

Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale
<http://fore.yale.edu/>

Religion and Ecology News Articles

October – December 2015

October 7, 2015

Earth Keeper Newsletter

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=70b057a399&e=d85b57a294>

October 8, 2015

Laudato Si' panel event encourages hope amidst ecological challenges

By Andrea Simmonds (MDiv '18) and C. Mark Batten, Office of Communications
Wake Forest University

On Tuesday, October 6 in front of an audience of nearly 200, three Wake Forest University professors – a theologian, journalist, and biologist – gathered to engage in a panel discussion on *Laudato Si' (Praise Be)*, the latest encyclical published by Pope Francis, and its call for a holistic approach to climate change. The panel was convened by the School of Divinity's Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative in partnership with the University's Center for Energy, Environment and Sustainability (CEES) and The Humanities Institute.

The panelists were Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, Earley Assistant Professor of Catholic and Latin American Studies at the School of Divinity, Justin Catanoso, Director of the Journalism Program and Associate Professor of the Practice in the College, and Miles Silman, Andrew Sabin Family Foundation Presidential Chair of Conservation Biology in the College, all of whom have ties to Latin America, one of the regions most impacted by the earth's changing climate. The panel was moderated by Fred Bahnson, Assistant Professor of the Practice of Ecological Well-Being at the School of Divinity. Bahnson also is the director of the Food, Faith, and Religious Leadership Initiative.

An encyclical is a papal document that is produced by the Pope and sent out to all bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. While it is an official document sent to the bishops it is addressed to everyone and can be accessed online. Pope Francis' encyclical deals with the issue of "our common home" and how people are to live in communion with the Earth rather than just using it for its resources. Each panelist was invited to give a 10-minute presentation on the takeaways, related to their specific discipline, from the encyclical.

Gandolfo focused on what she called the Roman Catholic Church's best kept secret, its Social Teaching. "Our dignity as human beings depends on living in relationships of solidarity and care with other beings, creatures, and creation as a whole," she said. "Human beings are no longer at the center of things, but are at the heart of the matter. Our dignity is at stake."

Silman focused on the changing climate patterns of the planet and expressed the urgency of the issue of global warming. He used a series of charts and time-lapsed illustrations to demonstrate the way the Earth is heating up. "When a biologist looks at the Earth they see a love letter," Silman stated. "Every year the Earth provides 125 trillion dollars worth of resources and energy."

"We are all linked on an annual cycle," Silman continued. "If my young children live the rest of their lives in Winston-Salem, they will die in the climate of north Florida. This is the world we have created for ourselves."

Catanoso discussed his reporting work in La Oroya, Peru – the most populated city in the country – speaking with local activists who are trying to keep their home from becoming more polluted by a planned copper mine. It is a delicate situation to consider. While the mine would provide jobs it would drastically increase the rate of pollution.

"We are creating an Earth that is angering Mother Nature," Catanoso said. "How do you feel when your temperature goes up to 106-degrees? Dead. The encyclical is not a five-point fix. It is an awareness phrasing document to empower all of us to get our head around the ecological crisis and push forward to fix it."

Each professor brought a nuanced way of viewing the encyclical with their experiences and the way the document calls everyone to live in communion and solidarity with the Earth. Even though the panel spoke of the horrific reality of global warming and the urgent need to act, they also shared their sense of hope in preparing the planet for future generations.

"We are called to reconcile ourselves with nature to help extend it," Silman noted in response to a question raised to the panel. Gandolfo added, "*Laudato Si'* invites a deep spiritual conversion away from consumerism, an invitation for humans to change their habits."

First-year Master of Divinity student Leanna Coyle-Carr said that the panel gave her encouragement. "I have been converted," she said, referring to the ecological conversion Pope Francis is hoping for. "The question before us has become, 'now what?'"

Jude Swanson, a Master of Divinity and Masters of Arts in Sustainability joint degree student, felt a sense of hope following the panel conversation. "In light of the many predictions that the human race is bound toward a fiery end, the very fact that the encyclical has led to intense conversations, like this panel, across the globe is a positive transition."

