impacts of a major spill. In a foreshadowing of debates to come, the EPA also stated: "We believe the national security implications of expanding the nation's long-term commitment to a relatively high carbon source should also be considered."

Just 10 days later, the EPA's warning proved justified.

A pipeline operated by TransCanada's biggest competitor, Enbridge Inc., ruptured in Michigan, spilling nearly one million gallons of tar sands oil into the Kalamazoo River. Hundreds of residents went to the hospital complaining of health problems. And now the activists had another revealing photo to carry around by way of warning -- the Enbridge pipeline looked as if a bomb had exploded inside it.

Enbridge initially denied that its busted pipeline had been carrying tar sands oil, but it was forced to retract after NRDC's onEarth magazine asked tough questions and prodded investigators to confirm it. In a subsequent report, NRDC and its allies demonstrated that "dilbit" -- the chemically diluted bitumen carried by tar sands pipelines -- is "significantly more corrosive to pipeline systems than conventional crude."

In other words, tar sands pipelines will, inevitably, leak, with greater impact on the environment due to the heavy, thick nature of tar sands crude (which sank to the bottom of the Kalamazoo River, rather than floating on top).

Tar sands spills require "significant personnel, equipment, supplies and other resources" for cleanup, the NRDC report concluded. And indeed, cleanup of the Kalamazoo has cost more than $1 billion. Five years later, it is still ongoing.
Grassroots Mobilization

Armed with graphic evidence that tar sands oil was a threat to their land, homes and rivers, NRDC and its allies put new energy into connecting with the farmers, ranchers, and tribespeople along the Keystone XL route -- the ones who would suffer most directly from a spill like the one in Kalamazoo.

One of their staunchest new supporters was Jane Kleeb, a young progressive married to a Nebraska farmer. She had founded Bold Nebraska with the idea of fostering community action in the state; the more she learned about the dangers of the pipeline, the more she realized that this was a cause that would unify Nebraskans, who learn in grade school of the importance of protecting the Ogallala Aquifer that provides much of their state's water. A threat to the aquifer was a threat even unlikely allies would understand.

One of those unlikely allies was a Republican rancher named Randy Thompson. His family had raised cattle for generations on land that TransCanada would need to build the pipeline. He became the face of a campaign called All Risk, No Reward, and "I Stand With Randy" became a common slogan on the signs and T-shirts of pipeline opponents.

As groups like these coalesced, a national movement was being born. The No Tar Sands Oil campaign, sponsored by groups including CEI, NRDC, Sierra Club, 350.org, National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and Rainforest Action Network, had a fresh strategy.

In the past, Secretary Clinton and the State Department had been the focus of protest. The disastrous ruling of 2010 led the groups to switch their attention to President Obama. Increasingly the activists named him as the decision-maker and directed all public appeals to the White House.

In early 2011, on the eve of a meeting between Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Harper, 86 groups representing millions of Americans -- from the Idaho Wildlife Federation to the Texas Conservation Alliance -- signed a letter urging the president to reject the pipeline.

That spring, the writer and activist Bill McKibben, founder of the group 350.org, contacted coalition members about the pipeline campaign, testing their appetite for civil disobedience in Washington. All were in favor. In the course of two hot weeks during the summer of 2011, more than 1,200 people were arrested during sit-ins on the sidewalk in front of the White House, from farmers and ranchers to actress Daryl Hannah.

This was the turning point for the tar sands movement, the moment when James Hansen's science and Bill McKibben's convening power were directed at Keystone XL, and the world started to take notice.

Young people swarmed to the movement, which led to some tense confrontations. In October 2011, pipeline opponents were camping out overnight to get a speaking slot at the next day's State Department hearing in Washington. They faced off against pipeline proponents, and CEI's
Bruno received a late-night call from a demonstration organizer, asking him to come help ease tensions.

At the next day's hearing, a Nebraska rancher's daughter broke down in tears and implored union members who supported the pipeline: "We are workers, too. Don't you care about our jobs?"

One month later, exactly a year before President Obama's second election, 12,000 people encircled the White House to proclaim: "Yes We Can... Stop the Pipeline." John H. Adams, the founding president of NRDC and one of the giants of the environmental movement, was there. "Our ring around the White House was 10 people deep at points," he wrote, calling it the "largest environmental demonstration I've ever witnessed."

Casey-Lefkowitz was there, too.

"We could feel the ground shifting politically," she says. Surrounding the White House was symbolically powerful. So was the broad diversity of those speaking out against the pipeline. In Bruno's words: "It was a giant embrace of the president by people who had supported his candidacy. But this was not unconditional love. It required climate action, starting with Keystone XL."

**Bringing the Heat**

With a broad coalition of activists fighting in the streets, NRDC and its allies also continued to marshal intellectual and economic arguments against the pipeline.

- Retired Brigadier General Steven Anderson, the Army's chief logistician in Iraq in 2006-2007, testified to Congress that Keystone XL would "degrade our national security" by keeping the nation addicted to oil.
- More than 100 scientists wrote to President Obama to oppose KXL, with one group of 20 climate scientists declaring that the pipeline was "not only not in the national interest, it's also not in the planet's best interest."
- Researchers from Rainforest Action Network and National Wildlife Federation uncovered information from TransCanada showing that Keystone XL might raise oil prices in the Midwest.
- An Oil Change International report called "Exporting Energy Security" showed that much of the oil from Keystone XL would ultimately be exported.
- NRDC pointed out that, in less than a year of operation, the first part of the Keystone pipeline networked had leaked 12 times. (In subsequent years, NRDC would continue to document all the ways in which TransCanada had amassed a terrible safety record.)
- The Cornell Global Labor Institute released a report showing that Keystone XL would create no more than 2,000 jobs for two years. And institute staff, along with a young First Nation leader from Alberta named Melina Laboucan Massimo, were instrumental in recruiting the first labor unions to oppose the pipeline.

The president appeared to be paying attention. In November, he told a Nebraska radio station that he shared concerns about the pipeline's route through the Sandhills and Ogallala Aquifer. He
suspended the State Department review, asking the department to consider an alternative route and address environmental concerns.

The backlash was ferocious.

In the closing days of Congress in 2011, Republicans presented a bill that required a decision on Keystone XL within 90 days, attaching it to a must-pass tax bill. Forced into a decision, President Obama rejected the project, at least for the moment, noting that his decision was based solely by the "rushed and arbitrary deadline" congressional Republicans had imposed.

TransCanada promptly segmented the pipeline and submitted a fresh proposal -- one for a southern leg that didn't cross the Canadian border. NRDC led a swift and thorough response, engaging experts and submitting hundreds of pages of technical input to the government, including 50,000 comments from activists. (Subsequent efforts would generate hundreds of thousands of comments opposing the pipeline.)

Facing a reelection campaign, Obama now took a cautious approach. Instead of rejecting Keystone XL outright, he agreed to an expedited permitting process for the pipeline's southern leg. TransCanada had achieved a partial victory -- but only partial. It could build in Oklahoma and Texas, but the stretch of pipeline crossing into Canada was the key to expanding the tar sands industry, and it remained in the president's power.

Maintaining Momentum

As the president sought reelection, powerful donors urged him - in public and private -- to reject the pipeline once and for all. As he settled in for a second term, more than 35,000 people marched on the National Mall in bone-chilling temperatures in February 2013 for the "Forward on Climate" rally. They included busloads of college students, religious groups, tribal representatives, landowners, business leaders, the Hip Hop Caucus, and National Nurses United. The coalition continued to grow.

In June 2013, in a major climate speech at Georgetown University, President Obama addressed Keystone XL, saying: "Our national interest will only be served if this project does not significantly exacerbate the problem of carbon pollution."

This was significant.

The president had established a climate test for the project, said Danielle Droitsch, who was now NRDC's Canada project director. (Casey-Lefkowitz had moved up to lead the group's international program.) "Keystone XL was clearly a driver of tar sands expansion, and therefore would make climate change worse," Droitsch said. If activists could make that clear, the president's own test would prohibit him from approving the project.

"What was profound is that the president said that impact on climate would determine whether it was in the national interest," said CEI's Bruno. "And it was the doggedness of Keystone XL protesters that had brought him to that realization."
That doggedness would need to continue. Over the next year, the debate continued to drag out. In early 2014, the State Department issued a final -- and somewhat ambiguous -- environmental impact assessment. Other federal agencies were then asked to weigh in. In Nebraska, court challenges to the pipeline route -- and a state law that had allowed TransCanada to use eminent domain to seize land for the project -- kept the route in doubt. Representatives of 16 Indian tribes in three states also challenged TransCanada's right to cross their land.

Congressional Republicans, though, urged on by fossil fuel interests, kept trying for force the project through. In January 2015, after taking control of both houses of Congress, they sent a pipeline-approval bill to the White House. President Obama vetoed it. Shortly thereafter, the Environmental Protection Agency weighed in on the State Department's environmental review, concluding that Keystone XL would lead to expanded tar sands oil production, and as a result, significantly increase carbon pollution, just as NRDC's analysts had argued for years.

Today the seven-year battle finally ended with President Obama's rejection of the Keystone XL proposal. "America is now a global leader when it comes to taking serious action to fight climate change," the president said. "And, frankly, approving this project would have undercut that global leadership."

Bruno, who spent more than six years organizing groups to fight the pipeline, says: "If the Keystone XL campaign has raised awareness about the threat of tar sands and slowed its expansion -- and the evidence is that it has -- then we did the job we set out to do. The heroes of this story are the activists who kept coming out to meet the president, who held signs, who sent letters and signed petitions and traveled and never tired."

For Casey-Lefkowitz, the journey that started in that darkened room has reached a conclusion -- but it's far from the end. "I predict that down the road," she says, "we'll be able to look back at the Keystone XL campaign as a moment when the American environmental movement was rejuvenated to confront, and eventually reverse, climate change."

Written with the NRDC editorial staff.


November 9, 2015

Young Activists and the Long Haul

By Rev. Jim Conn
Capital & Main

Old people often shake their heads and mutter about “the younger generation.” Or they’ll say to one another, “It’s not the way it used to be,” with a solemn look of dismay as if the world was
“going to hell in a hand basket.” That’s the problem when an elder like me writes about human-caused climate change: I come close to being a cliché.

Perhaps such sentiments come from nostalgia for a time earlier in one’s life, an era viewed as simpler, slower and more familiar. Friends occasionally email me photo collections that supposedly represent a decade such as the 1950s without a single photo of anyone of color. It’s as if no one other than white people lived in this country. On the other hand, since most filmgoers are younger than my cohort, and if the top 10 grossing movies of a typical week are any indication, most people attending movies today choose deeply dystopian films about the violent end of civilization as we know it.

Reading the material about climate change that’s found on the Internet or stumbling across short pieces in the daily newspaper about freak storms in Yemen, or the diminishing trade winds in Hawaii, would confirm that maybe we are not headed in a direction that could likely sustain civilization. Immersion in this kind of information easily leads to apocalyptic thinking – “The end is near, be very afraid.”

Alternatively, I am encouraged by the energy, courage and commitment of so many young people. Recently we visited a friend of our generation whose son led the Greenpeace campaign that attempted to stop Shell Oil’s Arctic exploration vessel from leaving Portland. Repelling off a bridge to stop a ship requires dedication, yes — also a set of skills I do not have and never did. Another friend’s son works on the restoration of the San Francisco Bay. Climate justice issues attract young people from Houston to Harvard. They organize demonstrations like last year’s People’s Climate March that filled New York City’s streets with 300,000, and they lead blockades like those that derailed the Keystone XL pipeline.

Grace Cagle was only 23 at the time she launched the KXL campaign. She was studying biology at North Texas University when she became an activist. “I know it’s going to take massive, almost unimaginable system change,” she told Wen Stephenson, the author of What We’re Fighting for Now Is Each Other. That’s a far cry from the environmentalism of the established conservation organizations that cut deals with Big Oil and that appear to worry about economic growth as much as the habitability of the planet.

Tim DeChristopher was the guy who made the winning bid at an oil auction in Utah a few years back. He served two years in federal prison because he didn’t intend to actually exploit his purchase — which he also didn’t have the money to buy. Now a seminary student at Harvard Divinity, he seeks to deepen his core values, which, he expects, will be required to stop human-caused climate change. When he speaks of this he talks about “this new challenge of maintaining our humanity as we navigate this period of rapid and intense change.”

Such young deep-ecology activists understand that the struggle will be over everything, that something profound will be required of us, whether or not we save the earth.

Perhaps, in this context, Worcester Polytechnic Institute philosophy professor Roger Gottlieb asked the right question: “Even if we won’t win, should we stop trying to live with love?”
Eve Ensler, famous for writing *The Vagina Monologues*, might have answered this question when she finished a thought-provoking essay on sex trafficking by saying: “This led me to love, thinking about love, how the failure of this century is a failure of love. What are we being called to do, what are we really made of, each of us alive on this planet today? What kind of love, what depth of love, what fierceness and searing love is required?”

As the human-caused climate change crisis sharpens, the most difficult task will be to continue to love our neighbors, to love one another, as most religious traditions put it. That will require a fortitude and courage beyond our imagination. To love will call upon our deepest reserves, whether we are old or young or somewhere in between.


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**November 10, 2015**

Berkley Center symposium panel examines relationship between religion and climate change

By Justin Plumb
The Georgetown Voice

On Nov. 9, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs in conjunction with the U.S. Department of State held a symposium on religion and climate change in the Healey Family Student Center.

The symposium featured a panel discussion on climate concerns in a religious context. Moderating the panel was Professor of Ethics and Global Development Drew Christiansen, S.J. The panel included a number of academic experts on issues that intertwined religion and the environment including Mary Evelyn Tucker, research scholar at Yale University, Akbar Ahmed, professor at American University, Julia Watts Belser, professor at Georgetown University, and Willis Jenkins, professor at the University of Virginia.

A major theme of the panel was placing climate concerns in the context of the different world religions. Tucker emphasized that Catholicism’s attention to the environment didn’t start with the recent concerns posed by Pope Francis. “I want to suggest that this movement is at least two decades old,” she said. She cited statements by various leaders in the Church that related to the environment dating back to 1987 when a bishop in the Philippines made a statement calling for environmental protection.

Tucker also noted that more religions than just Catholicism see the importance of mitigating climate change. “It was in 2000 and 2001 that [my husband and I] held one of the first conferences on religion and climate change at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge and published a volume, *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change? Views of All the World’s Religions,*” she said.
Others panelists went on to explain various religion’s doctrine that related to climate change. Ahmed discussed Islam’s relationship with the Earth. “Islam is the religion of green. It’s color is green,” he said. “From early Islam, read the rules of war from the time of the first caliph Abu Bakar. A Muslim in the midst of war cannot touch the foliage because nature and the Earth belong to God.”

Watts Belser spoke of Judaism by relating an ancient Jewish story to globalization where one group of feasters celebrated safety from Caesar while Caesar’s men slaughtered Jews on the other side of the mountain and the feasters did not know. “I think of globalization like a light which shines brighter and brighter on a few people and the rest are in darkness wiped out, they simply can’t be see. So, one side did not know about the other,” she said, quoting author Arundhati Roy.

The panel also talked about a number of other climate issues, including the possible solutions to the climate crisis, and Jenkins warned the panel of some solutions’ intentions. “We have a high incentive to do something but not that much, and to pass off the problem as much as possible to future generations under the cover of having done something,” he said. “We could take [climate change]as a problem to be fixed and … the North Atlantic World has some really great ways of fixing it – they all involve climate engineering and carbon markets. What will these things do? They will reinscribe the advantages of the North Atlantic World into the climate. That’s a real peril.”


November 13, 2015

Christians set out on climate 'pilgrimage' from London to Paris

Members of different denominations embark on a two week long march to the Paris climate change talks to raise awareness of environmental issues

By Emma Howard
The Guardian

“Not getting lost in London will probably be the first hurdle,” laughed Jade Till, a teacher from Stroud, before adding that walking 19 miles on a cold November day will also be a challenge.

Sat in the crypt of St Martin’s-in-the-Fields on the edge of Trafalgar Square on Friday, Till was about to walk 200 miles to Paris on a two week “pilgrimage” to crunch UN climate change talks where world leaders aim to negotiate a new deal on limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

She is joined by 44 other Christians, among them Methodists, Baptists and Catholics, from 18-year-old students to 75-year-old retirees. Many more will join for smaller sections along the way as the group stop to give talks and stay with schools, churches and environmental groups.
“What we are trying to do is to get the church to see that the care of God’s creation, the care of the Earth is central to our Christian life and not a nice addition for some people who are keen on it. This is one of the key things about being a Christian today,” Bishop of Salisbury, Nick Holtam, the lead Bishop on the environment for the Church of England (CoE) told the Guardian.

“Those of you making the journey will feel it through the soles of your feet. It’s a very physical thing you are about to do. It is November – cold days, wet weather – physically it will be a challenge,” he told the “pilgrims” before leading a service to mark the journey.

Holtam is not the only church leader calling for stronger action on climate change within faith communities. Many hope that the Pope’s landmark climate change encyclical on the issue will galvanise believers worldwide, and in particular sceptics in the US. Islamic leaders and the Dalai Lama have issued similar calls to action.

On Friday the “pilgrims” walked 16 miles through Whitehall and across Westminster Bridge to Banstead, a few miles inside the M25. Other days will see the group cross through countryside, towns and along a disused railway. The longest day is 19 miles.

After taking the ferry from Newhaven to Dieppe, they will arrive in Paris in two weeks time and join the climate change march taking place there and other cities around the world. They will also deliver a series of petitions from faith organisations to Christiana Figueres, the Costa Rican diplomat leading the UN’s climate negotiations.

Kevin and Ros Durrant from Gloucester, both 56, were prompted to join the pilgrimage after hearing economist Nicholas Stern speak at the Hay Festival in May.

“It was a bit of a throwaway line – but he said that the faith communities could be doing more in the run-up to the conference. It prompted us to come and find out what the Baptist church is doing,” said Ros Durrant.

“Like lots of people we’ve been armchair environmentalists for a long time and we wanted to show our commitment in some way,” added Kevin.

The pair have only done “social pub-to-pub walking” before and have been training for three months. Their church is in the process of being credited as an “eco-congregation” for taking environmental measures such as getting energy from renewable sources, teaching on environmental issues and encouraging members of the congregation to make lifestyle changes.

Other environmentalists around the world are also taking a symbolic journey to the talks. Yeb Saño, the Filipino diplomat who shot to fame after breaking down and leading a two week fast at climate talks in Poland two years ago, has already been on the road for six weeks as part of a 1,500km “people’s pilgrimage” from Rome to the French capital.

