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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 unexpugnable 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.

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<http://www.themonthly.com.au/blog/robert-manne/2015/01/2015/1435708320/laudato-si-political-reading>

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:

<http://www.deeptimejourney.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Encyclical-Laudato-Si-Comments.pdf>

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”.

<http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2015/07/people-and-planet-first-imperative-to.html>

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.

<http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2015/07/pope-franciss-laudato-si>

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](#) 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

interest. 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.

[1] See: John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Ecology and Religion*. Washington DC: Island Press, 2014. (Foundations of Contemporary Environmental Studies).

<http://www.esa.org/esablog/guest-posts/papal-encyclical-calls-for-renewed-cooperation-of-science-and-ethics/>

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.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/08/world/americas/pope-francis-in-ecuador-calls-for-more-protection-of-rain-forest-and-its-people.html>

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*. “. . . [N]owadays 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](#), 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](#) from mining and oil extraction. The Shuar people have led the [resistance campaign](#) to keep "the oil in the soil." President Rafael Vicente Correa Delgado led a [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](#), 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."

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/10/world/americas/pope-francis-bolivia-catholic-church-apology.html>

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.”

<http://midwestenergynews.com/2015/07/09/from-pope-francis-to-green-muslims-faith-groups-steadfast-in-push-for-clean-energy/>

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 areas 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".

<https://greenmajoritymedia.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/459-an-ode-to-climate-trolls/>

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 the 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. Francis 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.

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-visit-to-the-vatican>

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](#)

<http://www.lincoln.anglican.org/news-events/news-stories/bishop-of-salisbury-welcomes-update-to-environment-guide/>

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 Intergovernmental 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.

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<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/our-common-home-climate-change-brings-moral-change>

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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<http://www.outlookindia.com/article/the-emerging-phenomenon-of-religious-environmentalism/294843>

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).

<http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/from-times-square-to-the-capitol-apache-protestors-fight-u-s-land-swap-with-mining-company/>

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.

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

[1] JOHN XXIII, Encyclical Mater et Magistra (15 May 1961), 3: AAS 53 (1961), 402.

[2] PAUL VI, Encyclical Populorum Progressio (26 March 1967), 14: AAS 59 (1967), 264.

[3] PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 157.

[4] FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN BISHOPS, Aparecida Document (29 June 2007), 66.

[5] JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa (14 September 1995), 52: AAS 88 (1996), 32-22; ID., Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (30 December 1987), 22: AAS 80 (1988), 539.

[6] Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 Incarnationis Mysterium (29 November 1998), 11: AAS 91 (1999), 139-141.

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

<http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1840918/pope-not-alone-people-faith-take-environmental-cause>

July 20, 2015

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, 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](#), 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](#), 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 affects 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.

<http://midwestenergynews.com/2015/07/20/white-house-honors-wisconsin-green-muslims-founder/>

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/0/1AF6664C642BB32785257E8800775585>

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 organizations 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: @WhyDoIcareorg #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 Abdou 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 (Valdleice 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 Greenfaith, 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](#).

<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=781>

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 brake 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:

http://mahb.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/MAHBBlog_PopeFrancisOnAnimalLiberation_MCTobiasJGMorrison_Jul2015.pdf

<http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/pope-francis-on-animal-liberation/>

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.

<http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2015/07/31/3686725/evangelicals-carbon-reduction-letter/>

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:

http://fore.yale.edu/files/Tucker_Grim_Integrating_Ecology_and_Justice.pdf

July-August 2015

Praise Be!

By Rachel Findley and Shelley Tanenbaum

August 4, 2015

Theologian Leonardo Boff compares the Earth Charter and the Pope's Encyclical

Similarities between the Encyclical *Laudato si'*: "On Care for our Common Home" and the Earth Charter, "Earth, Our Home"

By Leonardo Boff
Earth Charter International

The encyclical, *Laudato si'*: 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 lovest 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.

<http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/articles/1171/1/Theologian-Leonardo-Boff-compares-the-Earth-Charter-and-the-Popes-Encyclical/Page1.html>

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:

<http://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2015/08/mary-evelyn-tucker-balancing-science-and-awe/>

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:

<http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-announces-world-day-of-prayer-for-the>

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 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.