The School of Divinity will convene at least two similar panel events in Asheville and Charlotte. More details will be available at divinity.wfu.edu/food-and-faith/.

October 12, 2015

Can the pope bridge the climate divide?

Catholics in the West are responding to his call. Will Congress?

By Elizabeth Shogren
High Country News

Pope Francis, in his first-ever visit to the United States in late September, lauded President Barack Obama's response to climate change and challenged Congress to take "courageous action." But it's going to take a lot more than the pontiff's passionate plea to bridge the wide divide between Republicans and Democrats. Not only have congressional Republicans — and some Democrats from fossil-fuel states — blocked comprehensive climate legislation for many years, but some are also trying to undermine Obama's Clean Power Plan, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the electricity sector.

Even if Francis has yet to accomplish the miracle of reconciling U.S. politicians' wildly divergent views on climate change, he still may play a transformational role by inspiring ordinary Catholics in the American West — and around the globe — to take the health of the planet more seriously and even to start voting for candidates who prioritize slashing emissions.-

Still, the pope clearly wants to influence the political elite. He not only urged Congress to steer the nation away from fossil fuels and the destruction of ecosystems, he also implored political leaders to stop feuding. "We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all," he said.

And he added a note of optimism, saying, "I'm convinced that we can make a difference. I'm sure," a statement that provoked long applause and a standing ovation from many of the congressional representatives, Supreme Court justices and cabinet members gathered in the Capitol.

The pope has already started to inspire change in local church congregations, in the West and elsewhere, with his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which was released this summer. Pedro Lopez, for example, works for the League of Conservation Voters in Arizona. Before the pope unveiled his encyclical, Lopez and his team would attend mostly Latino Catholic churches around Phoenix and struggle to connect the priests' messages with climate change in short talks after Mass. "Now that we have the encyclical, it's an open door for us to make a call to action to Catholics," Lopez says.

Some priests have even begun to do the activists' work for them, summarizing the encyclical for their congregations and encouraging members to pray and work to solve the climate crisis. Lopez believes that, in time, the pope's message will inspire Latinos, who represent a growing share of eligible voters, to support candidates who are committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and ushering in renewable energy. "We can change the whole political landscape," he says.

Democratic senators are hoping for just such a shift: They introduced a new climate change bill — deliberately timed for the pope's visit — that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions nationwide by at least 2 percent a year, provide more tax incentives for renewable energy and remove some fossil fuel subsidies.

Western Republicans' responses to the pope's visit ran the gamut. Just prior to it, 11 Republicans, including David Reichert, D-Wash., introduced a resolution to address the causes and effects of "measured changes to our global and regional climates including mitigation efforts and efforts to balance human activities that have been found to have an impact."

On the other extreme, Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., decided to boycott Francis' historic speech, the first time a pope has addressed the U.S. Congress. "If the Pope wants to devote his life to fighting climate change then he can do so in his personal time. But to promote questionable science as Catholic dogma is ridiculous," Gosar wrote at the conservative website Townhall.com.

Nor did the first Jesuit pope sway Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso, R, who was taught by Jesuits. "The pope speaks for the Lord when it comes to matters of faith or morality, but not on issues of economics or the environment," Barrasso told Fox News. Barrasso then attacked the Democrats' new climate bill, saying it would weaken the economy and make electric power less reliable.

If the pope could move any congressional Republican, it may be Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who chairs the Senate Energy Committee. Murkowski, a Catholic, recorded a video about her encounter with Francis, who briefly held her hands when he was in the Capitol on the way to give his speech. "It was a moment I will always remember; the feeling of his presence; the love that this man radiates. It was extraordinary," Murkowski said. Her statement echoed the pope's call for "dialogue," but avoided mentioning climate change, which has already impacted her state especially hard.

Some Western Democrats, however, seemed hopeful that Francis' words will resonate long after the media excitement dies down. "The pope gave an enormous wakeup call today to everyone who thinks unregulated consumption is an unending free ride. Now we need to turn that wakeup call into lasting action," said Rep Raúl M. Grijalva, D-Ariz. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said: "This is an important moment for our country. When the pope speaks, we all listen."