Two climate scientists have gone many steps further, leaving their desks to walk and cycle from the two polar regions to the conference in an effort to raise awareness.
Indigenous Stories: Enduring Memories of Ancient Sea Rise

By John Upton via Climate Central

To most of us, the rush of the oceans that followed the last ice age seems like a prehistoric epoch. But the historic occasion was dutifully recorded — coast to coast — by the original inhabitants of the land Down Under.

Without using written languages, Australian tribes passed memories of life before, and during, post-glacial shoreline inundations through hundreds of generations as high-fidelity oral history. Some tribes can still point to islands that no longer exist — and provide their original names.

That’s the conclusion of linguists and a geographer, who have together identified 18 Aboriginal stories — many of which were transcribed by early settlers before the tribes that told them succumbed to murderous and disease-spreading immigrants from afar — that they say accurately described geographical features that predated the last post-ice age rising of the seas.

“It’s quite gobsmacking to think that a story could be told for 10,000 years,” Nicholas Reid, a linguist at Australia’s University of New England specializing in Aboriginal Australian languages, said. “It’s almost unimaginable that people would transmit stories about things like islands that are currently underwater accurately across 400 generations.”

The Australian National University led research, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, tracked prehistoric changes in sea levels. The study included this figure, showing the oceans rising more than 100 meters (330 feet) during the past 20,000 years. How could such tales survive hundreds of generations without being written down?

“There are aspects of storytelling in Australia that involved kin-based responsibilities to tell the stories accurately,” Reid said. That rigor provided “cross-generational scaffolding” that “can keep a story true.”

Reid and a fellow linguist teamed up with Patrick Nunn, a geography professor at the University of the Sunshine Coast. They combed through documented Aboriginal Australian stories for tales describing times when sea levels were lower than today. The team analyzed the contours of the land where the stories were told and used scientific reconstructions of prehistoric sea levels to date the origins of each of the stories — back to times when fewer than 10 million people were thought to have inhabited the planet.
Nunn has drafted a paper describing sea level rise history in the 18 identified Aboriginal Australian stories, which he plans to publish in a peer-reviewed journal. He’s also scouring the globe for similar examples of stories that describe ancient environmental change.

“There’s a comparably old tradition among the Klamath of Oregon that must be at least 7,700 years old – it refers to the last eruption of Mount Mazama, which formed Crater Lake,” Nunn said. “I’m also working on ancient inundation stories and myths from India, and I’ve been trying to stimulate some interest among Asian scholars.”

The highlights of the results of the trio’s preliminary analysis of six of the ancient Australian tales was presented during an indigenous language conference in Japan. The stories describe permanent coastal flooding. In some cases, they describe times when dry land occupied space now submerged by water. In others, they tell of wading out to islands that can now only be reached by boat.

“This paper makes the case that endangered Indigenous languages can be repositories for factual knowledge across time depths far greater than previously imagined,” the researchers wrote in their paper, “forcing a rethink of the ways in which such traditions have been dismissed.”


November 17, 2015

Promoting Environmental Awareness Among Practicing Hindus

By Kirk Semple
New York Times

On an overcast morning this month, a dozen or so people, most of them Hindus, gathered in a circle on the shore of Jamaica Bay and bowed their heads as a priest invoked the deities.

The location they had chosen, next to Cross Bay Boulevard in southern Queens, has for years been a popular site for New York’s Hindus to conduct rituals that involve the casting of religious offerings into the water, including food, statuary and fabric. Many of the items later wash ashore as flotsam.

But on this particular morning, the group was seeking divine inspiration for a countervailing reason: to clean up the debris left by their fellow Hindus. “This beach, this water, is our mother,” said the priest, Arjunen Armogan, who leads a temple in Jamaica, Queens. “We’re supposed to keep it clean, just as we look after our mother.”

The effort was part of a campaign by Sadhana, a four-year-old Hindu group based in New York, to spread environmental awareness and best practices among fellow believers.
For the past two years, members of the group and other volunteers have gathered once a month at the south end of the Joseph P. Addabbo Memorial Bridge, which links Howard Beach and Broad Channel, to clean the beaches lining Cross Bay Boulevard, popular places for Hindus to perform the rituals. The group’s leaders have also visited Hindu temples to speak with priests and their congregations about adapting ancient traditions to modern environmental regulations.

The effort has challenged cultural conventions and caused friction within the Hindu population. But officials with the National Park Service, which manages the bay as part of Gateway National Recreation Area, said the project had contributed to a significant reduction in the amount of debris left by Hindus in the past couple of years.

“In New York, I’ve seen it go from something that is taboo to something that is acknowledged and talked about,” said Sunita Viswanath, a founder of Sadhana, who was recognized by the White House this year as a Champion of Change for her faith-based environmental work. “It gives me so much hope.”

Sadhana is seeking to strengthen the liberal voice in the Hindu population and become a flag-bearer for social justice and social action. Its leaders have spoken out in favor of gay marriage and against homophobia and Islamophobia, among other issues. And they have taken a particularly strong stance against the caste system.

“We want to stand for human rights and justice for all,” Ms. Viswanath said. “If the rights of Hindus have been violated, we will stand in protest of that violation. If Hindus perpetrate an atrocity, we will stand against that.”

Their efforts have met some resistance, the group’s leaders say.

“It’s hard to tell someone not to do something they’ve been doing for decades,” said Aminta Kilawan, a Sadhana founder who serves as a legislative analyst for the New York City Council.

The group has focused its environmental lobbying on the temples of the Indo-Caribbean population, which has a large presence in Queens, especially Richmond Hill and Ozone Park, just north of Jamaica Bay.

At the heart of the matter is the practice known as puja, in which Hindus make offerings to the gods to commemorate births, deaths, marriages and other key events.

In India, the Ganges River is the most important site for such rituals. But in New York City, Hindus have made do with other bodies of water, especially Jamaica Bay.

Parks officials tried for years to make a dent in the litter problem by doing their own outreach among the Hindu population, visiting temples and speaking at Hindu events.

Their campaign received a significant lift with the cooperation of Sadhana’s members, who brought to the green puja campaign, called Project Prithvi, the advantage of being Hindu themselves.
While the problem is still chronic — the group’s last cleanup of the year, on Nov. 7, netted 40 bags of trash in three hours, with ritual debris still littering the shoreline — parks officials say they have seen a measurable reduction in the amount of waste left behind by worshipers.

“People are getting the message and I think it’s making a big change,” said Keith White, Gateway’s coordinator of volunteers. “The message comes across a lot better when it comes from within their own community.”

Daniel M. Hendrick, who has written a book about Jamaica Bay and is finishing a documentary on the same subject, said Sadhana had “transformed” the relationship between the Parks Service and the Hindu population, making it “less us-versus-them.”

“They’re changing the minds from inside,” Mr. Hendrick said.

Sadhana’s members have sought to show how religious practice can be compatible with environmental awareness, and have insisted that while the submersion of objects in water is important, worshipers need not leave them there.

The basic message: Leave no trace.

“Use saris and fabrics as needed in your puja, but take them home with you,” guidelines distributed by the group say. “Wash and press them, and give them to a needy or elderly person who could use them.”

Cindy Ramotar, a Guyanese immigrant, said, “You are trying to do the ritual but you’re also trying to keep the earth pollution-free.” She had come to the beach one Saturday morning several months ago with her parents, her son and other family members for an annual puja ceremony.

As Sadhana members and other volunteers combed the beach for trash — they would soon fill scores of extra-large trash bags — Ms. Ramotar and her relatives prepared their ritual.

On a white sheet, they laid out nine foam plates piled with fruit, flowers and candy. Ms. Ramotar and her mother, Seeta Venkatasami, folded the entire load on itself like a burrito and then, hiking up their skirts with a free hand, waded into the water up to their knees.

They dunked the bundle into the water, hauled it back to the beach, dumped it into a garbage bag and took it to their car.

Ms. Ramotar said that until about two years ago, the family would have left everything in the water. Asked whether any one person in the family had pressed for the change, she responded, “As a family, we all thought about it at the same time, that it was a wise thing to do.” But when her father turned away, she lowered her voice and whispered, “It’s always the younger generation that makes the change.”

“God will protect you no matter what,” she continued.
“But if you get a fine from the city,” she said, shrugging, “what are you going to do?”


November 19, 2015

Taking Pope Francis to the classroom

By Cathal Barry
Irish Catholic

A number of students from one of Ireland’s leading teacher training colleges have taken a unique approach to teaching children about the environment.

Papal documents aren’t usually the top choice resource for teachers, especially at primary school level, but Pope Francis’ recent encyclical on the environment has proven to be accessible for all ages.

That’s what a group of student teachers from Limerick’s Mary Immaculate College found when they took on the challenge of explaining Laudato Si’ to a class of 12-year-olds at Corbally’s Scoil Íde.

Third year student teacher David Walsh told The Irish Catholic he “thoroughly enjoyed” the experience and would “absolutely” consider using other Church documents in classes in the future as a result.

“I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I loved working with the class and engaging with the students’ questions and thoughts on the issue.

“I will absolutely be using Church documents when teaching in the future,” he said, adding that encyclicals such as Laudato Si’ are ideal resources for teachers as they deal with “contemporary” issues.

“It’s about the now and the future rather than the past. It’s about going forward,” he said.

David also said he was “surprised” at the level of engagement from students with the Pope’s encyclical and the subject of the environment.

“I was surprised that even though they were so young they had great insights and were able to express them perfectly,” he said, adding that Pope Francis is a person young people “respect”.

Passionate
“This Pope is concerned about the youth and the environment. I think he’s a friendly and approachable Pope, set on doing the right thing.

“Pope Francis is a person the children respect and take heed of. They could clearly see that care of the environment is an issue he is passionate about and so understood the need for action,” he said.

Head of Theology at Mary Immaculate Prof. Eamonn Conway said “it’s important for students to engage with papal documents and see that they impact on real life”.

He said *Laudato Si’* in particular “touches on so many aspects” of the primary school curriculum, which “allows for the Christian perspective on a whole range of issues to be brought to life in the classroom”.

In preparation for the teaching initiative, which took place over a two week period and included four hours of direct teaching, the student teachers read *Laudato Si’* in depth and derived four main themes to focus on.

The themes selected, which would form the basis of four distinct lessons, were:

- Pollution.
- World hunger.
- Climate change.
- Endangered animals.

David explained that the group decided to open up the first lesson by showing the class a number of key quotes from *Laudato Si’* without revealing the Pope as the author.

The student teachers selected quotes such as: “The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.”

And: “Humanity has disappointed God’s expectations.”

David said the students were “shocked” to eventually discover that they were direct quotes from the Pontiff.

“These quotes really shocked and surprised the children as they are not things you would generally hear in today’s world. The children were shocked furthermore to discover that the Pope said these things himself. It’s not stuff you would expect a Pope to say,” David said.

Addressing the second topic, world hunger, the student teachers got the class to play the ‘biscuit game’, which involves dividing the class into different groups of different sizes representative of the continents.

They then gave each ‘continent’ a different number of biscuits which were representative of how much food that continent would have.
David explained that this “reflected the Pope’s message in the encyclical about the inequality of resources in our world”.

“That was something they really enjoyed. It was their favourite. They had really great questions afterwards. They could really reflect critically on the whole situation,” he said.

On the third issue, climate change, the student teachers focused on “how we are not caring properly for our common home”.

They also developed a ‘word cloud’ comprising of the most popular words within *Laudato Si*': world, human and God.

“We took from that the message that God created the world for humans and so it is up to humans to take care of the world for God,” David said.

**Opportunity**

Teachers also provided the class with the opportunity to ‘suggest’ to Pope Francis by means of a suggestion box ideas about how they could prevent climate change, with the children coming up with ideas such as walking or cycling to school rather than taking a lift in a car.

On the last topic, endangered animals, the student teachers played another game based on an old favourite – musical chairs – in an attempt to impress upon the children the issue of melting ice caps in the North Pole.

The children, pretending to be polar bears, had to walk around the class and jump onto pieces of newspaper, representing ice, laid on the floor whenever the music stopped.

As the game progressed, teachers removed more and more pieces of newspaper.

Concluding their teaching initiative, the student teachers invited the class to write a prayer on a sheet of paper in the shape of a leaf and attach it to their hand-crafted ‘Laudato Si’ tree’.

David said there were a “great variety” of prayers, with the children asking God to assist them “in their efforts to make the world a better place”.

Overall, David said the experience led him and the class to discover “the link between religion and nature”.

Prof. Conway said he was “hugely impressed” with the caliber of the student teachers involved in the project.

He raised in particular their “ability to translate the at times difficult language of the encyclical into perfectly sensible concepts for sixth class pupils”.

Prof. Conway said he was equally impressed with the children being taught.
“I was amazed at how quickly the pupils grasped the seriousness of the issues being discussed and how quickly they could relate to real issues and ask tough questions about the problem of evil and suffering in the world.

“I would definitely encourage other schools to look to do something similar,” he said.

http://www.irishcatholic.ie/article/taking-pope-francis-classroom

November 19, 2015

Catholic Multicultural Center puts pope's encyclical into action

By Laura Green
Catholic Herald

MADISON -- Pope Francis’ recent encyclical Laudato Si’ makes a firm and urgent case for taking care of God’s creation in order to care for the poor and vulnerable among us.

He asserts that environmental stewardship must always be tied to social justice and vice versa. For the Catholic Multicultural Center (CMC), the encyclical is an affirmation of the work it has already been doing.

**Bringing poor, environmental stewardship together**

“The encyclical really brings the poor and the environment together, which is exactly what we have been doing, exactly what we at the CMC stand for,” said CMC Director Andy Russell.

Over the past several years, the center has made environmental stewardship an integral part of its mission of serving those in need.

This came in response to the fact that low-income and minority communities are often hit the first and the hardest by the consequences of environmental degradation, a theme that the pope touches on throughout his encyclical.

**Installing solar panels**

With this in mind, in the fall of 2014, the CMC installed a solar panel system on its roof to produce some of its own electricity from clean, renewable energy.

“The solar panels are one little way that we can lessen our harm not just to the poor, but to everyone,” said Russell. By using renewable energy, the CMC is reducing its contribution to the pollution and resulting harm caused by coal-fired power plants.
One other way the solar panels have an immediate impact on the poor is through their effect on the center’s services. By saving money on electricity, the center can now spend more money directly on helping those in need and expanding its services.

Currently the money the panels save on an average annual basis equals the cost of providing approximately 10,000 meals through the daily free meal program.

The CMC is working to expand the solar project by the end of this year and install additional solar panels to see even more savings.

Going solar is certainly not a new idea for Catholic organizations. Pope Benedict XVI, who also issued many statements on the Catholic faith and the environment, ushered in the installation of solar panels at the Vatican in 2008.

The installation of solar at the CMC was a community led effort, with much of the funds for the first phase of the project coming from a partnership between St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Madison, St. Bernard Parish in Middleton, and St. Francis Xavier Parish in Cross Plains.

The solar project at the CMC gives people a way to live out their faith by becoming involved in a Catholic environmental stewardship initiative, according to Russell.

Food pantry garden

Working at the food pantry garden is another way CMC volunteers and supporters become involved in caring for creation.

Through a partnership with Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens, the CMC has been growing fresh, local produce for its food pantry and meal program for nearly five years.

During the growing season, guests find the CMC food pantry is fully stocked with an assortment of fresh local produce that they otherwise might not have access to.

“The vegetables we grow don’t always look like the ones in the store, but they are always nutritious, tasty, and fresh,” joked volunteer garden leader Dick Reynolds, who offers his time to coordinate the all-volunteer-run garden.

From his perspective, growing food for those in need is a way for not only Catholics to live out their faith, but for people of all faiths to get involved in helping the community.

Reynolds explained the mutually beneficial relationships he sees through gardening. People suffering from food insecurity get fresh produce. The earth is cared for so that it may continue to sustain people in need for years to come.

And, people from many different backgrounds connect and learn with one another through their shared work in the garden.
“For volunteers who work full time or are busy with many other things in retirement, for them to take the time to come regularly is inspirational,” said Reynolds.

The results of the gardening efforts are inspiring as well. Last year, volunteers grew and harvested over 7,700 pounds of produce for the CMC’s food programs.

“I hope that the land is better than we found it as a result of our work there,” Reynolds said.

**Helping neighborhood**

The CMC reflects this same sentiment in regards to the South Madison neighborhood in which it resides. “[Caring for creation] is often forgotten in neighborhoods like this,” said Russell.

Lots of trash and a polluted creek are just a couple of the problems that plague the neighborhood, problems not often seen in more affluent neighborhoods with more resources to address those issues.

Workshops and neighborhood projects hosted by the CMC over the last year and a half have been trying to change that.

These programs aim to offer tools people can use to benefit their communities and their own lives, from saving money on electricity to creating positive neighborhood spaces like the CMC rain garden.

Patricia Hernandez, CMC neighbor and volunteer, regularly participates in these programs. According to her, the motivation for her participation is simply wanting to help out and make her neighborhood a better place for everyone, especially the poor among us.

**Installing rain garden**

Last spring, she helped install a rain garden at the CMC along with other community members and volunteers.

“The rain gardens clean the water that we all drink,” Hernandez explained. “If everyone did things like this, it would be better for our planet. Our grandchildren would live better lives than we do.”

As with the food pantry garden, Hernandez also commented on how working on projects like this unites people. She said participating in the programs at the CMC allowed her to meet new people that she otherwise wouldn’t have met, coming together with these new friends to work towards building a stronger community.

**Part of one family**

Hernandez explained, “We are all like family. We have to help one another out.”
Pope Francis’ encyclical asks us to do just that, to help one another as one human family by being good stewards of creation and of one another.

As for the CMC, Russell says the center will continue to lead by example, living out the Catholic faith by serving the poor while also being a good steward of creation.


November 19, 2015

A 'New Deal' of sorts for religion

Science alone can't force behavior change. Religion needs to step up.

By Douglas Fischer
The Daily Climate

RIETI, Italy – Religion needs a revolutionary shift, taking responsibility for our "common home" and rejecting fundamentalism, to point humanity to better, wiser solutions for problems like climate change.

Reason alone can't handle the job.

The message came from a panel convened here in Italy, where the papal encyclical issued this summer and the Paris attacks over the weekend were both very much present.

"Any fundamentalism breaks our common home," said Monsignor Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Council of Family. "This is the most important message stemming from Pope Francis and his encyclical."