From the Vatican, 6th August 2015

Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord.

<http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-announces-world-day-of-prayer-for-the>

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](#)) 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 disenchanted 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.

Daniel C. Maguire is a Professor of Moral Theology at Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit institution in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is author of *A Moral Creed for All Christians* and *The Horrors We Bless: Rethinking the Just-War Legacy* [Fortress Press]. He can be reached at daniel.maguire@marquette.edu

<https://consortiumnews.com/2015/08/12/pope-francis-appeal-for-the-future/>

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.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/13/opinion/uki-goni-peronist-roots-of-pope-francis-politics.html>

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

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.¹ 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 gas²), 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.

1. See my "[Prophet in Kentucky](#)," *The New York Review*, June 14, 1990.

2. See "[Why Not Frack?](#)" *The New York Review*, March 8, 2012.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/aug/13/pope-and-planet/>

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

<http://www.greenfaith.org/media/press-releases/major-islamic-climate-change-declaration-released>

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.

“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.’”

<http://www.theindianpanorama.com/united-states-america/us-news/obama-to-seek-unity-with-pope-francis-on-many-issues-45917.html>

September 1, 2015

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.

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.

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.

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/09/13/us/pope-francis-non-catholic-flock/>

September 17, 2015

Where is Pope Francis? A schedule of his U.S. visit

By Christine Rushton
USA Today

Where in the states is Pontifice 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

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/09/15/pope-visit-washington-new-york-philadelphia-united-states/72073294/>

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 Philadelphia
 - **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.*

Resources:

- <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/catholicnews/2015/01/exclusive-details-of-the-proposal-for-pope-francis-us-visit-revealed/>

- <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pope-francis-will-address-congress-during-us-visit/>
- <http://www.usccb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/francis/papal-visit-2015/2015-papal-visit-schedule.cfm>

<http://www.popefrancisvisit.com/official-final-schedule-of-pope-francis-u-s-visit-2015/>

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:

<http://www.popefrancisvisit.com/official-final-schedule-of-pope-francis-u-s-visit-2015/>

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/09/15/pope-visit-washington-new-york-philadelphia-united-states/72073294/>

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:

http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50836/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=15418

Warmly,

Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim,
Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

<http://fore.yale.edu>

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

<http://www.foe.org/news/news-releases/2015-09-top-musicians-faith-leaders-and-climate-activists-ga>

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-lightstheaway>

The festival will be followed by a vigil in Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza. This vigil is one of many taking place around that world. For more, visit: <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.

RSVP and get free tickets here:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/coming-together-in-faith-on-climate-an-evening-of-celebration-at-washington-national-cathedral-tickets-17898882038>

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%3Dweb_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: Scharmél Roussel, scharmél2008@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, <http://boldnebraska.org/nebraska-lights-the-way-watch-the-pope-address-congress-on-climate-change/>
Contact: Rev. Kim Morrow, kim@nebraskaip.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-lightstheaway>
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 Church, <http://www.ncipl.org/event/pope-address-congress-grnsboro/>
Morehead City – 09/23, 12:00-1:00pm; Prayer Vigil; St Egbert Catholic Church, <http://www.ncipl.org/event/9-23-vigil-st-egbert/>

Raleigh – 09/23, 7:00-8:00pm; Ecumenical Prayer Vigil; Church of the Nativity,
<http://www.ncipl.org/event/let-us-pray-together/>
Contact: Susannah Tuttle, susannah@ncipl.org

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,
<http://paipl.us/event/panel-and-vigil-climate-jobs-and-justice-a-moral-response-to-the-popes-urgent-message/>
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 worshippers, 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 worshippers 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."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/09/18/amid-popes-visit-jews-are-incorporating-his-teachings-into-yom-kippur-traditions/>

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>

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 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.

Gather a group — family, friends, students, parishioners, neighbors, whomever — and experience the inspiration and transformation that Pope Francis' words can bring.

<http://ecospiritualityresources.com/2015/09/22/>

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

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*](#).

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/roger-s-gottlieb/pope-francis-on-climate-change-some-questions_b_8190112.html

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 planet 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.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/254683-faith-in-clean-energy>

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](#).”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/09/24/how-pope-francis-helped-awaken-a-deep-religious-tradition-for-care-for-the-environment/>