<https://www.hcn.org/issues/47.17/can-the-pope-bridge-the-climate-divide>

October 19, 2015

Jane Goodall at Parliament: Pope Francis gives me hope on environment

By Anne Marie Hankins
Religion News Service

SALT LAKE CITY (RNS) [Jane Goodall](#) is a world-renowned primatologist, anthropologist and a United Nations Ambassador of Peace. Through her groundbreaking research with chimpanzees she helped the world understand humans' relationship with wildlife and the environment. At the Parliament of the World's Religions, [which concluded its five-day run in Salt Lake City](#) Monday (Oct. 19), Goodall, 81, spoke about uniting religious and spiritual communities to save the environment, one of the conference's main areas of concern. She sat down with Religion News Service to describe her new program, [Roots & Shoots](#), an organization that equips children to tackle environmental problems.

Q: What do you think about Pope Francis' call to action for Catholics and other religious groups to take care of the Earth?

A: I think Pope Francis should be canonized on the spot. He's absolutely amazing and he gives me more hope than almost anybody else alive at this time today. He's brave, he's tackling some very ancient customs which are not good ones, he has not been afraid to speak out and perhaps one of the major things is, he walks his talk. Imagine another pope going around in New York in a little tiny car!

Q: What are some ways you feel religions and religious organizations can come together to preserve our environment?

A: I can only say I hope that more and more children from different religions will come together in our (Roots & Shoots) youth program, which is emphasizing the need to live in peace and harmony with each other as well as nature.

Q: What significance does the pope's championing of the environment bring to the cause?

A: I hope it brings a lot. I hope that hundreds and thousands of young Catholics who might not have been concerned with the environment will become concerned. I hope they'll all come in and join our people in this world movement, Roots & Shoots, because it's only when we all get together and consolidate and cooperate instead of fighting that we're going to save the world.

Party politics is terribly destructive, but so too is the divisiveness between many religions and many kinds of cultures. One of the most important words in the language, which I believe Pope Francis embraces, is respect. Let's respect each other and respect other life.

<http://www.religionnews.com/2015/10/19/jane-goodall-parliament-pope-francis-gives-hope-environment/>

October 20, 2015

Religious Leaders Urge Ambitious Climate Agreement

International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) Reporting Services

UNFCCC Executive Director Christiana Figueres received a statement from a delegation of 154 faith and spiritual leaders representing different faith groups, headed by South African Archbishop Thabo Makgoba, calling for an ambitious climate agreement, reminding governments to commit to emission cuts and climate risk reduction, and pledging contributions from their own faith communities, including fossil fuel divestment.

The statement calls for the UNFCCC COP 21 to: translate ecological stewardship into concrete climate action; show inter-generational responsibility; ensure climate justice; and initiate individual and structural transformation.

More specifically, it calls for: phasing out fossil energies and reaching zero emissions by mid-century; a robust mechanism to review and ratchet up ambitions, transparency and accountability rules applicable to all; and the provision of finance and support to poor and vulnerable countries.

The religious leaders also call for delivery of the internationally agreed US\$100 billion in climate finance annually by 2020, and express support for the goal of 100% renewable energy worldwide by 2050.

The statement builds on a number of recent calls from faith groups, notably Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the declaration of the New York Interfaith Summit, the Lambeth Declaration and the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change, according to the ACT Alliance, one of the coordinators of the statement. [[UNFCCC Press Release](#)] [[Statement by Faith and Spiritual Leaders](#)] [[ACT Alliance Press Release](#)]

<http://climate-1.iisd.org/news/religious-leaders-urge-ambitious-climate-agreement/>

October 20, 2015

Dalai Lama says strong action on climate change is a human responsibility

Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader says humans caused global warming so must now take action to protect fragile environments including Himalayan glaciers

Associated Press
The Guardian

The [Dalai Lama](#) on Tuesday urged strong global action to limit global warming and to protect fragile environments, including the Himalayan glaciers and Tibetan plateau.