Paglia spoke via a translator at the 12th International Media Forum on the Protection of Nature, an annual gathering of scientists and journalists in Italy. Environmental Health Sciences, publisher of The Daily Climate and Environmental Health News, is being honored at the conference with the International Greenaccord Media Award.

At a discussion on religion and science, several theological experts called for more than a simple rethinking in the longstanding, antagonistic relationship between the two.

"What are our values that shape our individual behavior? From where do we receive our onus on responsibility?" asked former Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato, a member of the Constitutional Court, one of two supreme courts in Italy. "Religions are an irrenouncable moral guide for a free society."

But for too long, Amato added via a translator, religion has stood as the antithesis to free society - a force that "darkens the mind," the enemy of science.
What's needed, said Paglia and others, is an ecological revolution "in the broadest possible sense."

"We have to rethink our relationship with this common home," Paglia said. "Humans are not the masters."

That message was explicit in Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, the Laudato Si, issued earlier this year. Almost 200 pages long, the landmark document mapped a more holistic ecology—one wrapping environmentalism, economics, science and faith together in an integral effort.

It calls, said Giancarlo Bosetti, director of Reset Dialogues on Civilization, an Italian nonprofit focused on intercultural understanding, not simply for a shift in "tone or style," but in "theological substance."

"This is a post-secular philosophy, open to dialogue, that allows us to produce many syntheses between faith and reason."—Giancarlo Bosetti, Reset Dialogues on Civilization

"It explicitly abandons dogmatic expression of faith," Bosetti said. "This is a post-secular philosophy, open to dialogue, that allows us to produce many syntheses between faith and reason."

And that pairing, Amato added, is crucial to breaking the "gigantic oxymoron" between unfettered economic growth and expression on one hand, and ecological preservation on the other.

"There is nothing more beautiful, more momentous, than the fact that we are able to choose, to design and build, our life project," Amato said. "But we are so often focused on desires centered around ourselves.... We have endangered our relationship with our collective interest."

Science has pointed out the folly of such choices. But it has little power to shift the underlying ethics and morals, panelists agreed.

"Science is telling us we are living as if we were ill," Amato said. "And science is helpless ... in telling us what we should do. "We need a form of ethics that can reset our relationship with ourselves and with our world."

http://www.dailyclimate.org/tdc-newsroom/2015/11/a-new-deal-of sorts-for-religion

November 22, 2015

Catholics waking up to perils of climate change

By Michael Swan
Pope Francis has been getting ready for Paris for more than a year. In May of 2014 the Patriarch of Rome sat down in Jerusalem with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and issued a joint declaration as a challenge to the world’s Christians.

“Together, we pledge our commitment to raising awareness about the stewardship of creation,” they wrote. “We appeal to all people of goodwill to consider ways of living less wastefully and more frugally, manifesting less greed and more generosity for the protection of God’s world and the benefit of His people.”

As they signed the declaration, the spiritual heads of more than one billion Catholics and more than 300 million Orthodox Christians were already thinking about COP21, the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference coming up Nov. 30 to Dec. 11 in Paris. Work was then already underway at the Vatican to prepare a major statement on the environment. That statement turned out to be Francis’ environmental encyclical Laudato Si’.

So the Pope is ready — ready for 196 world leaders to get down to work on meaningful, measurable action to limit global warming to less than two degrees by mid-century. But are Catholics ready? Is the world ready?

A Pew Research Centre study of popular opinion in over 40 countries shows Catholic and world opinion catching up with the Pope.

Across all nations a global median of 54 per cent of us believe climate change is a very serious problem. Canadians fall a little short of the world standard with 51 per cent claiming the problem is very serious, but another 33 per cent grant it is somewhat serious. Canadians however, are more concerned than Americans. Only 45 per cent of U.S. residents believe climate change is very serious, with another 29 per cent saying it’s somewhat serious.

The real concern over climate change is in Latin America, where 74 per cent call the problem “very serious,” and Africa, where on average 61 per cent of Africans told Pew researchers the problem is “very serious.”

Religiously, Catholics seem to have more personal concern about climate change. Among Canadian Catholics, 26 per cent said they were “very concerned that climate change will harm me personally.” That compares to just 16 per cent of Canadian Protestants. But Catholics still lag behind the religiously unaffiliated in this country. Thirty per cent of religiously unaffiliated Canadians expressed grave concern about how climate change will harm them personally.

On that personal sense of foreboding, Canadian Catholics trail their American co-religionists. Thirty-nine per cent of American Catholics (half of them Hispanic with ties to Latin America) claim to be very concerned with how climate change will affect them personally, compared with 27 per cent of the religiously unaffiliated Americans and 26 per cent of Protestants.
Results showing Canadian Catholics more concerned about climate change than Protestants were surprising to Dennis Patrick O’Hara, a theologian at Toronto’s University of St. Michael’s College.

“The Protestants have been doing a lot of work on climate change. It’s not as if they’ve been bystanders in all of this,” said O’Hara, the director of the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology. “What could be the difference? The only thing I could come up with is Pope Francis. And it’s not just Laudato Si’, because he’s been pushing this since as soon as his pontificate began.”

The Canadian bishops have spoken up on the environment frequently, beginning with a 2003 pastoral letter on “The Christian Ecological Imperative” and most recently signing on to a September statement organized by the Canadian Council of Churches “On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada.”

But the CCCB and the CCC will never have the clout or rhetorical oomph of a Pope who last November said, “This is what we do — destroy creation, destroy lives, destroy cultures, destroy values, destroy hope. How greatly we need the Lord’s strength to seal us with His love and His power to stop this mad race of destruction! Destroying what He has given us, the most beautiful things that He has done for us, so that we may carry them forward, nurture them to bear fruit.”

The Pope has not been satisfied to pontificate on climate change and the environment. He encouraged the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences to organize a Vatican workshop for global leaders in April. The workshop, titled “Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity: The Moral Dimensions of Climate Change and Sustainable Humanity,” concluded with a statement that, “In the face of the emergencies of human-induced climate change, social exclusion and extreme poverty, we join together to declare that human-induced climate change is a scientific reality, and its decisive mitigation is a moral and religious imperative for humanity.”

As an observer state at the United Nations, the Vatican will send an official delegation to the Paris meetings, but the cardinals and Vatican officials in the official delegation won’t be alone. Catholic development organizations, including the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, will have representatives out on the Paris streets and in the convention halls urging world leaders to do better than they have so far.

While the Development and Peace delegation will be a small, self-financed group of just eight to 10, the European CIDSE group of agencies will have large contingents of their members who can make it to Paris by bus or train.

Those Catholic development agencies will run a Dec. 9 to 13 program in Paris that promises to re-orient and concentrate Catholic development efforts on behalf of poor people in Africa, Latin America and Asia based on the principles of Laudato Si’.

Jesuit Father John McCarthy doesn’t underestimate the effect of Pope Francis speaking clearly, plainly and forcefully. But the scientist, author of Do Monkeys Go to Heaven? and winner of the
Canadian Environment Award Gold Prize for his work on boreal forest conservation from the Royal Geographic Society of Canada, believes it goes deeper than one Pope’s pronouncements.

“There’s definitely no doubt that Laudato Si’ has really captured people’s imaginations, more so than any other Catholic encyclical that I can remember,” he said.

But there’s more to it. Catholics, with their sacramental understanding of the incarnation, have a religious instinct that tells them creation is sacred, McCarthy said.

“I’ve focused a lot on the creed that we profess each Sunday,” he said. “Just the idea of God as creator of all that is seen and unseen — so there’s the whole world. And then Jesus Christ in and through whom all things were made. And then the Spirit, the giver of life. For me, that’s all life.”

McCarthy will be presenting his view of how Laudato Si’ and the sacraments fit together in a Nov. 18 talk at Guelph’s Holy Rosary parish. He will have another go at the subject as part of a four-part series of popular theology talks at Regis College in Toronto on Wednesday evenings March 23 to April 13. Laudato Si’ s subtitle, “On Care for Our Common Home” provides the theme that ties together these four talks by Scripture scholar Fr. Scott Lewis, moral theologian Sr. Mary Rowell, McCarthy and systematic theologian Fr. Gordon Rixon.

The Scarboro Missions have also caught the fever. “Caring for Our Common Home” is a “signature workshop series” the Scarboros are presenting by request at parishes and schools all over southern Ontario. Using Laudato Si’ as the key, the Scarboro team is willing to travel to any parish or Catholic school that thinks it could benefit from a deeper understanding of Church teaching, using the encyclical as a kind of key to understanding the Catholic tradition of engagement in the world.

Catholics will also be a big part of the 100% Possible marches across Canada planned for the eve of the COP21 meetings in Paris. Some 20,000 are expected on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, including a Development and Peace delegation. Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast and Gatineau Archbishop Paul André Durocher are expected in the Ottawa crowd urging Canada’s new government to do more at the Paris showdown. In Toronto, Development and Peace is concentrating on the local march at Queen’s Park.

The UN conferences on climate change have been bubbling along every year since the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, a framework which eventually produced the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. COP, as in COP21, stands for Conference of the Parties — meaning the parties which participated in the 1992 framework. Paris will be the 21st such meeting.

In Canada, COP conventions were big news when Kyoto was signed and again when Canada withdrew from Kyoto in 2011. But this time the news is even bigger.

For the first time ever, the Canadian prime minister will be accompanied at an international conference by all the provincial premiers. Added to the premiers will be federal opposition
leaders. If the new Liberal government is signaling a new and deeper commitment on the issue, they too are just catching up with Pope Francis.

“Our time cannot ignore the issue of ecology,” Pope Francis told us last November. “Which is vital to man’s survival. Nor (can we) reduce it to merely a political question. Indeed, it has a moral dimension that affects everyone, such that no one can ignore it. As disciples of Christ, we have a further reason to join with all men and women of good will to protect and defend nature and the environment. Creation is, in fact, a gift entrusted to us from the hands of the Creator. All of nature that surrounds us is created like us, created together with us. And in a common destiny it tends to find its fulfilment and ultimate end in God Himself. The Bible says ‘new heavens and a new earth.’ This doctrine of our faith is an even stronger stimulus for us to have a responsible and respectful relationship with Creation. In inanimate nature, in plants and in animals, we recognize the imprint of the Creator, and in our fellow kind, His very image.”

http://www.catholicregister.org/home/international/item/21314-catholics-waking-up-to-perils-of-climate-change

November 23, 2015

The Moral and Political Dimensions of Climate Change

Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)

Speakers:

Mitchell C. Hescox, President and CEO, Evangelical Environmental Network

Erin Lothes, Assistant Professor of Theology, College of Saint Elizabeth

Mary Evelyn Tucker, Codirector, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

Presider: John Grim, Codirector, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

Description

Erin Lothes Biviano, assistant professor of theology at the College of Saint Elizabeth, Mitchell C. Hescox, president and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network, Mary Evelyn Tucker, codirector of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, and John Grim, codirector of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, discuss international efforts to address climate change, including faith-based approaches to environmental justice. This meeting took place at the American Academy of Religion 2015 Annual Meeting, as part of CFR’s Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative.

Learn more about CFR’s Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative.
November 23, 2015

Hindu Religious and Civil Society Leaders Urge Climate Change Action

Hindu Declaration on Climate Change Press Release

Over 60 Hindu leaders and organisations have signed the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change issued to-day, calling for action from both the world’s 900 million Hindus as well as by the 196 governments meeting in Paris from 30 November to 11 December at the 21st Conference of Contracting Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21).

This Declaration (full text and list of signatories at [www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org](http://www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org)) follows similar documents issued by Islamic leaders (18 August), 154 Christian and other religious leaders (22 October), Presidents of Regional Catholic Bishops’Conferences (26 October), Buddhist leaders (29 October) which followed the Pope’s Encyclical of June 18 calling for massive global action to slow climate change and deal with its impacts. (Faith declarations are to be formally presented to the COP 21 presidency and participants under arrangements to be announced shortly.)

The Declaration is an initiative of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies / Bhumi Project, in partnership with the Hindu American Foundation the interfaith environmental organisation GreenFaith and the interfaith campaign for climate action OurVoices. Signatories from India, EU and North America include the renowned scientist and activist Vandana Shiva, and spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. “We are at a historic moment in time, as Hindus worldwide experience first-hand the effects of climate change. Though their religious beliefs, they are recognising their individual and collective responsibility to address it.” said Gopal Patel, Director of the Bhumi Project.

The Declaration asks the world’s 900 million Hindus to transition to using clean energy, adopt a plant-based diet, and lead lives in harmony with the natural world. International and national action must be scientifically credible and historically fair, based on deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through a rapid transition away from polluting technologies, especially away from fossil fuels. Renewable energies are also the best hope for the billions of people without electricity or clean cooking facilities to live better lives and reduce poverty.

As Mahatma Gandhi posited, “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. We need not wait to see what others do.”
The Declaration quotes the *Mahābhārata* (109.10) which states “Dharma exists for the welfare of all beings. Hence, that by which the welfare of all living beings is sustained, that for sure is *dharma*” and calls on all Hindus to expand their conception of *dharma* so as to consider impacts of personal actions on all other beings. National and international responses to climate change must be based on central Hindu principle that the Divine is all and all life is to be treated with reverence and respect. Three Sanskrit words from the *Īśopaniṣad*, characterise the Hindu outlook: “Īśāvāsyam idam sarvam. This entire universe is to be looked upon as the energy of the Lord.”

NOTE FOR EDITORS, For further information/interviews contact Gopal Patel, Bhumi Project Director: gopal@bumiproject.org, Tel: +44 7958807506 (UK)

http://www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org/launch_annoucement

November 28, 2015

Short Answers to Hard Questions About Climate Change

By Justin Gillis
New York Times

The issue can be overwhelming. The science is complicated. Predictions about the fate of the planet carry endless caveats and asterisks.

We get it.

So we’ve put together a list of quick answers to often-asked questions about climate change. This should give you a running start on understanding the problem.

**1. How much is the planet heating up?**

1.7 degrees is actually a significant amount.

As of October 2015, the Earth had warmed by about 1.7 degrees Fahrenheit since 1880, when records begin at a global scale. That figure includes the surface of the ocean. The warming is greater over land, and greater still in the Arctic and parts of Antarctica.

The number may sound low, but as an average over the surface of an entire planet, it is actually high, which explains why much of the world’s land ice is starting to melt and the oceans are rising at an accelerating pace. The heat accumulating in the Earth because of human emissions is roughly equal to the heat that would be released by 400,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs exploding across the planet every day.

Scientists believe most and probably all of the warming since 1950 was caused by the human release of greenhouse gases. If emissions continue unchecked, they say the global warming could
ultimately exceed 8 degrees Fahrenheit, which would transform the planet and undermine its capacity to support a large human population.

2. How much trouble are we in?

For future generations, big trouble.

The risks are much greater over the long run than over the next few decades, but the emissions that create those risks are happening now. Over the coming 25 or 30 years, scientists say, the climate is likely to resemble that of today, although gradually getting warmer. Rainfall will be heavier in many parts of the world, but the periods between rains will most likely grow hotter and therefore drier. The number of hurricanes and typhoons may actually fall, but the ones that do occur will draw energy from a hotter ocean surface, and therefore may be more intense, on average, than those of the past. Coastal flooding will grow more frequent and damaging.

Longer term, if emissions continue to rise unchecked, the risks are profound. Scientists fear climate effects so severe that they might destabilize governments, produce waves of refugees, precipitate the sixth mass extinction of plants and animals in Earth’s history, and melt the polar ice caps, causing the seas to rise high enough to flood most of the world’s coastal cities.

All of this could take hundreds or even thousands of years to play out, conceivably providing a cushion of time for civilization to adjust, but experts cannot rule out abrupt changes, such as a collapse of agriculture, that would throw society into chaos much sooner. Bolder efforts to limit emissions would reduce these risks, or at least slow the effects, but it is already too late to eliminate the risks entirely.

3. Is there anything I can do?

Fly less, drive less, waste less.

You can reduce your own carbon footprint in lots of simple ways, and most of them will save you money. You can plug leaks in your home insulation to save power, install a smart thermostat, switch to more efficient light bulbs, turn off the lights in any room where you are not using them, drive fewer miles by consolidating trips or taking public transit, waste less food, and eat less meat.

Perhaps the biggest single thing individuals can do on their own is to take fewer airplane trips; just one or two fewer plane rides per year can save as much in emissions as all the other actions combined. If you want to be at the cutting edge, you can look at buying an electric or hybrid car, putting solar panels on your roof, or both.

If you want to offset your emissions, you can buy certificates, with the money going to projects that protect forests, capture greenhouse gases and so forth. Some airlines sell these to offset emissions from their flights, and after some scandals in the early days, they started to scrutinize the projects closely, so the offsets can now be bought in good conscience. You can also buy
offset certificates in a private marketplace, from companies such as TerraPass in San Francisco that follow strict rules set up by the state of California; some people even give these as holiday gifts. Yet another way: In states that allow you to choose your own electricity supplier, you can often elect to buy green electricity; you pay slightly more, with the money going into a fund that helps finance projects like wind farms.

In the end, though, experts do not believe the needed transformation in the energy system can happen without strong state and national policies. So speaking up and exercising your rights as a citizen matters as much as anything else you can do.

4. What’s the optimistic scenario?

Several things have to break our way.

In the best case that scientists can imagine, several things happen: Earth turns out to be less sensitive to greenhouse gases than currently believed; plants and animals manage to adapt to the changes that have already become inevitable; human society develops much greater political will to bring emissions under control; and major technological breakthroughs occur that help society both to limit emissions and to adjust to climate change.

The two human-influenced variables are not entirely independent, of course: Technological breakthroughs that make clean energy cheaper than fossil fuels would also make it easier to develop the political will for rapid action.

Scientists say the odds of all these things breaking our way are not very high, unfortunately. The Earth could just as easily turn out to be more sensitive to greenhouse gases than less. Global warming seems to be causing chaos in parts of the natural world already, and that seems likely to get worse, not better. So in the view of the experts, simply banking on a rosy scenario without any real plan would be dangerous. They believe the only way to limit the risks is to limit emissions.

5. Will reducing meat in my diet help the climate?

Yes, beef especially.

Agriculture of all types produces greenhouse gases that warm the planet, but meat production is especially harmful – and beef is the most environmentally damaging form of meat. Some methods of cattle production demand a lot of land, contributing to destruction of forests; the trees are typically burned, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Other methods require huge amounts of water and fertilizer to grow food for the cows.
The cows themselves produce emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that causes short-term warming. Meat consumption is rising worldwide as the population grows, and as economic development makes people richer and better able to afford meat.