Calling climate change a “problem which human beings created,” the 80-year-old Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader said all of humanity was now responsible for taking action. But instead, he said, “we are relying on praying to God or to Buddha. Sometimes I feel this is very illogical.”

He issued his plea in a pre-taped video released as part of a campaign launched by the Tibetan government-in-exile in the north Indian hill town of Dharmasala, where the Dalai Lama has been based since fleeing a Chinese military crackdown in Tibet.

The government-in-exile said the campaign would continue through [this year's UN climate change talks](#), where nations hope to conclude a new treaty for limiting climate-warming gas emissions. The exiled government will also send its own delegate to the talks, which start 30 November in Paris, though it will not have a vote of its own.

“This is not a question of one nation or two nations. This is a question of humanity. Our world is our home,” the Dalai Lama said. “There’s no other planet where we may move or shift.”

Acknowledging his advanced years, the Dalai Lama appealed to younger generations to “take a more active role in protecting this planet, including the Tibetan plateau.”

Temperatures for Tibet’s high-altitude plateau — referred to as the Roof of the World — are rising about three times faster than the global average, and are 1.3C higher than they were 50 years ago. The Himalayas are also called the Third Pole, referring to the fact that they are covered in snow and ice and are particularly susceptible to climate change, like the North and South poles.

The government-in-exile also argued that Tibetans should be restored as the “true stewards” of the plateau, which has been under Chinese rule for decades and where Tibetans accuse Beijing of mining indiscriminately while forcing nomadic communities to move elsewhere.

“Tibetans must have a say on what happens on their land,” said the exiled government’s prime minister, Lobsang Sangay. “Tibetan nomads are the expert custodians of the alpine pastures, and their knowledge and experience must be recognized.”

China has long understood the plateau’s environmental importance and vulnerability, with some 40% of the world’s fresh water locked into the frozen Himalayan glaciers and feeding seven major rivers that run through China, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences studies environmental and climate change from its Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research in the region — a 2.5m sq km (966,000 sq m) area that includes the Tibetan Autonomous Region as well as most of China’s Qinghai province, parts of Sichuan and the southern Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.

Up to 70% of the plateau is covered in permafrost, with large reserves of both carbon dioxide and methane trapped within the ice. Scientists say thawing could release long-stored emissions of both greenhouse gases. Methane can be 30 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping Earth’s heat.

Watch the Dalai Lama's video message on global warming and the Paris climate summit:

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/oct/20/dalai-lama-says-strong-action-on-climate-change-is-a-human-responsibility>

October 26, 2015

World's bishops appeal to COP 21 delegates for 'just and legally binding' climate deal

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

The world's bishops have a clear message for world leaders set, in barely a month, to enter the latest and perhaps most significant round of international climate negotiations: Get the deal done in Paris.

In Rome on Monday, the heads of six continental bishops' conferences, along with leaders of national conferences in the United States and Canada and of the Catholic patriarchs of the Orient, made the collective call -- "on our own behalf and on behalf of the people for whom we care" -- to the negotiating parties who are set to arrive Nov. 30 in Paris for the annual United Nations climate change conference, formally known as the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP 21).

"We join the Holy Father in pleading for a major break-through in Paris, for a comprehensive and transformational agreement supported by all based on principles of solidarity, justice and participation," the bishops said in their appeal, which drew heavily from Pope Francis' encyclical, "*Laudato Si'*", on Care for Our Common Home."

Delegates to COP 21 are expected to finalize a global deal committing all nations to self-set pledges aimed at limiting greenhouse gas emissions in order to bypass the worst impacts of climate change.

In the appeal, the bishops outlined 10 points to what would qualify as a successful agreement: one that is "just and legally binding," links climate change to social injustice and exclusion, with special concern for the poor and most vulnerable, places the common good before national interests, and puts in writing enforcement and review measures for each country's pledge to reduce emissions.