This is worrisome: Studies have found that if the whole world were to start eating beef at the rate Americans eat it, produced by the methods typically used in the United States, that alone might erase any chance of staying below an internationally agreed-upon limit on global warming. Pork production creates somewhat lower emissions than beef production, and chicken is lower still. So reducing your meat consumption, or switching from beef and pork to chicken in your diet, are both moves in the right direction. Of course, as with any kind of behavioral change meant to benefit the climate, this will only make a difference if lots of other people do it, too, reducing the overall demand for meat products.

6. What’s the worst-case scenario?

There are many.

That is actually hard to say, which is one reason scientists are urging that emissions be cut; they want to limit the possibility of any worst-case scenario coming to pass. Perhaps the greatest fear is a collapse of food production, accompanied by escalating prices and mass starvation. Even with runaway emissions growth, it is unclear how likely this would be, as farmers are able to adjust their crops and farming techniques, to a degree, to adapt to climatic changes. Another possibility would be a disintegration of the polar ice sheets, leading to fast-rising seas that would force people to abandon many of the world’s great cities and would lead to the loss of trillions of dollars worth of property and other assets. Scientists also worry about other wild-card scenarios like the predictable cycles of Asian monsoons’ becoming less reliable. Billions of people depend on monsoons to provide water for crops, so any disruptions could be catastrophic.

7. Will a tech breakthrough help us?

Even Bill Gates says don’t count on it, unless we commit the cash.

As more companies, governments and researchers devote themselves to the problem, the chances of big technological advances are improving. But even many experts who are optimistic about technological solutions warn that current efforts are not enough. For instance, spending on basic energy research is only a quarter to a third of the level that several in-depth reports have recommended. And public spending on agricultural research has stagnated even though climate change poses growing risks to the food supply. People like Bill Gates have argued that crossing our fingers and hoping for technological miracles is not a strategy — we have to spend the money that would make these things more likely to happen.

8. How much will the seas rise?

The real question is not how high, but how fast.
The ocean is rising at a rate of about a foot per century. That causes severe effects on coastlines, forcing governments and property owners to spend tens of billions of dollars fighting erosion. But if that rate continued, it would probably be manageable, experts say.

The risk is that the rate will accelerate markedly. If emissions continue unchecked, then the temperature at the Earth’s surface could soon resemble a past epoch called the Pliocene, when a great deal of ice melted and the ocean rose by something like 80 feet compared to today. A recent study found that burning all the fossil fuels in the ground would fully melt the polar ice sheets, raising the sea level by more than 160 feet over an unknown period.

With all of that said, the crucial issue is probably not how much the oceans are going to rise, but how fast. And on that point, scientists are pretty much flying blind. Their best information comes from studying Earth’s history, and it suggests that the rate can on occasion hit a foot per decade, which can probably be thought of as the worst-case scenario. A rate even half that would force rapid retreat from the coasts and, some experts think, throw human society into crisis. Even if the rise is much slower, many of the world’s great cities will flood eventually. Studies suggest that big cuts in emissions could slow the rise, buying crucial time for society to adapt to an altered coastline.

9. Are the predictions reliable?

They’re not perfect, but they’re grounded in solid science.

The idea that Earth is sensitive to greenhouse gases is confirmed by many lines of scientific evidence. For instance, the basic physics suggesting that an increase of carbon dioxide traps more heat was discovered in the 19th century, and has been verified in thousands of laboratory experiments.

Climate science does contain uncertainties, of course. The biggest is the degree to which global warming sets off feedback loops, such as a melting of sea ice that will darken the surface and cause more heat to be absorbed, melting more ice, and so forth. It is not clear exactly how much the feedbacks will intensify the warming; some of them could even partially offset it. This uncertainty means that computer forecasts can give only a range of future climate possibilities, not absolute predictions.

But even if those computer forecasts did not exist, a huge amount of evidence suggests that scientists have the basic story right. The most important evidence comes from the study of past climate conditions, a field known as paleoclimate research. The amount of carbon dioxide in the air has fluctuated naturally in the past, and every time it rises, the Earth warms up, ice melts, and the ocean rises. A hundred miles inland from today’s East Coast, seashells can be dug from ancient beaches that are three million years old, a blink of an eye in geologic time. These past conditions are not a perfect guide to the future, either, because humans are pumping carbon dioxide into the air far faster than nature has ever done.
10. Why do people question climate change?

Hint: ideology.

Most of the attacks on climate science are coming from libertarians and other political conservatives who do not like the policies that have been proposed to fight global warming. Instead of negotiating over those policies and trying to make them more subject to free-market principles, they have taken the approach of blocking them by trying to undermine the science.

This ideological position has been propped up by money from fossil-fuel interests, which have paid to create organizations, fund conferences and the like. The scientific arguments made by these groups usually involve cherry-picking data, such as focusing on short-term blips in the temperature record or in sea ice, while ignoring the long-term trends.

The most extreme version of climate denialism is to claim that scientists are engaged in a worldwide hoax to fool the public so that the government can gain greater control over people’s lives. As the arguments have become more strained, many oil and coal companies have begun to distance themselves publicly from climate denialism, but some are still helping to finance the campaigns of politicians who espouse such views.

11. Is crazy weather tied to climate change?

In some cases, yes.

Scientists have published strong evidence that the warming climate is making heat waves more frequent and intense. It is also causing heavier rainstorms, and coastal flooding is getting worse as the oceans rise because of human emissions. Global warming has intensified droughts in regions like the Middle East, and it may have strengthened the drought in California.

In many other cases, though, the linkage to global warming for particular trends is uncertain or disputed. That is partly from a lack of good historical weather data, but it is also scientifically unclear how certain types of events may be influenced by the changing climate.

Another factor: While the climate is changing, people’s perceptions may be changing faster. The Internet has made us all more aware of weather disasters in distant places. On social media, people have a tendency to attribute virtually any disaster to climate change, but in many cases there is no scientific support for doing so.

12. Will anyone benefit from global warming?

In certain ways, yes.

Countries with huge, frozen hinterlands, including Canada and Russia, could see some economic benefits as global warming makes agriculture, mining and the like more possible in those places.
It is perhaps no accident that the Russians have always been reluctant to make ambitious climate commitments, and President Vladimir V. Putin has publicly questioned the science of climate change.

However, both of those countries could suffer enormous damage to their natural resources; escalating fires in Russia are already killing millions of acres of forests per year. Moreover, some experts believe countries that view themselves as likely winners from global warming will come to see the matter differently once they are swamped by millions of refugees from less fortunate lands.

13. Is there any reason for hope?

If you share this with 50 friends, maybe.

Scientists have been warning since the 1980s that strong policies were needed to limit emissions. Those warnings were ignored, and greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have since built up to potentially dangerous levels. So the hour is late.

But after 20 years of largely fruitless diplomacy, the governments of the world are finally starting to take the problem seriously. A deal reached in Paris in December commits nearly every country to some kind of action. Religious leaders like Pope Francis are speaking out. Low-emission technologies, such as electric cars, are improving. Leading corporations are making bold promises to switch to renewable power and stop forest destruction. Around the world, many states and cities are pledging to go far beyond the goals set by their national governments.

What is still largely missing in all this are the voices of ordinary citizens. Because politicians have a hard time thinking beyond the next election, they tend to tackle hard problems only when the public rises up and demands it.

14. How does agriculture affect climate change?

It’s a big contributor, but there are signs of progress.

The environmental pressures from global agriculture are indeed enormous.

The demand for food is rising, in large part because of population growth and rising incomes that give millions of once-low income people the means to eat richer diets. Global demand for beef and for animal feed, for instance, has led farmers to cut down huge chunks of the Amazon rain forest.

Efforts are being made to tackle the problems. The biggest success has arguably been in Brazil, which adopted tough oversight and managed to cut deforestation in the Amazon by 80 percent in a decade. But the gains there are fragile, and severe problems continue in other parts of the world, such as aggressive forest clearing in Indonesia.
Scores of companies and organizations, including major manufacturers of consumer products, signed a declaration in New York in 2014 pledging to cut deforestation in half by 2020, and to cut it out completely by 2030. The companies that signed the pact are now struggling to figure out how to deliver on that promise.

Many forest experts at the Paris climate talks in late 2015 considered the pledge as ambitious, but possible. And they said it was crucial that consumers keep up the pressure on companies from whom they buy products, from soap to ice cream.

15. Will the seas rise evenly across the planet?

Think lumpy.

Many people imagine the ocean to be like a bathtub, where the water level is consistent all the way around. In fact, the sea is rather lumpy – strong winds and other factors can cause water to pile up in some spots, and to be lower in others.

Also, the huge ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica exert a gravitational pull on the sea, drawing water toward them. As they melt, sea levels in their vicinity will fall as the water gets redistributed to distant areas.

How the rising ocean affects particular parts of the world will therefore depend on which ice sheet melts fastest, how winds and currents shift, and other related factors. On top of all that, some coastal areas are sinking as the sea rises, so they get a double whammy.

16. Is it really all about carbon?

Here’s a quick explainer.

The greenhouse gases being released by human activity are often called “carbon emissions,” just for shorthand. That is because the two most important of the gases, carbon dioxide and methane, contain the carbon molecule. Many other gases also trap heat near the Earth’s surface, and many human activities cause the release of such gases to the atmosphere. Not all of these actually contain carbon, but they have all come to be referred to by the same shorthand.

By far the biggest factor causing global warming is the burning of fossil fuels for electricity and transportation. That process takes carbon that has been underground for millions of years and moves it into the atmosphere, as carbon dioxide, where it will influence the climate for many centuries into the future. Methane is even more potent at trapping heat than carbon dioxide, but it breaks down more quickly in the air. Methane comes from swamps, from the decay of food in landfills, from cattle and dairy farming, and from leaks from natural gas wells and pipelines.

While fossil-fuel emissions are the major issue, another major creator of emissions is the destruction of forests, particularly in the tropics. Billions of tons of carbon are stored in trees, and when forests are cleared, much of the vegetation is burned, sending that carbon into the air as carbon dioxide.
When you hear about carbon taxes, carbon trading and so on, these are just shorthand descriptions of methods designed to limit greenhouse emissions or to make them more expensive so that people will be encouraged to conserve fuel.


November 28, 2015

Integrating Ecology and Justice: The New Papal Encyclical

By Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim
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In Brief:

In June of 2015, Pope Francis released the first encyclical on ecology. The Pope’s message highlights "integral ecology," intrinsically linking ecological integrity and social justice. While the encyclical notes the statements of prior Popes and Bishops on the environment, Pope Francis has departed from earlier biblical language describing the domination of nature. Instead, he expresses a broader understanding of the beauty and complexity of nature, on which humans fundamentally depend. With "integral ecology" he underscores this connection of humans to the natural environment. This perspective shifts the climate debate to one of a human change of consciousness and conscience. As such, the encyclical has the potential to bring about a tipping point in the global community regarding the climate debate, not merely among Christians, but to all those attending to this moral call to action.

Key Concepts:

- “Integral ecology” brings together nature and humans.
- Eco-justice encompasses the vulnerability of people and the planet.
- Inequities and environmental degradation being caused by market capitalism need to be addressed.
- These moral principles are part of Catholic social justice teachings of earlier Popes.
- A cosmological perspective or interrelatedness is also part of the encyclical.
- The encyclical calls for” ecological conversion.”

On June 18, 2015 Pope Francis released *Laudato Si*, the first encyclical in the history of the Catholic Church on ecology. An encyclical is the highest-level teaching document in
Catholicism. There have been earlier statements by popes and bishops on environmental issues, but never an encyclical.

With 1.2 billion Catholics on the planet, the potential for attention to environmental and climate change issues is unprecedented. Even if, as some argue, encyclicals do not draw the response and obligation from Catholics as in the past, it is clear that this one will be discussed in religious and educational circles radiating out into the larger Christian world and beyond. Indeed, the media coverage of this document has already been robust. Scientists and ecologists have been keen to draw on its message for conservation as UN climate change negotiations in Paris approach in December 2015. What distinguishes the Pope's intervention is his linking of environmental concerns with issues of social justice and economic inequality—themes often lacking from the climate change discussions. This article suggests that the Pope's message has the potential to transform that debate by connecting environmentalism with a century of Catholic social justice teachings. Ecology and social justice are inextricably linked, says the Pope. That's a Christian message but also a profoundly human one.

Pope Francis could not have chosen a more central topic than the human role in ecological degradation and climate change. He critiques our "technocratic paradigm" and "throwaway culture." He calls for a transformation of our market-based economic system that he feels is destroying the planet and creating immense social inequities. Indeed, the encyclical is highly critical of unfettered capitalism and rampant consumerism.

This might seem like a radical message—but it's also the culmination of a century of Catholic social justice thinking. By drawing on and developing the work of earlier theologians and ethicists, this encyclical makes explicit the links between social justice and eco-justice.\(^1\)

One of the key architects of the encyclical, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, believes Pope Francis' phrase "integral ecology" is central to understanding this interrelationship. Cardinal Turkson has identified several principles behind the phrase: 1) the moral imperative of all peoples to be protectors of the environment; 2) care for creation as a virtue in its own right; and 3) the need for a new global solidarity to direct our search for the common good.\(^2\)

Integral ecology means that ecological integrity and social justice are linked because humans and nature are part of nurturing, interdependent life systems. Given that the poor and vulnerable are most adversely affected by an ailing planetary system, the two must be addressed together. While this draws on traditional Christian teachings regarding the poor, it also marks an important shift in the church's conception of the relationship of humans to nature and humans to work.

We can compare Pope Francis' thinking to the writing of Pope John Paul II, who himself builds on Pope Leo XIII's progressive encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on workers' rights in 1891. A hundred years after Leo, John Paul II writes:

The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28)...It is through work that man, using his intelligence and exercising his freedom, succeeds in dominating the earth and making it a fitting home...Obviously, he also has the
responsibility not to hinder others from having their own part of God's gift; indeed, he must cooperate with others so that together all can dominate the earth. (Centesimus annus: 31)

Drawing heavily on biblical language of domination, John Paul underscores the modern separation of humans from nature. However, he also emphasizes the dignity of cooperative human labor as making something productive of God's gift of nature. Thus, the more traditional perspective of "dominion" in Genesis is balanced by a call for "stewardship" of nature. This stands in marked contrast to his successors' more holistic view of nature.

Pope Benedict expanded Catholic thinking regarding the environment. His 2009 encyclical, Caritas in Veritate, is focused on charity and our duty to the poor as well as to present and future generations. He wrote of this responsibility arising from:

…our relationship to the natural environment. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes. In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. (Caritas in Veritate: 48)

Pope Benedict moves away from language of domination of nature toward the protection of nature. Yet, he holds to a view of creation as in balance, which differs from the more dynamic perspectives of contemporary ecological science. Pope Benedict also presents what he calls the "grammar of nature" saying:

…the natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a 'grammar,' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation. Today much harm is done to development precisely as a result of these distorted notions. Reducing nature merely to a collection of contingent data ends up doing violence to the environment and even encouraging activity that fails to respect human nature itself.

He goes on to write that global development:

…cannot ignore coming generations, but needs to be marked by solidarity and inter-generational justice, while taking into account a variety of contexts: ecological, juridical, economic, political and cultural. (Caritas in Veritate: 48)

There is a clear shift here from Pope John Paul. Yet Pope Benedict still relies on an anthropocentric ethic of "wise use" of nature. Perhaps he was wary that talking about nature's inherent goodness might open him to the charge of neopaganism from conservative factions within the church.

Pope Francis doesn't seem to have such reservations. Indeed, following Francis of Assisi, he invokes "Mother Earth" in the opening paragraph of the encyclical. Pope Francis also shifts the
church to a view of nature in line with environmental science and environmental philosophy. He calls for great ecological literacy and understanding of environmental problems. He has left the earlier biblical language of domination for an understanding of integral ecology that connects humans to their environment and to the whole evolutionary process.

Indeed, in this respect there are echoes in the encyclical of the influence of two progressive Catholic thinkers of the 20th century, namely, the scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and the cultural historian Thomas Berry (1914–2009). Both of these thinkers saw the "grammar of nature" as reflecting an evolutionary unfolding of Earth's ecosystems.

Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest and paleontologist whose thinking about the place of humans in evolution led to his exile from Europe to China in the late 1920s. Of particular import is Teilhard's understanding of evolution that he saw being driven by life's "zest." Teilhard wrote: "A zest for living…would appear to be the fundamental driving force which impels and directs the universe along its main axis of complexity-consciousness…"3

Pope Francis has drawn on the same notion to describe a dynamic ecological relationship of humans with Earth's evolution. There are echoes also of cultural historian, Thomas Berry, who situated the human as arising from, and dependent on, this long evolutionary journey. Berry writes:

At such a moment, a new revolutionary experience is needed, an experience wherein human consciousness awakens to the grandeur and sacred quality of Earth’s process. This awakening is our human participation in the dream of Earth... 4

From this cosmological perspective Berry calls on humans to participate in the Great Work of transformation—building new ecological economics, new educational and political systems, and new religious and spiritual communities that are aligned with Earth's capacities and limits.

It is this evolutionary understanding of Earth's systems, so central to Teilhard and Berry, that provides a larger context for the Pope's own revolutionary thinking. Indeed, this is also the perspective of Journey of the Universe, which narrates the epic story of evolution in film and book form and shows the implications of this story for environmental living in the Conversations.5,6

Without this integrated sense of mutually enhancing human–Earth relations in an evolving universe, climate discussions can become simply business as usual amidst policy proposals, market-based schemes, and technological fixes. This integrated perspective for humans of a change of consciousness and conscience promises to have a rippling effect on the contemporary climate debate. In this spirit, the encyclical calls on governments and individuals to engage in action for climate justice.

The hope is the Pope's intervention can provide a tipping point for the global community—not just among Christians but among other religious groups as well. There are more than a billion Muslims, a billion Hindus, a billion Confucians, and nearly 500 million Buddhists, many of whom are hearing this call to action. The encyclical will also be a source of encouragement to
environmentalists who are not overtly religious but who care deeply about the environment, often for aesthetic and spiritual reasons.

The Pope convened religious leaders, scientists, and economists from all over the world at the Vatican on April 28, 2015 to highlight the moral dimensions of our global environmental crisis. He urged these leaders to join him in speaking out on the human suffering climate change is causing, especially for the most vulnerable. In a similar spirit, he commissioned Cardinal Turkson to convene a gathering at the United Nations on June 30, 2015 to call for concerted ecological and social change. The Pope has also addressed politicians and business leaders at Davos, noting that the wealthier countries have responsibilities to the poor in terms of fair and healthy development. In September, he will address the UN General Assembly and the US Congress to highlight the urgent need for climate change action.