Such an agreement, they said, would also reflect the ethical and moral dimensions of climate change and accept the view that the climate and atmosphere are "global common goods" belonging to all and meant for all. In addition, the bishops challenged leaders to "strongly limit a global temperature increase" and to devise "climate compatible" models of development and lifestyle that address inequality and offer an outlet from poverty. "Central to this," the bishops wrote, "is to put an end to the fossil fuel era, phasing out fossil fuel emissions and providing affordable, reliable and safe renewable energy access for all."

“Reliable scientific evidence suggests that accelerated climate change is the result of unrestrained human activity, working to a particular model of progress and development and that excessive reliance on fossil fuels is primarily responsible,” they said.

The latest round of U.N. climate summit runs Nov. 30-Dec. 11 in Paris. COP 21 has drawn heightened attention as it is expected to ratify the first global climate accord since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, with this version binding all 195 COP member nations (to differentiating degrees, based on historical responsibility), rather than solely the industrialized world.

During the Monday press conference, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, president of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, called the appeal “a very historical occasion,” and represented the first time in his memory that all the heads of the continental bishops’ federations have, first, come together, and second, around such a collective document.

“We’re here to, in a way, respond to what the Holy Father has asked for in *Laudato Si’*, and also because of the urgency all of us have felt,” he said.

Of the appeal’s nine signatories, six were presidents of continental bishops’ conferences: Gracias of Bombay, India (Asia); Cardinals Peter Erdö of Esztergom-Budapest, Hungary and Reinhard Marx of Munich, Germany (Europe); Cardinal Ruben Salazar Gomez of Bogota, Colombia (Latin America); Archbishop Gabriel Mbilingi of Lubango, Angola (Africa); and Archbishop John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (Oceania). Also penning their names were the heads of the U.S. and Canadian bishops’ conferences, Archbishops Joseph Kurtz and David Douglas Crosby, respectively, and Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, president of the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the Orient.

Gracias and his fellow bishops described the present-day experiences of the effects of climate change in their corners of the world, from more frequent and intense cyclones in India and typhoons in the Philippines, to more recurrent flooding of Bangkok, to the relocation of the people of the Carteret Islands to Bougainville, both off the coast of Papua New Guinea.

“It is taking some time to do so,” said Ribat, president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania, of the resettlement. “The people are not readily willing to go because they fear that their culture will go, will disappear. And all other things that belong to them will no longer be there. And their fear also at this time as they go settle on this place they’re given to resettle, will they be accepted easily and peacefully?”

The Papua New Guinea archbishop said his plea is that all people do what they can to encourage an ambitious, binding and fair agreement in Paris and beyond. “Ask politicians to guarantee the future existence of Oceania,” he said.

The seeds of the global bishops’ appeal germinated in July at a post-encyclical conference in Rome organized by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and CIDSE, an international coalition of Catholic development agencies. During an informal side meeting, representatives of various continental bishops’ conferences came to the conclusion they should take some type of

collective action. Leading the way were the Asian bishops, according to one of the document's organizers.

"FABC played the strongest role in the whole initiative," said Bernd Nilles, CIDSE secretary general, who collaborated in the construction of the joint statement.

In particular, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, president of Caritas Internationalis (another organization assisting the appeal), was central in building a bridge between bishops from climate vulnerable regions, like his native Philippines and parts of Oceania, and those on continents home to the historical output of carbon emissions.

"You need lead figures ... in the last steps to get really everybody on board. That was very important," Nilles said.

Meetings among the eventual signing parties picked up in September and continued through the Synod of Bishops on the family, which formally concluded Saturday. The text was finalized Thursday. While different proposals were studied, scrutinized and modified, the appeal's starting point was always bedrocked in *Laudato Si'*, with the bishops eager to show a united front in support of the pope and the encyclical. Throughout the encyclical, Francis challenged for greater courage among political leaders to take responsibility to reduce greenhouse gases and work toward the global common good.

A second text provided further inspiration: a plea last December for a climate agreement [from nine bishops](#) made during the U.N. climate talks in Lima, Peru. In their statement (also coordinated by CIDSE), the bishops, themselves representing four continents and five countries, called for "an end to the fossil fuel era" and endorsed the goal of holding average global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

An early version of the global bishops' appeal echoed the Lima bishops in calling for the 1.5 degrees target, but was ultimately left out of the final iteration. Conversations weighed including a specific temperature target, Nilles said, but it became clear it was not an area of comfort for the bishops, who found it "kind of tricky" as pastors to pinpoint the proper decimal.