Thus the publication of the papal encyclical is a unique opportunity to scale up and move forward. That is because it provides a renewed moral force and shared ethical commitment regarding environmental issues, especially climate change. It also highlights that we have a special kinship with nature and are responsible for its continuity for future generations. Indeed, the flourishing of the Earth community may depend on how humans heed this moral call to what Francis calls "ecological conversion."

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December 2015

Spiritual Principles in Action: A Story for a Younger Generation

By Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
Working with Oneness

First published in Dust Magazine

In answer to a question from a 31-year-old person, “What advice do you have for people my age in dealing with a world that tells us we are nothing but material mechanisms, and has almost no concept of the soul?”

CHAPTER ONE

I grew up in an England still dreary in the post-war years. Rationing only ended the year I was born. In my childhood there was religion but no spirituality. I went to church every Sunday, sang hymns and recited prayers. But nowhere was there the suggestion of spiritual states of consciousness. Spiritual bookstores did not exist. Christian mystical writings were present but just as historical texts rather than experiences to be lived. It was a grey world aspiring to middle-class materialism—a TV, a washing machine, even a car! Then in the mid- to late-sixties, another color entered the spectrum of consciousness. The Beatles went to India to meditate with the Maharishi, and orange-robed Hare Krishna devotees could be seen dancing and chanting on Oxford Street in London. Spirituality in all of its flavors and colors began to arrive in the West.

This awakening spirituality was part of my adolescence. When I was sixteen I began to practice Zen meditation, and experienced an inner dimension of emptiness completely different to my schoolboy classrooms. When I was eighteen I met the spiritual teacher Krishnamurti. I remember
it was a beautiful English summer morning. I went to hear him talk and he took me into this space of complete and total freedom. He said there is no path, there is no way to get there, it just happens—but suddenly there was another reality present, completely different than anything I had known before.

I practiced hatha yoga (until I damaged my knee from sitting too long in the lotus position) and became macrobiotic, learning to bake my own unleavened bread. I studied sacred geometry and built geodesic domes. I attended one of the first Glastonbury Festivals, where the pyramid stage was supposed to transmit spiritual vibrations. We felt that we were part of a spiritual movement that was going to change the world. Something was alive in a new way, a new spark of consciousness.

When I was nineteen I met my spiritual teacher, a white-haired Russian lady who had just come back from India where she had been trained by a Sufi master. Meditating in her small North London room beside the train tracks, I felt the presence of invisible spiritual masters—it was magical and mysterious. This world into which I had entered could hardly be compared to the bleak world of my childhood, in which only the physical existed and only material prosperity mattered. And many friends at the time followed similar and different paths—exploring Buddhist meditation in the monasteries of South East Asia, reading Tibetan texts, chanting Hindu mantras or whirling with Sufi dervishes.

Looking back over almost half a century, I can see how our journey, the story of my generation, was to help bring these practices and teachings to the West, to help something come alive in our materialistic Western consciousness. Meditation groups formed, ashrams were built, and many of us practiced meditation, accessing different states of consciousness. We were naïve and optimistic, expecting this infusion of spiritual consciousness to change the world. Sadly, or more realistically, while it changed our world, the world around us only became more enamored of materialism, technology, and the toys of triviality. And as the seventies moved into the eighties and then the nineties, many of the gurus became corrupted, mainly by sex or money, and many sincere seekers disillusioned. The innocence of those early years faded into the harsher light of daily life. But something remained. There was a shift in consciousness—this new color in the spectrum remained—along with the different spiritual practices and texts that had come from the East. And those of us who remained true to our practices, who lived our meditation and spiritual values, held this shift in consciousness, integrated it into our daily life. We listened to our dreams and our heart, we were open to inner experiences beyond the physical. We lived the story of our soul.

Then, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, something within me shifted and I was shown how the inner reality of the mystic had a vital part to play in the outer world. Traditionally the mystic turns away from the outer towards the inner, seeking the truth that in Sufism can only be found within the heart. Through meditation and prayer, going deep within we find something
beyond the illusions of the outer world—we dip into love’s infinite ocean. We experience the reality of the Self and the oneness that belongs to all that exists—what the Sufis call “unity of being.” But I began to realize that this “consciousness of oneness” was needed in our outer world, that our world was suffering from a misguided consciousness of separation, which is the consciousness of the rational self and ego: we are separate from the Earth and separate from each other.

To this effect I wrote a book, Working with Oneness, the first in a series of books about applying spiritual principles and practices to the present reality in the outer world. This gradually changed into my Spiritual Ecology work of recent years, giving a spiritual perspective to our present ecological crisis. When I began this work over a decade ago, “oneness” was still a fringe “spiritual” idea. But I am very happy that in the last few years, oneness, interconnectivity, or what the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh calls “interbeing,” have become much more part of the mainstream, and central to understanding the ecological crisis—that we need to respond from an awareness of the Earth as a living organic whole.

Until very recently spirituality and ecology were rarely associated. Environmentalists thought spiritual practitioners were “new age” and not activist enough, while apart from a few “engaged Buddhists” and others, spiritual practices and teachings were focused on self-development and the individual inner journey. But then earlier this year, Pope Francis’s encyclical On Care for our Common Home, unequivocally bridged this divide. In it, he stresses how our ecological crisis is both a spiritual and moral problem.

It brought tears to my eyes when I read how we should hear “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” This touched me deeply, as in 2013 I had edited a collection of spiritual teachers responding to our ecological crisis which was titled Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth. Suddenly, what had been a radical idea was proclaimed from one of the world’s most public pulpits. Spirituality and ecology need to be united, and we have to take full responsibility; we need to work together to return to a balanced and sustainable way of life for all of creation—to care for both the soil and the soul.

CHAPTER TWO

As I have mentioned, condensed into these paragraphs is almost half a century’s journey of living and also holding a quality of consciousness radically different to that of the environment I was born into. In its broadest terms this consciousness is the awareness of a spiritual reality very different to the material focus of our present civilization. The work of the spiritual seeker or wayfarer is to journey into and then through this spiritual inner reality, and experience the deeper truths of our human and divine nature. In Sufism this journey is sometimes described as different valleys of the quest, or different chambers of the heart, leading finally to divine oneness and
merging in God—union of lover and Beloved. But there is another dimension of this journey, how to apply the inner experiences of the journey to outer life. In particular how can our awareness and understanding of this foundational, inner spiritual reality help a world that is becoming a soulless and environmental wasteland?

Sadly the materialistic values of the fifties have now morphed into a global monster, exploiting and ravaging the Earth in a way that can only result in mutual self-destruction. And while there are those continuing this nightmare of “business of usual”—the global corporations and politicians who pursue only economic growth or greed—there are others who have real “care for our common home,” who hear the cry of the Earth and the pressing need to live from a place of unity. Maybe we have already passed the “tipping point” of unforeseen ecological consequences: temperatures rising, rivers and oceans polluted, and air made toxic. But spiritual consciousness still has a vital role to play as our world spins out of balance.

Yet I believe it is no longer enough just to hold this awareness—we have to bring it into action. Many people who read my book Spiritual Ecology responded, “What should I do?” The next chapter in this story of spirituality must be to bring these values, this quality of consciousness, into action to help heal and restore our dying world. I firmly believe that this is the calling for the next generation, for those who have the energy and passion to act from a place of service and love for the Earth. And especially important, from a place of unity.

Unfortunately, only too often activists constellate dynamics of duality, of us against them. And yet the original instructions given to the First Peoples stressed that we “have to get along together.” We are all part of the same living wholeness, and only from a place of inclusion can we transform what has been desecrated by a sense of separation. There are of course many different ways to work towards ecological wholeness, from forming a community of urban gardeners, to developing new economic models based upon generosity and sharing rather than acquisition, such as “pay it forward.” And I firmly believe that, while some global initiatives are vital, like reducing carbon emissions, most initiatives should be small groups of people coming together in different ways. Governments and politicians are too bound to the idea of continued “economic growth” to commit to real change. Instead the world needs to be regenerated in an organic, cellular way, the way life recreates itself.

This is the challenge facing those of the millennial generation who sense that life is something more than the accumulation of “stuff,” who have heard the cry of the Earth, which is also the cry of their own soul. How can we help the world in this time of transition? How can we participate creatively in our lives and communities? There is much work to be done, a work founded upon the principles of oneness and unity, a work that recognizes that all of life is sacred and whole. Life is calling to us and it desperately needs our attention; around us are what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “bells of mindfulness,” which we need to hear and then respond to—hear with our hearts and respond with our hands.
There are many ways to participate, just as Rumi says “there are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” It is for each person to find the community and initiative that speaks most to their nature, their unique offering. And central to this work is that we are here to help each other and to help the Earth—we are here to be of service. These are the spiritual principles that are the foundation of real work that endures, what the engaged Buddhist Joanna Macy calls *The Work that Reconnects*. I also believe that it is important for anyone committing to this work to develop their own spiritual practice—especially helpful is a meditation practice that is done every day. It can be a mindfulness meditation, watching the breath, the Christian practice of centering prayer, or a Sufi heart meditation. It could also be walking in a sacred manner, being aware of our connection to a sacred Earth with every step we take. What matters is that our practice connects us to what is deepest and more enduring within us, a Source beyond the illusions of the ego and the many distractions of the outer world. This practice can support and protect us, and inwardly guide us in our work.

And if I have learned anything from my own journey, I’ve learned what matters most is love. Love is the most powerful force in creation, and it is our love for the Earth that will heal what we have desecrated, that will guide us through this wasteland and help us to bring light back into our darkening world. Love links us all together in the most mysterious ways, and love can guide our hearts and hands. And the central note of love is oneness. Love speaks the language of oneness, of unity rather than separation.

Small things with great love, learning to live and act with love and care, with the true attention of our minds and hearts—these are the signs of the sacred and the truest way to regenerate life, to help life to recreate itself. Yes, we have to relearn many of the sacred principles of life, the patterns of creation, to remember what our ancestors and all indigenous people know (what I have called the principles of Spiritual Ecology). But it is for this younger generation to bring these principles into form, into action, and then the future that is waiting can be born. It will not be easy. The forces of greed and exploitation are more entrenched than we realize, the environmental collapse accelerating. But this is the challenge for those whose hearts are young and energized, who care for the planet and for the souls of future generations. This is the next chapter of the story of our time that is waiting to be lived.

http://www.workingwithoneness.org/articles/spiritual-principles-action-story-younger-generation

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**December 1, 2015**

**A Unique Moment in History**

By Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

Huffington Post
As the world's expectations rise, our prayer is that political leadership will also rise to the occasion. From November 30 to December 11, 2015, the COP 21 meeting in Paris is a unique historical moment, a critical opportunity to make the right choice. Political leaders may and should broker an agreement; but our planet is not negotiable.

In recent decades, the world has witnessed alarming ecological degradation, increasing failure to implement environmental policies, as well as an ever-widening and scandalous gap between the rich (predominantly of the north and west) and the poor (predominantly in the south and east). As we have repeatedly emphasized, these vital challenges are not primarily political or economic. They are profoundly spiritual and ethical.

Our deep-felt conviction is that all of us -- as citizens of this delicate planet that we cherish and share -- are involved in this crisis. No single region or nation can be blamed for its cause, just as no single institution or discipline can resolve the crisis. We are all in the same boat. We are all called to care. We are all obliged to respond.

By some mysterious connection that we do not always understand (and indeed sometimes choose to ignore), the earth reminds us of our vocation and obligation to protect our planet and its natural resources, to preserve and sustain it for our neighbors and for future generations. We will surely be judged by the urgency with which we respond to the ecological crisis of our age. The earth still has the resilience to heal, but only if we allow it to survive.

Unlike former generations, today we have no excuse. We have all the data and resources at hand. Yet, the crisis that we face has less to do with the environment and more to do with the way we perceive and treat the world. We are treating this earth in an inhumane and godless manner precisely because we see it in this way. Unless we radically change the way we perceive the world, unless we voluntarily transform our pattern of consumption, then we will simply be dealing with symptoms, rather than with their causes.

The responsibility of political leaders in Paris over the next few days is crucial and urgent, especially in the aftermath of recent dark events in the city of lights. Their responsibility is compelling and desperate, particularly in view of the alarming flight and global plight of refugees. But it is imperative and authoritative when we consider the rise in temperatures and sea levels, the extinction of forests and species, or the extreme changes in weather and excessive impact of mining. In Paris, let the political agreement be ambitious and the legislative action tenacious.

An unprecedented gathering of world civil and religious leaders planned to be in attendance for the United Nations Climate Change Convention. We have witnessed an exceptional groundswell on the grass-roots level. Even where politicians are uncertainty and apathy, citizens of the world are resolved and undaunted.

Capacity crowds were to attend and march, pray and fast, in a revolutionary crusade to save the planet. Sadly, the multitude will be more moderate. But the momentum remains undiminished, the optimism undimmed. The entire world is still watching. The entire world is still waiting. The entire world is still wishing.
If political leaders have hitherto been cautious -- uncertain at best and unresponsive at worst -- then it is time to represent their people and nations. If political policy has hitherto been slow -- nominal at best and unsupportive at worst -- then it is time to speak out and take measures. If political action has hitherto been slow -- at best inadequate and inconsistent, at worst fruitless and futile -- then this is surely the time to ensure that it is not too little and too late.

Political leaders must choose and act with responsibility, with clarity, and with commitment. They must look for answers outside of their comfort zone, beyond familiar patterns or politics-as-usual. They must choose to care for the vulnerable and fragile, no longer to ignore the marginalized and suffering.

And religious leaders must persist in recalling and revealing the mystery of creation. There is a divine spark in the whole world and we must remind people that the value of our planet is much greater than any individual, corporate or national interest. It is the moral obligation of us all to rediscover and reaffirm this compassionate vision of God's gift of creation.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew/a-unique-moment-in-history_b_8688462.html

December 1, 2015

What does your faith say about how we treat the environment?

By Kelsey Dallas
Deseret News National

More than 150 world leaders gathered in Paris on Monday for the start of an international conference on climate change. Policymakers are expected to reach an agreement within the next few weeks on how to address environmental degradation by reducing greenhouse gas emission and supporting sustainable energy initiatives.

Although political concerns and scientific research drive debates on the environment, faith leaders are increasingly speaking out on the issues discussed this week in Paris.

Pope Francis released an encyclical on the environment in June, presenting climate change as a moral crisis and asking Catholics to take better care of creation. Evangelical Christian pastors have led their congregations in gardening and energy-efficiency projects through partnerships with organizations like the Evangelical Environmental Network.

Linking religious beliefs with environmental activism has long been the mission of scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker, a senior lecturer at Yale University who has been studying the relationship between religion and ecology for more than 20 years. A leading voice on the way spirituality can inform faith-based environmental activism, she co-directs the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology with her husband, John Grim.
Tucker first became interested in faith-based environmental activism when she was living in Japan in the 1970s and studying religious traditions like Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism. These Asian religions often provide practitioners with both a spiritual path and a social philosophy, and Tucker's research helped her recognize the power of religion to encourage people to live in harmony with nature.

When she returned to the U.S., Tucker began working with Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and environmental activist. "He was one of the very first people to see the environmental crisis as a spiritual crisis," she said.

Guided by Berry's mentorship, Tucker and her husband pioneered the academic study of religion and ecology, presenting lectures, editing collections of articles on the subject and producing the Emmy award-winning documentary, "Journey of the Universe," on humanity's place in the cosmos.

In October, when she was in Salt Lake City to attend the Parliament of the World's Religions, Tucker shared her thoughts with Deseret News National on the relationship between religion and the environment and how faith leaders can encourage church members to be involved in efforts to end climate change. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Deseret News: Your work at the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology began 20 years ago. How has faith-based environmental engagement changed since then?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: When we began hosting conferences on this topic in the mid-nineties, there was no field of religion and ecology. We had to call up every person and ask them to contribute their knowledge.

In 20 years time, this effort has really grown. It's now a field in academia and a force in larger society.

We have classes on religion and ecology at Yale and other universities, as well as at high schools. And as the Climate March in New York City last year illustrated, faith leaders are emerging as powerful voices on this topic.

DN: Speaking of religious leaders, Pope Francis released an encyclical on the environment this summer. What effect could his leadership have on faith-based engagement with environmental issues?

MET: Pope Francis is an amazing leader, as we can all see. He's got authenticity, sincerity and a genuine concern for the poor and outcast. He's a great messenger.

What he's doing that's so helpful is weaving together our concerns for the degradation of ecosystems, species and water, pollution issues and climate change. He's saying these shifts affect people in immense ways.
The poor are the ones most affected. Ecology and justice — topics we've been working on for a long time — are highlighted in this encyclical. He calls this work "integral ecology," a term that was also used by my mentor, Thomas Berry.

DN: This fall's Parliament of the World's Religions in Salt Lake City cited caring for creation as one of its core themes. Why was it important to you to participate in the event?

MET: My husband and I have come to all the parliaments, besides, of course, the first one in 1893 in Chicago.

At each one, we were trying to focus the religions of the world on their great texts and teachings on the environment. It's taken quite a while.

In Melbourne in 2009, there were maybe 20 panels on religion and ecology. That number has doubled and tripled since then. I'm thrilled with the growth in interest and engagement around environmental justice.

DN: It's hard to point to a verse in the Bible and determine what Christianity teaches about climate change. How are religion and ecology linked?

MET: At the Forum on Religion and Ecology, we're trying to overcome that gap of knowledge. We suggest that religions need to retrieve, re-evaluate and reconstruct traditions in order to address modern issues.

We need theologians and academics to help do that, answering questions like how the verse in Genesis about dominion over the environment should be interpreted or what it means to care for creation.

Religions have obvious teachings (on the environment) that we need to bring forward, as well as liturgical systems that weave humans into the great cycles of the cosmos and nature. For example, Christmas is celebrated at the winter solstice.

DN: Are you optimistic about faith-based conversations on the environment continuing to grow?

MET: Yes, definitely. I think that once religious traditions really understand the moral force that is there for change (in terms of how we approach the environment), there could be a rippling effect across the whole country.

The environment is not just an issue for science or policy or economics or law or technology. All of these approaches are necessary, but not sufficient.

With the moral force, and I think sincere activism of faith leaders and laity around the world, there's a tidal wave of change that's beginning and growing across the planet.

We're at a moment of great transition, and it's a very exciting moment for all of us.
December 2, 2015

Paris: A Spiritual Response to Climate Change

By Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
Huffington Post

In a city whose soul is bleeding from the acts of terrorists, world leaders are meeting to discuss the fate of an Earth whose soul is also bleeding--bleeding from exploitation, from our civilization's relentless pursuit of materialism. These leaders will discuss carbon emissions and the global rise of temperature, but I doubt they will dare to discuss the deeper malaise of a civilization whose only goal seems to be economic progress.

Sadly, even the concept of "sustainability" has been co-opted by our culture. Sustainability no longer refers to upholding the viability of our ecosystem--its biodiversity and beauty, its wilderness and wonder--but to upholding the very materialistic culture that is destroying it. This attitude reveals that, above all, we want to sustain our energy-intensive, resource-depleting lifestyle, the very demands of which are damaging our planet. For many at the Paris gathering, "environmentalism is no longer about how to save the environment. It has instead become about how we in the developed world can save our lifestyle."

As we follow our consumerist dreams and our version of sustainability, the Earth suffers, and some of us, hearing the cry of the Earth, are responding to this deep wound. Those gathered in Paris know that we need to act "before it is too late." But, unless we ask the deeper questions, unless we consider the soul as well as the soil, how can we begin to bring the Earth back into balance? We can no longer afford to treat the Earth as something separate, just a physical environment--we are all part of the same living wholeness.

While there are those continuing the present nightmare of business of usual, there are others who have real "care for our common home," who hear the cry of the Earth and the pressing need to live from a place of unity. Maybe we have already passed the "tipping point" of unforeseen ecological consequences: temperatures rising, rivers and oceans polluted, and air made toxic. But as Pope Francis's encyclical spoke so powerfully, religious and spiritual consciousness has a vital role to play.

Two years ago I published a collection of essays, Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth, to help pioneer this emerging awareness of the need for a spiritual response to our ecological crisis--that it is a spiritual as well as a physical crisis. Many who read this book responded, "What should I do?" More specifically, the central question we should be asking is, how can we bring spiritual values, a sense of the sacred, into action to help heal and restore our dying world? I firmly believe that this is the calling for those who have the energy and passion to act from a place of
We are all part of the same living wholeness, and only from a place of unity can we transform what has been desecrated by centuries of thinking that we are separate from the Earth. The original instructions given to the First Peoples stressed that we "have to get along together." There are of course many different ways to work towards ecological wholeness, from forming a community of urban gardeners, to developing new economic models based upon generosity and sharing rather than acquisition, such as "pay it forward." And, while some global initiatives are vital, like reducing carbon emissions, I firmly believe that most initiatives should be created by small groups of people coming together in different ways--as is already happening. Governments and politicians are too bound to the idea of continued "economic growth" to commit to real change. Rather, the world needs to be regenerated in an organic, cellular way, the way life recreates itself--with different groups emerging as part of our new, living structure.

This is the challenge facing those of us who sense that life is something more than the accumulation of "stuff," who have heard the cry of the Earth and recognize that it is also the cry of our own soul. How can we help the world in this time of transition? How can we work together to break free from our pathological addiction to consumerism? How can we participate creatively in our lives and communities? The Earth is part of our own self and we are a part of its suffering wholeness. There is much work to be done, a work founded upon the principles of oneness and unity, a work that recognizes that all of life is sacred and whole. Life is calling to us and it desperately needs our attention; around us are what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "bells of mindfulness," which we need to hear and then respond to--hear with our hearts and respond with our hands.

And if I have learned anything from my own spiritual journey, it is that what matters most is love. Love is the most powerful force in creation, and it is our love for the Earth that will heal what we have desecrated, that will guide us through this wasteland and help us to bring light back into our darkening world. Love links us all together in the most mysterious ways, and love can guide our hearts and hands. And the central note of love is oneness. Love speaks the language of oneness, of unity rather than separation.

As the darkness of terrorism attacked Paris, the most moving response of some of those directly affected was their focus on love--that only love can conquer hate, that love is what really matters, that the final message in our life should be love. Now, this week in the same city, we should aspire to bring this message of love into the darkness of our global exploitation. We are one with the Earth and it needs actions based upon love and unity.

Small things with great love, learning to live and act with love and care, with the true attention of our minds and hearts--these are the signs of the sacred and the truest way to regenerate life, to help life to recreate itself. Yes, we have to relearn many of the sacred principles of life, the patterns of creation, to remember what our ancestors and all indigenous people know (what I have called the principles of Spiritual Ecology). What we need is to work to bring these principles into form, into action, into the myriad ways we can help the Earth to regenerate--ways that foster real sustainability. Then the future that is waiting can be born. It will not be easy. The
forces of greed and exploitation are more entrenched than we realize, the environmental collapse accelerating. But this is the challenge for those whose hearts are strong, who care for the planet and for the souls of future generations.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/llewellyn-vaughanlee/paris-a-spiritual-respons_b_8697058.html

December 6, 2015

Scientists enlist the big gun to get climate action: Faith

By Seth Borenstein, Associated Press
The Daily Mail

PARIS (AP) — The cold hard numbers of science haven't spurred the world to curb runaway global warming. So as climate negotiators struggle in Paris, some scientists who appealed to the rational brain are enlisting what many would consider a higher power: the majesty of faith.

It's not God versus science, but followers of God and science together trying to save humanity and the planet, they say.

Physicist John Schellnhuber, founder of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, said he has been coming to these international talks for 11 years and essentially seen negotiators throw up their hands and say "sorry guys we tried our best." And no one protested. But this time, with the power of Pope Francis' encyclical earlier this year calling global warming a moral issue and an even more energized interfaith community, Schellnhuber feels the world's faithful are watching and will hold world leaders accountable.

"They know they will be measured against the encyclical," Schellnhuber, a member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said Saturday at a Catholic Church event. Ever the scientist, Schellnhuber said on Saturday he hadn't seen any evidence yet during the first week of negotiations that this will happen, but he has faith it will.

In the first five days of climate negotiations, interfaith activists came, fasted, talked to media, buttonholed leaders and prayed. On Saturday night in a downtown Paris chapel, hundreds of people, many of them prostrated on the ground, sang and prayed for the climate negotiators and mostly for the world.

Faith "is much deeper" than science, said Caroline Bader of the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation.

And so are their numbers. Bader said interfaith leaders recently handed top United Nations negotiators a petition with 1.8 million signatures begging for meaningful climate action. Such action was also sought by Brother Alois Taize, a Catholic member of the ecumenical monastery,
as he was preaching at the song-laden service about how the faithful and the world have to open their eyes to solutions to global warming.

"The environment movement, which has primarily been a secular one, has realized that over the last 30 years or so it's not been that successful in achieving its goals," Joe Ware of Christian Aid wrote in an email from the Paris talks. "Increasingly it has looked to faith groups for help in mobilizing a broader movement of people calling for action on climate change. They are actually natural allies as almost all faiths have a theology of creation care at their heart."

Scripps Institution of Oceanography scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a non-Catholic who advised Pope Francis on climate and is on the pontiff's science academy, says he thinks this new alliance will play a major role in what he hopes will be a historic agreement.

But for Ramanathan, now a member of the Holy See's delegation to the climate talks, it's more than science or history. About four years ago he had a moment that he called "a revelation."

He was presenting a paper on glacier melt to the scientists at the pontifical academy. It was academic and laid out the conclusions in cold hard facts. But then the chancellor to the academy, a bishop, added one sentence to the end: "If we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us."

It was quickly agreed to and Ramanathan started to look at climate science not as an academic issue but an issue of justice, because those who are hurt the most by climate change are the world's poorest 3 billion. He started volunteering, working with the poor and examining his own consumption habits, like how much he drives.

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si is less about ecology than morality and fairness.

"Climate change is a global problem with serious social, environmental, economic, distributional and political dimensions, and poses one of the greatest challenges for humanity," the bishop said Saturday. "The poor populations are the most severely affected even though they are the least responsible."

Pope Francis, called a rock star by young religious climate activists, was not in Paris. But as he spoke to faithful in St. Peter's Square Sunday he appealed to those deciding on climate change measures to show courage by also fighting poverty, saying "the two choices go together."

He asked for prayers so that those making decisions on climate measures receive "the courage to always use as their criterion of choice the greater good of the human family."

Marcia McNutt, a former U.S. Geological Survey director and Science magazine editor who is about to become the head of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, can't say enough about the importance of the pope's message.
"You can argue the science until cows come home, but that just appeals to people's intellect," McNutt said. "The pope's argument appeals to someone's heart. Whenever you appeal to someone's heart that's a much more powerful message."

In some ways, the enlisting of the faith movement is a sign of scientists' desperation, but it's also a realization of the need for a moral revolution on climate, said Ramanathan, who actually briefed the pope on climate in a parking lot.

The world will not act enough on climate change, Ramanathan said, "until we teach this in every church, every mosque, every synagogue, every temple."

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-3348252/Scientists-enlist-big-gun-climate-action-Faith.html

December 7, 2015

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=e1b53c2dcd&e=709fe41ec4

December 8, 2015

Talking Point
Issue I
Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES)/EcoIslam

http://us11.campaign-archive2.com/?u=9e7db8d664e580892adb797bf&id=2869b2629c&e=ec660b7322

December 12, 2015

Nations Approve Landmark Climate Accord in Paris

By Coral Davenport
New York Times

LE BOURGET, France — With the sudden bang of a gavel Saturday night, representatives of 195 nations reached a landmark accord that will, for the first time, commit nearly every country to lowering planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions to help stave off the most drastic effects of climate change.
The deal, which was met with an eruption of cheers and ovations from thousands of delegates gathered from around the world, represents a historic breakthrough on an issue that has foiled decades of international efforts to address climate change.

Traditionally, such pacts have required developed economies like the United States to take action to lower greenhouse gas emissions, but they have exempted developing countries like China and India from such obligations.

The accord, which United Nations diplomats have been working toward for nine years, changes that dynamic by requiring action in some form from every country, rich or poor.

“This is truly a historic moment,” the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, said in an interview. “For the first time, we have a truly universal agreement on climate change, one of the most crucial problems on earth.”

President Obama, who regards tackling climate change as a central element of his legacy, spoke of the deal in a televised address from the White House. “This agreement sends a powerful signal that the world is fully committed to a low-carbon future,” he said. “We’ve shown that the world has both the will and the ability to take on this challenge.”

Scientists and leaders said the talks here represented the world’s last, best hope of striking a deal that would begin to avert the most devastating effects of a warming planet.

Mr. Ban said there was “no Plan B” if the deal fell apart. The Eiffel Tower was illuminated with that phrase Friday night.

The new deal will not, on its own, solve global warming. At best, scientists who have analyzed it say, it will cut global greenhouse gas emissions by about half enough as is necessary to stave off an increase in atmospheric temperatures of 2 degrees Celsius or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. That is the point at which, scientific studies have concluded, the world will be locked into a future of devastating consequences, including rising sea levels, severe droughts and flooding, widespread food and water shortages and more destructive storms.

But the Paris deal could represent the moment at which, because of a shift in global economic policy, the inexorable rise in planet-warming carbon emissions that started during the Industrial Revolution began to level out and eventually decline.

At the same time, the deal could be viewed as a signal to global financial and energy markets, triggering a fundamental shift away from investment in coal, oil and gas as primary energy sources toward zero-carbon energy sources like wind, solar and nuclear power.

“The world finally has a framework for cooperating on climate change that’s suited to the task,” said Michael Levi, an expert on energy and climate change policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. “Whether or not this becomes a true turning point for the world, though, depends critically on how seriously countries follow through.”
Just five years ago, such a deal seemed politically impossible. A similar 2009 climate change summit meeting in Copenhagen collapsed in acrimonious failure after countries could not unite around a deal.

Unlike in Copenhagen, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius of France said on Saturday, the stars for this assembly were aligned.

The changes that led to the Paris accord came about through a mix of factors, particularly major shifts in the domestic politics and bilateral relationships of China and the United States, the world’s two largest greenhouse gas polluters.

Since the Copenhagen deal collapsed, scientific studies have confirmed that the earliest impacts of climate change have started to sweep across the planet. While scientists once warned that climate change was a problem for future generations, recent scientific reports have concluded that it has started to wreak havoc now, from flooding in Miami to droughts and water shortages in China.

In a remarkable shift from their previous standoffs over the issue, senior officials from both the United States and China praised the Paris accord on Saturday night.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who has spent the past year negotiating behind the scenes with his Chinese and Indian counterparts in order to help broker the deal, said, “The world has come together around an agreement that will empower us to chart a new path for our planet.”

Xie Zhenhua, the senior Chinese climate change negotiator, said, “The agreement is not perfect, and there are some areas in need of improvement.” But he added, “This does not prevent us from marching forward with this historic step.” Mr. Xie called the deal “fair and just, comprehensive and balanced, highly ambitious, enduring and effective.”

Negotiators from many countries have said that a crucial moment in the path to the Paris accord came last year in the United States, when Mr. Obama enacted the nation’s first climate change policy — a set of stringent new Environmental Protection Agency regulations designed to slash greenhouse gas pollution from the nation’s coal-fired power plants. Meanwhile, in China, the growing internal criticism over air pollution from coal-fired power plants led President Xi Jinping to pursue domestic policies to cut coal use.

In November 2014 in Beijing, Mr. Obama and Mr. Xi announced that they would jointly pursue plans to cut domestic greenhouse gas emissions. That breakthrough announcement was seen as paving the way to the Paris deal, in which nearly all the world’s nations have jointly announced similar plans.

The final language did not fully satisfy everyone. Representatives of some developing nations expressed consternation. Poorer countries had pushed for a legally binding provision requiring that rich countries appropriate a minimum of at least $100 billion a year to help them mitigate and adapt to the ravages of climate change. In the final deal, that $100 billion figure appears only in a preamble, not in the legally binding portion of the agreement.
“We’ve always said that it was important that the $100 billion was anchored in the agreement,” said Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu, a negotiator for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the incoming leader of a coalition known as the Least Developed Countries coalition. In the end, though, they let it go.

Despite the historic nature of the Paris climate accord, its success still depends heavily on two factors outside the parameter of the deal: global peer pressure and the actions of future governments.

The core of the Paris deal is a requirement that every nation take part. Ahead of the Paris talks, governments of 186 nations put forth public plans detailing how they would cut carbon emissions through 2025 or 2030.

Those plans alone, once enacted, will cut emissions by half the levels required to stave off the worst effects of global warming. The national plans vary vastly in scope and ambition — while every country is required to put forward a plan, there is no legal requirement dictating how, or how much, countries should cut emissions.

Thus, the Paris pact has built in a series of legally binding requirements that countries ratchet up the stringency of their climate change policies in the future. Countries will be required to reconvene every five years, starting in 2020, with updated plans that would tighten their emissions cuts.

Countries will also be legally required to reconvene every five years starting in 2023 to publicly report on how they are doing in cutting emissions compared to their plans. They will be legally required to monitor and report on their emissions levels and reductions, using a universal accounting system.

That hybrid legal structure was explicitly designed in response to the political reality in the United States. A deal that would have assigned legal requirements for countries to cut emissions at specific levels would need to go before the United States Senate for ratification. That language would have been dead on arrival in the Republican-controlled Senate, where many members question the established science of human-caused climate change, and still more wish to thwart Mr. Obama’s climate change agenda.

So the individual countries’ plans are voluntary, but the legal requirements that they publicly monitor, verify and report what they are doing, as well as publicly put forth updated plans, are designed to create a “name-and-shame” system of global peer pressure, in hopes that countries will not want to be seen as international laggards.

That system depends heavily on the views of the future world leaders who will carry out those policies. In the United States, every Republican candidate running for president in 2016 has publicly questioned or denied the science of climate change, and has voiced opposition to Mr. Obama’s climate change policies.

In the Senate, Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader, who has led the charge against Mr. Obama’s climate change agenda, said, “Before his international partners pop the champagne,
they should remember that this is an unattainable deal based on a domestic energy plan that is likely illegal, that half the states have sued to halt, and that Congress has already voted to reject.”

There were few of those concerns at the makeshift negotiations center here in this suburb north of Paris. The delegates rose to their feet in applause to thank the French delegation, which drew on the finest elements of the country’s longstanding traditions of diplomacy to broker a deal that was acceptable to all sides.

France’s European partners recalled the coordinated Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, which killed 130 people and threatened to cast a shadow over the negotiations. But, bound by a collective good will toward France, countries redoubled their efforts.

“This demonstrates the strength of the French nation and makes us Europeans all proud of the French nation,” said Miguel Arias Cañete, the European Union’s commissioner for energy and climate action.

Yet amid the spirit of success that dominated the final hours of the negotiations, Mr. Arias Cañete reminded delegates that the accord was the beginning of the real work. “Today, we celebrate,” he said. “Tomorrow, we have to act. This is what the world expects of us.”

**Correction: December 12, 2015**

An earlier version of this article misstated the agency for which Michael Levi works. It is the Council on Foreign Relations, not the Center on Foreign Relations.


**December 15, 2015**

Climate, Mind and Behavior Newsletter

Garrison Institute

[https://ginst.informz.net/informzdataservice/onlineversion/pub/bWFpbGluZ2luc3RhbmNlaWQ9NTIyOTA4Nw==](https://ginst.informz.net/informzdataservice/onlineversion/pub/bWFpbGluZ2luc3RhbmNlaWQ9NTIyOTA4Nw==)

**December 16, 2015**

On care for our common home

By Phyllis Zagano
National Catholic Reporter

When you were decking your halls recently, they probably were not in your 30,000 square-foot hillside mansion in Los Angeles. That's not a typo. Things have gotten so out-of-hand in
California that The New York Times ran a front-page story about the seventy-foot high $100-million extravaganza the neighbors call "the Starship Enterprise."

Maybe the Archdiocese of Los Angeles should tack a copy of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment "Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home" to the front door of the building?

The construction is ruining the environment. No kidding. There are tales of dirty water run-off, trucked-out dirt, even the threat of landslide.

Things are getting quite serious. Maybe not in your backyard today, but tomorrow. …

It is time for everyone to take a deep look at what is going on. Let's connect the dots between climate change, excessive building, and money.

Yes, I know about the Paris climate change agreement. Yes, I know 196 world leaders agreed to do something for the planet. But Paris was essentially about poverty. The excesses of the rich are what cause greenhouse gasses, and it is the poor who suffer. The rich are not generally focused on their carbon footprints or whether they've properly separated the paper and plastic for recycling.