Speaking with journalists in Rome following the press conference, Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski, who acknowledged U.S. bishops opposed inclusion of the 1.5 degrees limit, made much the same point: "To say 1.5 or 1.6 or 1.7, that seemed to be more the competencies of a scientist than the competencies of a pastor," in that advocating a specific number could lead people to question why bishops viewed themselves adept to even make such an argument.

"What they say is something which leads to a similar result in the end," Nilles told *NCR*.

In the appeal the bishops hinted at a target, Gracias said, in proposing the Paris agreement "strongly limit a global temperature increase and to set a goal for complete decarbonisation by mid-century, in order to protect frontline communities suffering from the impacts of climate change, such as those in the Pacific Islands and in coastal regions."

Ribat, for his part, invoked the 1.5 degrees goal at the press conference in saying the world community has the means and alternatives available to change course and limit temperature rise below that level. In briefly contrasting the limits of 1.5 degrees and 2 degrees warming, Jean-Pascal van Ypersele de Strihou, former vice-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said the science has outlined the potential scenarios but ultimately, it comes to a value judgment: “For example, are the lives of those who would be drowned under such a long-term sea level increase worth saving or not?”

According to the 2014 IPCC report, to limit warming to 1.5 degrees by 2100 would require slashes in emissions of 70-90 percent below 2010 levels by 2050; Continuing down the status quo could result in 4 degrees of temperature rise. Scenarios aiming for a max 2 degrees rise would require the near-elimination of fossil fuel use by century’s end, a timeline that ratchets up as the temperature goal shrinks.

“That’s what the IPCC says, so de facto, the bishops are not naming a temperature, but they are very clear: If you want to protect vulnerable communities, you need to phase out fossil fuels and decarbonize,” Nilles said.

Even without a specific temperature target, the CIDSE director hailed the appeal as “a major achievement across continents,” and in particular noted the positive movement on the climate issue occurring in North America -- in the U.S., given greater momentum through the papal visit in September. Though the appeal comes from some of the highest echelons of church hierarchy, Nilles stressed it doesn’t represent a message “from the ivory tower,” but one embedded in “the concrete reality of people.”

“Who decides in the end in Paris are the national governments, so the bishops can play now an important role to bring that in their continents to the table. So it’s not just something coming from the Vatican, from the pope, it’s really something from the local church that asks their politicians to do,” he said.

Gracias said he understood the political challenges posed by taking the necessary steps to curb global warming, in that par for politicians is to think and operate within the confines of their term in office, whereas climate change is an issue impacting generations. The church’s duty, he continued, is to bring forward the ethical and moral principles for adopting a long-term lens in matters concerning the climate.

“We are therefore wanting to make an earnest appeal on behalf of our people. Because the ones who will suffer, if decisions are not taken by governments, will be our people,” Gracias said.

Read “World bishops' appeal to COP 21 negotiating parties”

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/287076328/World-bishops-appeal-to-COP-21-negotiating-parties>

<http://nronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/worlds-bishops-appeal-cop-21-delegates-just-and-legally-binding-climate-deal>

October 26, 2015

Catholic Church Leaders Issue Appeal on Climate Change

By Elisabetta Povoledo
New York Times

VATICAN CITY — Roman Catholic cardinals, patriarchs and bishops from around the world on Monday appealed to climate-change negotiators to approve a “fair, legally binding and truly transformational climate agreement” when they meet at a widely anticipated [United Nations](#) conference in Paris next month.

Representatives of the church from five continents signed the appeal in Vatican City. They said it was inspired by [Pope Francis](#)’ sweeping encyclical on the environment, “Laudato Si,” issued in June, which [forcefully calls for action](#) to stem environmental destruction and [climate change](#).