I am talking about the superrich, the folks overbuilding in California and elsewhere around the world. I am talking about the secret rich, who have enough money to keep from being famous. I am talking about the very rich, who settle back in wood-paneled cabins of their private aircraft with double beds and showers and butlers as they jet from one hideaway to another. You can read the details in The Times. You can see the results in L.A.

Of course it's not only in Los Angeles. In larger or smaller measure, the same blight spreads in cities and towns around the globe where zoning and building inspections are minimal or non-existent, or where other shall we say "interests" are considered when granting variances. No matter who you are, someone else has more money, more power, and more connections. No matter where you are, you have the opportunity to suffer the poverty of careless oversight combined with too much money, power, and connections. The overall result: a ruined neighborhood or cityscape, a polluted stream or wasted woodland. Whether really or metaphorically, each of us lives with the truly poor at the bottom of every overbuilt hill awaiting the certain landslide of rubbish and dirty water.

In these respects, with Laudato Si' Pope Francis is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Except of course, there's not that much wilderness left. Francis' words are strong, but realistic: pollution causes premature deaths and the earth is starting to look like "an immense pile of filth."

The bottom line, in Francis' words: "we have no such right."

No, we do not. But, we suffer equally the "globalization of indifference." Whether at the town council meeting or down at the zoning board, high-priced lawyers argue that this or another structure or road or clearing is "in keeping with the surrounding area." Other high-priced lawyers create the shell companies that own the land and structures, so even if a government agency
orders a correction or a tear-down, the village, town, or city must expend huge resources just finding out who owns the place.

So it is with the Los Angeles "residence" that seems big enough to house a plane load full of refugees. Who owns it? Who can do anything about it? And, beyond the people at the bottom of the hill, who cares?

[Phyllis Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y. She will speak February 9, 2016 at St. Michael's College, Vermont and May 6, 2016 at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto. Her books include *On Prayer: A Letter to My Godchild* and *In the Image of Christ: Essays on Being Catholic and Female*.

http://ncronline.org/blogs/just-catholic/care-our-common-home

December 16, 2015

WCC leader says faith groups must follow up on climate deal

Vatican Radio

World leaders have hailed the climate change agreement they struck in Paris at the weekend as historic, while some environmentalists have warned the deal does not go far enough to curb the effects of global warming on our planet. Financial analysts meanwhile have described the summit's outcome as the most important climate agreement since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, saying it will boost the world's low carbon-emissions economy.

Leaders of the Christian Churches and other faith communities also played a vital role in Paris, representing the voice of the poorest communities who are worst effected by climate change.

Pope Francis on Sunday urged the international community to urgently follow up on the path set by the agreement, paying special attention “for the most vulnerable populations”.

Among the Christian leaders addressing the talks in Paris was the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. He was in Rome this week for talks with Cardinal Peter Turkson of the Pontifical Justice and Peace Council and members of the St Egidio community. Rev Fykse Tveit spoke to Philippa Hitchen about his hopes and his expectations following the historic agreement…

Rev Fykse Tveit says he told the politicians in Paris that all people – but especially the most vulnerable – have a right to hope that the world leaders would show responsibility towards all of humanity and not just the interests of their own countries.

He says the agreement is an important symbol of this and that politicians, business leaders, researchers, the civil sector and the religious communities now need to “speak the same language” to press for monitoring and implementation.
Faith leaders, he says, need to be “both strong in the conviction that (implementation) is possible” and hold the world leaders accountable to the commitments they have made. In Paris, he says, there was an interaction between civil society, the most vulnerable communities and politicians, “working together in ways we haven’t seen before”.

The religious discourse – especially Pope Francis’ encyclical – he says, has had an impact and “now it’s time to follow up”.

Regarding the recent refugee crisis that has caused tensions in many European countries, including his own nation, Norway, Rev Fykse Tveit praises the Norwegian Council of Churches for calling for the legal rights of refugees to be respected. He says there is a growing ecumenical and interfaith movement opposing the skepticism and proposing a more hospitable approach.

There is a strong role for the Churches, he says, to combat the current fears and show that “our own security and wellbeing is not only defined by protecting our resources, but by making sure we live in a world of peace and justice, dealing with each other in a decent way”.

Rev Fykse Tveit also speaks about the Jubilee Year, inaugurated by Pope Francis earlier this month, saying it offers an ecumenical challenge, as well as opportunity for the “worldwide fellowship of humanity” to see that we need mercy “to be able to find a way forward”.

Finally the WCC leaders shares some of the priorities of the ecumenical body for the coming year: firstly, to look at what Christians can say together to combat the use of religion to justify violence; secondly to follow up on the climate change achievements; and thirdly to pursue the search for justice and peace, especially in the Middle East.

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/12/16/wcc_leader_says_faith_groups_must_follow_up_on_climate_deal/1194830

December 22, 2015

The ecological justice work of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary at West Lake landfill — and beyond

By Kelly Moffitt
St. Louis Public Radio

You may have heard of the local group of nuns who go to Bridgeton to pray for and protest over the West Lake and Bridgeton landfills, which have been the subject of much controversy in recent years. What you may not know is that movement is part of a greater spiritual calling for the Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM) to do ecological justice work — and how close-to-home the landfill saga is for the sisters.

In fact, the landfills are less than two miles from the group’s living quarters and administrative offices. After moving to the area in 2012 from the convent at St. Mary’s Hospital in Richmond...
Heights, the order started to become active not only at the landfills but also at town hall meetings, contacting local officials and adopting environmental investing and philanthropic policies.

FSM and the Catholic Church’s focus on environmentalism, ignited by Pope Francis’ calls to address climate change with the groundbreaking 42,000 word encyclical, has not always been so pronounced.

“We as Franciscans have always been involved with the environment as we follow St. Francis’ model,” said Sister Susan Scholl, president of the group. “Even for us, we’ve been in healthcare, it has only been in the last four to five years that we’ve turned our focus to the environmental issues.”

Scholl is referring to the sisters’ involvement as founders of SSM Health in St. Louis.

“When we moved our sisters from our convent behind St. Mary’s, our offices also moved to Bridgeton,” Scholl said. “All of us were in the same area as the landfill, which was somewhat of a surprise to us. The proximity to it was our first awakening to it.”

On Tuesday’s “St. Louis on the Air” Scholl and Gale Thackrey, the group’s ecological justice coordinator, joined the show to talk about the work they do to better the environment and how it ties in with the Catholic Church’s environmental mandate as a whole.

In fact, the landfills are less than two miles from where the group’s living quarters and administrative offices sit. After moving to the area in 2011 from Richmond Heights, the order started to become active not only at the landfill sites but also at town hall meetings, contacting local officials and adopting environmental investing and philanthropy policies.

On Tuesday’s “St. Louis on the Air” Sister Susan Scholl, the president of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, and Gale Thackrey, the group’s ecological justice coordinator, joined the show to talk about the work they do to better the environment and how it ties in with Pope Francis’ calls to address climate change and the Catholic Church’s environmental mandate as a whole.

Sister Susan Scholl and Gale Thackrey join "St. Louis on the Air" host Don Marsh to discuss the ecological justice work of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary at the West lake landfill and, more broadly, in their "mission investing."

A mission to care for the environment

“The sisters have a mission that is ‘compassionate care of the planet,’” said Thackrey, who recently returned from Paris, where she attended the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference to network. “Through that, I look for areas where there may be an injustice, areas where we can do better. When I heard about the West Lake Landfill issue through the Missouri Coalition for the Environment … I was surprised to find out all this was happening in the St. Louis area.”
Thackrey, and later the sisters themselves, met with the coalition as well as “Just Moms STL,” a group of moms in the Bridgeton area advocating for environmental and health justice for those living around the landfills.

They found that, most of all, people outside of Bridgeton just didn’t know about the issue. That’s when the sisters started attending community meetings, visiting classrooms, meeting with legislators with company executives, and also exerting a physical presence at the landfills through prayer vigils.

**Bringing awareness through action**

Nowadays, you can find the sisters holding a prayer vigil once every other week across from the site of the landfills — something Thackrey invites all faith communities to participate in. There are only 74 sisters who are part of the order today, and they are aging. “There’s very little to do on a daily basis, physically,” said Scholl. “We can lend our presence and our financial support and the wisdom of our years.”

“Our presence hopefully brings some notoriety to it,” Scholl continued.

Thackrey said the group is making some strides politically and counts the legislation recently introduced in November in the U.S. Senate (sponsored by Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt) and House (sponsored by Lacy Clay and Ann Wagner) as signs of success that their pleas are being heard. Those bills call for the Secretary of the Army, through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to take over the remediation efforts at West Lake Landfill from Republic Services.

“Their ecological justice mission is to improve our environment, to have a response to things that may negate a healthy environment,” said Thackrey, calling the bills a tremendous success. “The sisters … realize health and environment are very closely related. From that aspect, we continue to improve our environment, therefore improving health.”

**Bringing change through investment**

Aside from protest, prayer and legislative action, the sisters are pursuing ecological justice in another, stealthier way: through their finances they invested over the years from their congregation.

“We are an aging congregation — we can’t be out there doing these things, but we can support those who are,” said Scholl. “We can use the resources we have to a better advantage. We took a chunk of the money we had invested in Wall Street type things and moved it to mission investment. That means we can use these resources while we still earn a return for doing sustainable agriculture, saving the wetlands, investing in clean energy.”

"The truth of it is that we single-handedly can't have an impact, but it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

The other portion of money that the sisters took out is going to philanthropy.
“The truth of it is that we single-handedly can’t have an impact, but it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness,” said Scholl. “We do what we can do. It is very inspiring to see all the groups, both where our mission investments are but groups we do philanthropy with, to see how inspired these young people are and the kind of programs that they put together to save the rainforest, to use clean energy, sustainable agriculture.”

Thackrey said she met with the beneficiaries of some of their investments at the Paris climate conference and was excited to see the impact such investing had on the groups. Likewise, she met with indigenous groups from “where the frontlines are burning,” and realized how much more help they need. She came away from the conference feeling optimistic, particularly given the White House American Business Act on Climate Pledge and the involvement of mayors from urban areas all over the globe.

Scholl believes that the Pope’s recent statements on climate change are also cause for optimism about the movement on climate change as a whole — globally and here at home.

“I think he has done a great service for the whole global environment because people are impacted by this,” Scholl said. “I’m very impressed with Pope Francis that he was able to step out there. He does get criticism because he is picking into little things—but those are things people can do every day. He begins to tie it to spirituality. This is our common home. There is a requirement for all of us to take care of it. Frankly, personally, everything this man writes just bowls me over. I think he is really excellent.”

“I think the Holy Spirit put him in place and I trust her judgment,” she continued.

Has the Pope influenced your views on climate change? Email talk@stlpublicradio.org or tweet us at @STLonAir.

Some responses, via email, so far:

No, the Holy Father hasn't changed my mind, because I already believe, and with reading Earth In The Balance and An Inconvenient Truth, from former Vice-President Al Gore, I've alway believe that our activities have affected the Earth's climate. We are continuing to contribute to the changes in weather, and overall climate, and with each passing year, I predict, that the extreme weather we're having will get worse. It doesn't take Nostradamus to see that with the violent storms we see in Spring and Summer, the warmer weather we're having now, and the affects around the world that climate change is not, as some would say, a "a Liberal myth". I applaud his Holiness for his stance, and as a Catholic, I hope we'd learn to reverse (as much as we can) the damage we're doing to the world, before it's too late [lest we abuse the world God gave us]. -- Michael Chandla

This World is gifted with a highly respected man in the way of Pope Francis. This doesn't happen often enough. His "Laudato Si" is a testament to our culture. He is directing us to "Care for our common home.” Hard to believe the conservative attitude that there is no issue with the condition of our Home. Revolutionaries historically may not live long lives...pray this is not true
of Francis. We need him, his love for all things living is a beacon for us to emulate. The Franciscan Sisters are certainly among those carrying his banner and acting on it. —Kate Shaw

No, the Pope endorsed climate change as a moral, as well as an existential, issue. Something I already believe is true. Since morality is rarely ever discussed in this world of political and economic tussling, he elevated this life threatening reality to a new plain. --Barbara Anderson

I am influenced insofar I am affirmed. Granted, this pope has some limited scientific background. For these issues my views on global warming were formed years ago by scientific evidence. It is important and good that he affirms the need for action to address climate change. His is a voice that expresses a need for action in many places that have been ignored for far too long. --Peter Gounis

No the Pope has not influenced my opinion on climate change. I believe climate change is real and so does the Pope. --Rosemary Bagin

I love this Pope but his opinion on climate change hasn’t moved me in any way. I’ve felt this has been happening and was quashed in the US for many years now, mostly due to the corporations that make money off fossil fuels. I’m glad he’s been able to voice his opinion on such a large stage.

What I am most amazed by though, is the negative reaction to him even having an opinion on climate change. He’s one man, with no legislative power, no authority to impose or require any action- just an opinion and a suggestion. And that that opinion could ignite such backlash (mostly in the US) kind of gives me a glimpse into what it must have been like when Christ spoke. I never understood how someone’s ideas of goodness and loving and caring could provoke and bristle people. Seeing this in a modern day setting put the crucifixion in a brighter light for me. -- Susan Gioia


December 22, 2015

Praise and plaudits from the best of COP21

By Donna Schaper
National Catholic Reporter

After Paris and its enormous invigoration of the environmental, scientific and religious communities, it is time to figure out who is who and what is what. My big takeaways involve all three of these communities at their environmental -- and strategic -- best.

First, the scientists. Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a scientist with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California-San Diego and member of the Pontifical Academy
of Sciences, told the Associated Press during COP21 (the United Nations climate summit) he thinks the alliance of science and religion -- as exemplified in Pope Francis’ encyclical “Laudato Si’, on Care for Our Common Home” -- would play a major role in the eventual agreement.

Thank you for this handshake between science and religion. It is as rare as it is necessary.

Physicist John Schellnhuber, founder of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, added in the same piece he has attended the international talks for 11 years and essentially been disappointed. But now with the watchful gaze from faith communities, he suspected leaders might be held more accountable: "They know they will be measured against the encyclical," Schellnhuber, also a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, told AP.

Thank you for another rare and essential handshake, and thank you, Vatican, for hosting such an illustrious academy of science!

The ecumenical religious climate movement also arrived in Paris with great vigor. Most impressive was the Lutheran World Federation’s decision to bring only delegates to COP21 who were under age 30. That was daring and smart. If they have to go to more COPs, at least they will be prepared.

At the conference’s midweek point, the many faith groups gathered at the American Cathedral in Paris to build ourselves up. GreenFaith, the OurVoices campaign, the World Council of Churches, Islamic Relief Worldwide, the Bhumi Project (Hindu), Plum Village (Buddhist), the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, ACT Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the Franciscan Action Network, and others all were represented.

The liturgy for the night was appropriate to our stage of development as a global religious movement. The liturgy was quiet, humble and had pilgrimage as its central motif. We were helping each other to “keep on keeping on.”

Thank you, American Cathedral in Paris, for hosting us and our simple, yet deep, liturgy.

And then there is the climate movement, which involved itself in great ethical spectacle all across Paris. The best for me was the trial of Exxon Mobil, arranged by 350.org and its inimitable leader Bill McKibben. Since the Paris Agreement’s adoption, he has basically argued that the deal is great, especially if it had happened in 1995. “This didn’t save the planet but it may have saved the chance of saving the planet,” McKibben also said. He won’t let us forget the power of evil and how much Exxon Mobil destroyed.

Thank you, Bill McKibben, for keeping naiveté from our door.

I won’t forget going to a planning meeting for a proposed next-day morning action at the Louvre. The group spent 45 minutes imitating the Occupy movement’s open style of meeting, with once again the white men doing more talking than the white women. Of the 50 people
gathered in the cold dark room, near the Bastille, appropriately uncomfortable, three were people of color.

The question was whether the gorgeous black umbrellas with messages on them should be delivered en masse or individually, given it was believed that neither cops nor the press would let anyone anywhere near the Louvre. The concerning issue was that the Louvre takes donations from fossil fuel industries. “What if we can’t get in?” “Well, let’s find out where another museum is that takes fossil fuel contributions and put up our umbrellas there.”

The action was actually -- even with this modest preparation -- incredibly successful and got the kind of international notoriety it deserved. Even with Paris on lockdown for security reasons following the mid-November terrorist attacks, two women got into the Louvre and were able to pour oil on the floor. As is typical these days with ethical spectacle, the tweets mattered more than the action.

Thank you, environmental movement for ethical spectacles abundant.

I will give Ramanathan a final word here: “Until we get our message into every church, every mosque, every temple, every movement, the environment will not change,” he told AP. “When we do, it will.”

For everything to change, as Naomi Klein puts it so well, everybody will have to change. More religious and scientific cooperation and getting over the old divides will matter. More ethical spectacle, even when it is immature, will help us. And surely getting to the grassroots -- as the pope has argued in his field hospital approach to the congregations -- will be necessary. No root can be left behind, as everything changes.

And people under 30 should get the tickets and the support going forward -- and those of us over 30 need to be sure to fund them.

[Donna Schaper is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City. She was in Paris for a portion of the COP21 United Nations climate summit.]


December 28, 2015

A young Catholic from Kenya reflects on the Pope's African visit

A month after the apostolic visit to Kenya, Uganda, and CAR, the impact of Francis' call to integrity, holiness, and unity has been felt among both Catholics and non-Catholics alike

By Allen Ottaro
The Catholic World Report
A month has already gone by since Pope Francis set foot on Kenya soil, on his first apostolic visit to the African continent, a visit which also took him to Uganda and the Central African Republic. Following the trip, the Holy Father has shared his reflections about his time in Africa, fielding questions from journalists on the flight back to Rome and commenting at the Wednesday General Audience on the second day of December.

Asked what his most memorable moment of his first trip to Africa was, Pope Francis replied, “The crowds. That joy. That capacity to celebrate on an empty stomach. But for me, Africa was a surprise. I thought, God surprises us, but even Africa surprises us. There were many moments. But the crowds, they felt visited. They have a very great sense of welcome. I saw in the three nations that they had this sense of welcome because they were happy to feel visited.” Back in St. Peter’s Square at the General Audience, Pope Francis used the opportunity to share his experience and to give thanks. “Africa is beautiful! I thank the Lord for this great gift of His.”

I offer here some initial reflections, based on my own experience of the Pope’s time in Nairobi; I know that in the months to come, more reflections will emerge. I begin with a brief history of my ‘papal encounters’. Prior to last month, the last time a pope had been to Kenya was in September 1995. I was still in primary school, in my home town of Njoro, about 180 kilometers from the capital, Nairobi. I was not even aware that Pope John Paul II was in the country, perhaps owing to the fact that my parents were both non-practicing—my mum a Catholic and my dad an Anglican.

Fast forward to my early twenties when I became actively involved in youth and young adult ministry. My friends and I were preparing ourselves for World Youth Day 2005, in Cologne, Germany. I was looking forward to see Pope John Paul II. Then, in April of that year, he died. I was devastated. Would the next Pope show the same love and commitment to young people as JPII did? Would he show up in Cologne, to honor the appointment JPII had made with the youth?

That World Youth Day turned out to be what the then Archbishop of Cologne Cardinal Joachim Meisner, referred to as “the World Youth Day of two Popes. John Paul II in heaven and Benedict XVI on earth.” I managed, finally to catch glimpses of Pope Benedict XVI during the main events of WYD 2005. It was a wonderful gift to be able to lead groups to the next three World Youth Days, in Sydney (2008), Madrid (2011) and Rio (2013).

In May 2015, I was invited to Rome, to a meeting of the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), in preparation for the release of the encyclical *Laudato Si’.* Our Coordinator, Mr. Tomas Insua, intimated that six of us would have a chance to attend the Wednesday General Audience and to greet Pope Francis. I could not believe it—until it finally happened. Pope Francis, at the end of the audience, went round greeting everyone gathered on the upper sections of the square on either end of the main podium from where he delivers the catechesis. By this time, news of a possible papal trip to Africa was already going round. Someone asked me whether I would be meeting Pope Francis on his visit to Africa. I remember thinking to myself that it would be really special were that to happen.
When the aircraft carrying Pope Francis and his entourage landed in Nairobi, I was attending a conference organized by the Symposium for Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) on Land Grab and Just Governance in Africa. I watched television coverage of the Pope’s arrival and marveled at just how extensively the Kenyan media were reporting on the events. The Catholic Church in Kenya does not run a television station, and so it was rather unusual to watch a flurry of interviews featuring priests, bishops and lay Catholics, explaining the significance of the papal visit. It was a moment of grace to see updates on social media, with a friend on Facebook sharing that she was now able to discuss her Catholic faith in a public space, without feeling shy. In closing his speech during the welcome ceremony at State House, President Kenyatta requested Pope Francis to, “Pray for me. Pray that as I lead this nation, God will lead me”.

Before celebrating Mass at the University of Nairobi grounds, Pope Francis held an ecumenical and interreligious meeting at the Apostolic Nunciature. He reiterated the need for religions to play a key role in “forming consciences, instilling in the young the profound spiritual values of our respective traditions, and training good citizens, capable of infusing civil society with honesty, integrity and a world view which values the human person over power and material gain”. I reflected on how honesty and integrity are values that are in short supply in my country, where the mentality of “getting ahead” often takes precedence. Unable to make it to the University grounds for the Mass on a wet, rainy morning due to early road closures, I followed the Mass on television, and listened to the translation of the Pope’s homily, which he delivered in Italian. I felt encouraged and re-affirmed as Pope Francis reminded us that Jesus “asks us to be missionary disciples, men and women who radiate the truth, beauty and life-changing power of the Gospel”, and ending with the motto chosen by the Church in Kenya for his visit: “Stand strong in faith! Do not be afraid!”

Later that afternoon, together with two of my colleagues, I went to the United Nations complex to listen to the Pope address diplomats and UN staff. It was also the first time I saw Pope Francis in person in Nairobi. Events at the United Nations offices in Nairobi are usually formal affairs, full of protocol. On this occasion, however, the atmosphere was one of joyous anticipation. A choir was already belting out well-known Catholic hymns as the Pope alighted from his car. The UN staff in conference room two, cheered and ululated as the Holy Father, accompanied by Cardinals Njue (Archbishop of Nairobi), Turkson (President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace) and Parolin (Secretary of State), walked into the hall. Welcoming remarks from the top three UN officials followed, with Mr. Steiner (Executive Director, United Nations Environment Program) inviting Pope Francis to “speak from the heart of Africa, to the hearts of people across the world”.

For my colleagues and I, it was a moment of ‘homecoming’, of the encyclical Laudato Si’ in Africa. Pope Francis gave a strong and impassioned, wide-ranging speech, touching on deforestation and desertification, the ‘throw-away culture’ and urbanization, and development, poverty and exclusion. On climate change, Pope Francis warned that, in reference to the Paris climate change conference, “it would be sad, and I dare even say catastrophic, were particular interests to prevail over the common good”. When he reminded us in his final remarks that “Africa offers the world a beauty and natural richness which inspire praise of the Creator”, I
noticed how little I pay attention to my natural surroundings, and just how much all of creation should fill me with a sense of awe for God.

On his final day in Kenya, Pope Francis visited the Kangemi neighborhood, where he met with 1200 representatives from eleven slums in Nairobi, referring to them as “brothers and sisters, who I am not ashamed to say, have a special place in my heart”. At the Kasarani Sports Stadium on the other side of town, thousands of young people were gathered. The bishops and political leaders, including several governors arrived, and were soon joined by President Kenyatta. The atmosphere was electric, full of song and dance, punctuated with moments of reflection led by the Archdiocese of Nairobi’s youth chaplain. At one point, the Bishops accepted a challenge from the program director, to dance to a popular local tune. Within minutes and without being prompted, the President and the First Lady, joined in as well! It was as if they were all saying to the young people, “we identify with you, with your hopes and desires.”

Then Pope Francis arrived at the stadium and was driven around the stadium in the Pope mobile. He listened and took notes, as two youth representatives, Lynette and Emmanuel, enumerated the challenges faced by their contemporaries. Tribalism, corruption and radicalization of young people, all hot button issues in Kenya, were top on the list. The politicians seemed nervous. I found it most impressive that none of the politicians were listed on the day’s program. Young people are generally treated by the political class in Kenya as mere political capital. This day however, was for the Pope and the youth. “Tribalism! It can destroy. It can mean having your hands hidden behind your backs, and have a stone in each hand to throw at others. Tribalism can only be overcome with your ear, your heart and your hand”, said Pope Francis in his response as he tackled the issues head-on. Speaking in his native Spanish, he went on to invite everyone to do something that deeply moved me, and that will be remembered in Kenya for a long time. “I want to invite you all today, to the young, to invite Lynette and Emmanuel to come up now, and that we hold each other’s hands. Let’s hold hands together. Let’s stand up as a sign against tribalism. We are all a nation!” He exhorted us to work every day, opening our hearts to root out tribalism, a vice that has wrought division and pain in Kenyan society for decades.

Pointing out that the evil of corruption is a reality in all areas of life, including in the Vatican, Pope Francis explained that “corruption is something that eats inside, like sugar. Sweet, we like it, it’s easy. And then we end up in a bad way. So much sugar that we end up being diabetic, or our country ends up being diabetic. Young people: corruption is not a path to life; it’s a path to death”. Corruption in Kenya has been described by many as a national disaster, as the vice has permeated almost all spheres of society. The Church in Kenya now has a great task ahead, in ensuring that the words of Pope Francis are not conveniently forgotten.

Finally, Pope Francis decided to share “something personal”. “In my pocket, I always carry two things”, he said, “a rosary to pray, and something here which seems odd, this is here the history of God’s failure. It’s the way of the cross, a mini way of the cross, as Jesus suffered, and when they condemned him right up to where he was buried. With these two things, I do the best I can. And thanks to these two things, i never lose hope”.

I hope that Pope Francis’ message may continue to transform my country. That we may do the best we can, that we may never cease to pray, and that we may never lose hope.
Allen Ottaro lives in Nairobi, Kenya, where he is a parishioner at St. Paul’s Catholic University Chapel in the Archdiocese of Nairobi. He is a co-founder of the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa, and is the former national coordinator of MAGIS Kenya.

http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/4466/a_young_catholic_from_kenya_reflects_on_the_popes_african_visit.aspx

December 29, 2015

The Rabbi Who Became an Environment Minister and Calls the Pope His 'Rav'

By Cecilia Blasbalg
Haaretz Daily Newspaper

Sergio Bergman, the Argentinian pharmacist-turned-rabbi-turned-politician, says his latest career choices were all inspired by his 'rabbi': Pope Francis

When Argentina's new government was sworn in earlier this month, most ministers took their oath on a Christian Bible. But there was one politician who brought his own holy text, a Hebrew Bible with just the Old Testament. That was Rabbi Sergio Bergman, Argentina's newly-minted environment minister.

He may be the only rabbi holding a government post outside Israel, but Christianity, and one very Christian leader in particular, played a key role in inspiring Bergman to enter politics and take on the mantle of defender of the environment.

The 53-year-old rabbi, who wears a large knitted skullcap, readily admits that it was his friendship with the Argentine-born Pope Francis – known as Jorge Mario Bergoglio until he became pontiff – that led him to his recent career choices.

"Bergoglio is the reason I got into politics in Argentina. When someone asks me why would I, as a rabbi and also as someone with little background on this issue take on this role, I answer back that before you ask me why, you must ask Bergoglio why, too," Bergman said in an interview with Haaretz.

Protecting the environment "is a moral issue and we will end up destroying the planet if we don't change things. This comes from my lessons with Bergoglio, whom I see as a true rav," he said, using the Hebrew term for rabbi.

Bergman has written several books including "A Gospel According to Francisco," which details his relationship with Bergoglio when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires and is based on the thoughts and teachings of Francis that Bergman collected during their meetings and conversations.
Bergman says that his desire to protect the environment stems also from reading "Laudato si'," the pope's second encyclical, published earlier this year, in which Francis criticizes consumerism and irresponsible development while warning about the dangers of global warming. The document "is my guide and my bible on environmental issues," Bergman told Haaretz in a phone interview last week.

Discussing his environmental policies, he said Argentina has so far lagged behind in the fight against global warming and pledged the country would stand by the agreement signed earlier this month at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, which aims to reduce emissions to a level that will keep the rise in global temperatures below 2 degrees Celsius.

Earlier this year, the rabbi also introduced a bill in the parliament of Mercosur (the South American trade bloc) that would make the Southern Ocean region of the Antarctica a protected area and restrict human activities in the surrounding waters.

Bergman stepped into politics during the 2011 mayoral elections of Buenos Aires, briefly running for mayor as an independent before withdrawing his candidacy to join the conservative Mauricio Macri, who won that election and went on to take the presidency in the national vote last month. Over the last years, the rabbi has served as a municipal official and a lawmaker for Macri's Propuesta Republicana party.

Bergman, who lives with his wife and four children in the northern Buenos Aires suburb of Nunez, started his career as a pharmacist. In 1992 he went on to study at the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Argentina, where he was ordained a Conservative rabbi, and in 2001 he was chosen to lead Templo Libertad, the oldest Jewish congregation in the country, which was founded in the mid-19th century.

In 1993 he moved to Israel for a couple of years where he completed his Master of Education at Hebrew University and afterwards went on to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City where he received his Master of Arts in Jewish Studies.

Despite being a rabbi who entered politics, Bergman feels that Orthodox rabbis holding political posts in Israel could not serve as role models for him.

"What I learned in Israel is the absolute opposite of what I do in Argentina," he said, criticizing the role of religion in the Jewish state.

"I would like for Israel to be a Jewish yet secular state and for all religions and different variations of Judaism to be accepted equally by Israel and not require an appeal to the Supreme Court, which is what happens today," he said, referring to the supremacy of Orthodox Judaism over other streams of the religion in Israel. "Religious leaders in politics only look out for their sector's interests. I was voted by the citizens of Argentina, the majority of whom are not Jewish, and my role in government is not for the interests of the Jewish community but for Argentina as a nation."
There is however at least one issue concerning the Jewish community that is very close to Bergman's heart: the investigation into the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people and left hundreds injured in the deadliest terror attack in the country's history.

Macri has pledged to cancel the agreement signed by his predecessor, the left-leaning Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, to investigate the bombing jointly with Iran.

The deal had been soundly criticized at home and abroad, as Tehran was seen by many – including, according to recent revelations, Kirchner's own foreign minister – as responsible for the attack.

Bergman said Kirchner's policy was the result of her close ties with the socialist government of Venezuela, a country that Macri now seeks to expel from Mercosur over rights abuses.

"The previous relationship between us and Iran was a direct result of Venezuela. Cristina Kirchner used very worrisome expressions leading to anti-Israeli sentiment in Argentina because of Venezuela," Bergman said. "Argentina will change its relationship with Iran and the memorandum (on the AMIA investigation). We want to keep relations only with reasonable countries."

Bergman said he believes relations with Israel will improve, though he blamed the previous government for skewing many Argentinians' views on the Middle East conflict.

"Cristina used the term Palestinian in a certain way to support Venezuela and the agreement with Iran. She presented images of Palestinians as victims of the terrorist actions caused by Israel and used them for her agenda," he said. "I believe that anti-Zionism is a new form of anti-Semitism. To blame Israelis for the deaths of all the Palestinians can lead to hating Jews."

Still, Bergman noted that, as a rabbi who has just been elected to public office, he is the living embodiment of the fact that "Argentina cannot be an anti-Semitic country."

http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/.premium-1.694366

December 30, 2015

Water concerns bubble up in Appalachia

By Lydia Noyes
Global Sisters Report

Since 1970, the Catholic Committee of Appalachia has existed to serve Appalachia and to address the issues this region faces, both communally and environmentally. As a membership-based organization, the CCA provides a community of solidarity and a network of support for people of faith working for social, economic and ecological justice in Appalachia. The CCA
holds an annual gathering every fall, and this post is my reflection on the Sept. 18-20 gathering in Charleston, West Virginia:

After moving to central Appalachia, my husband and I found the community we have been missing at the annual gathering of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia.

For one weekend of the year, legions of passionate and environmentally and socially minded Catholics from the Appalachian Mountain states drive hours to attend the meeting, held this year in Charleston. The mission of the 2015 meeting was to study the water crisis on a local and global scale.

I consider myself relatively informed about the humanitarian crises happening throughout the world thanks to my college education. However, the CCA meeting blew apart my confidence that I could even understand the environmental tragedies in my own backyard. The drought in California is well known, and I expect global water wars to define much of my adult life, but until this conference, I had never given any thought to water issues in the eastern United States.

The conference began with a presentation from Dr. Ben Stout, a professor of stream ecology at Wheeling Jesuit University, about Big Coal's effects on the Appalachian water system. Stout's career was research-focused until he was called to court to testify in a series of cases against coal companies' work to reclaim mountaintop removal sites. When told that they needed to return the mined site to how it looked before, these companies would vehemently deny that the streams they removed had existed in the first place, presumably assuaging themselves of the guilt of rebuilding them.

Though Appalachia is a water-wealthy region, Dr. Stout provided evidence that this water supply is threatened. Toxic algae blooms from excess nutrients that come from chemical fertilizers are becoming larger and more frequent, and underground wells are continuously contaminated by mining.

In 2014, the coal cleaning company Freedom Industries suffered a massive chemical spill from a containment tank used to clean coal slurry that contaminated the Charleston water supply for days. The nonpolar molecule 4-Methylcyclohexanemethanol doesn't dissolve in water and can't be removed by flushing out tanks, causing this hard-to-detect toxin to linger in a water supply virtually forever. Dr. Stout said everyone in Charleston was risking their health unless they fully replaced their water heaters after the spill; the city government only suggested throwing out plastic dishes.

Another conference speaker, Dr. Laura Diener, a professor at Marshall University, spoke about the 2014 chemical spill in terms of poverty and inequality, indicating that income is a driving factor of safety when faced with contaminated water. Her field research and in-person interviews told a shocking story about accessibility.

During the spill, most affluent residents were able to buy bottled water, leave the region for a few days, or drive to various emergency tanks of safe water throughout the city. However, those without cars had difficulty getting to these tanks, and many were forced to drink from their taps
anyway. Some of the tanks in the poorest neighborhoods were illegally filled with the contaminated water, and in some cases, prison inmates weren't given access to safe water until their families protested for days.

This was toxic water. Showering with it caused many to break out in rashes, and ingesting it caused nausea and lingering sickness. Over 700 people were stricken, and 16 were hospitalized. Yet some were still forced by lack of options to use it, even in baby formula.

This was no natural disaster, no act of God. This chemical spill was directly caused by inept safety measures by Freedom Industries and the coal industry as a whole.

This isn't an isolated problem. Spills like this happen a lot, and many regions of Appalachia are permanently cut off from their groundwater supply because of chemical contamination. Why was the Charleston spill different? Why did it make national and international news? Because for once, it affected an urban area. In the words of one of Professor Diener's interviewees:

"It's a good thing this spill happened to rich white people, too — otherwise, no one would pay attention."

Sadly, this lack of attention to the suffering of the rural poor is a common story in Appalachia. Dr. Shannon Bell, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Kentucky, took part in an interactive conversation at the conference about how her research revealed the ways industries pollute rural communities.

In so many ways, the roots of communities and families run incredibly deep in this region. Yet these roots are being torn up as families become stymied in their attempts to stay and thrive in their home communities because of the poverty caused by the coal companies. Bell has collected story after story of women suffering from the ecological impacts of the industry. (Check out her book on her research, *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed: Appalachian Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice*.)

In one instance, a broken containment pond caused massive flooding in a mountain valley and almost carried away a woman's house with her children in it. Now, her children have nightmares every time it rains, and their home has lost all resale value. In another case, coal dust from a processing plant settles so thickly on the homes in the nearby community that some homes have depreciated in value from $144,000 to less than $12,000.

That loss is incredible enough, but it is made worse because living in such close proximity to coal factories dramatically raises one's risk of cancer. When the value of a home can depreciate almost 92 percent, what chance does a non-affluent family have to sell and move somewhere safer? More importantly, why should they have to? That is a loss of power. Without their consent, without their voices being heard, the people of Central Appalachia are being sacrificed for the energy needs of the rest of the world. And every time I turn on the hot water, I am contributing to their suffering.
This isn't a far-away problem. This is happening right here in America. It's affecting the lives of the students I work with. It has defined the lives of their parents and has limited the options for the next generation. The least we can do is to try to understand. After all, being informed is the first step to lasting change.

[Lydia Noyes and her husband, Ian, are volunteers with the Notre Dame Mission Volunteers AmeriCorps program. She is a 2015 graduate of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has degrees in environmental studies and international development.]

[Notes from the Field are reports from young women volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. The project began in the summer of 2015 when, working with the Catholic Volunteer Network, we enlisted four young women working in Honduras, Thailand, Ethiopia and the United States to blog about their experiences. The fall 2015 series presents two more women, both volunteering with sisters' ministries in the United States.]

http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/environment/water-concerns-bubble-appalachia-36021