The prelates’ appeal calls for a “major breakthrough in Paris” that puts “the common good ahead of national interests,” and advances a 10-point policy proposal “drawing on the concrete experience of people across the continents, and linking [climate change](#) to social injustice and the social exclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable of our citizens,” they wrote.

The proposal includes putting “an end to the fossil fuel era,” phasing out emissions by midcentury and providing “affordable, reliable and safe renewable energy access for all.” It also calls for the development of “new models of development and lifestyle.”

Governments must also set limits to global temperature increases, the appeal stated. Decisions made in Paris must be legally binding, the prelates said.

“It’s not a wish or a recommendation but something that is going to tie the hands of governments, we hope,” Cardinal Oswald Gracias, archbishop of Mumbai, India, said at a news conference Monday.

The church has a duty, he said, to bring “ethical considerations” to the forefront of the climate talks in Paris from Nov. 30 to Dec. 11.

The appeal, Cardinal Gracias said, was a “historic occasion” and the first time that Catholic leaders representing all regional and national bishops conferences had presented a joint appeal.

The reason for the petition was simple, he said: “We are experiencing very much the effects of climate change.”

Archbishop John Ribat of Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, who is the president of the Federation of Episcopal Conferences of Oceania, said islands had been especially hard hit by climate-induced rising sea levels. “Our life,” in Oceania, “is at stake,” he said.

He called the Paris meeting a critical turning point. “Business as usual is neither viable nor respecting human dignity, cultures that have evolved over ten thousand years will be extinguished,” if Paris fails, he said.

[Pope Francis](#) has made care for the environment one of the platforms of his papacy, and the [Vatican](#) has organized international conferences to press the issue.

“It’s very important to have a variety of actors like the church who take a stance, because the changes that are required involve much more than decisions at the political and economic level,” said Prof. Jean-Pascal van Ypersele of the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, a former vice president of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. “They involve a cultural change everywhere around the planet. The church can be a very important player in that context.”

The church has also been attuned to the social injustice effected by climate change. “A common rule is that the poor are the most vulnerable, while they are also the least responsible for the greenhouse-gas emissions,” Professor van Ypersele said, describing it as a “double injustice.”

But the rich, he said, should not believe that they can escape the impact of climate change. “We all share the same planet, the same boat,” he said. “If we sink to the bottom of the ocean, we all sink together.”

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/27/world/europe/catholic-church-leaders-issue-appeal-on-climate-change.html?_r=0

October 27, 2015

The Blessing of the Bikes

Churches are encouraging bike travel by holding rituals to Bless the Bicycles.

Yale Climate Connections

In 1999, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City held the world’s first organized blessing of bicycles. Now this new ritual has spread to different denominations and to cities as far away as Melbourne, Australia.

As part of the ritual, riders have their bikes blessed with holy water, remember cyclists who have died, and say a prayer for safe biking.

The Trinity St. Paul’s United Church in Toronto just hosted its sixth annual blessing of the bikes in June of this year. For this church, the event is also an important way to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

Lyn Gaetz of the Church's Center for Faith, Justice, and the Arts says the cyclists who participate understand the importance of making daily choices to reduce carbon emissions.

GAETZ: "Making the decision, even in the dead of winter some of them, to leave their car in the garage and cycle is taking a big step to contributing to climate justice."

The importance of personal responsibility was reinforced by the Pope's recent Encyclical – one of the Catholic Church's most authoritative documents – in which he expressed the moral duty we all share to protect the earth's climate.

GAETZ: "We feel a responsibility for the generation coming that's going to have to live with the results of our lifestyle."

<http://www.yaleclimateconnections.org/2015/10/the-blessing-of-the-bikes/>

October 29, 2015

Buddhist Leaders Call For Climate Change Action At Paris Talks

By Lydia O'Connor
Huffington Post

"The earth is not just our environment. The earth is our mother."

A dozen Buddhist authorities, in what they're calling an unprecedented effort, appeal to world leaders to take strong climate change action at next month's Paris conference.

In the letter released Thursday and titled "[Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders](#)," the Dalai Lama and 11 other signatories urge the phasing out of fossil fuels and movement toward 100 percent use of renewable energy. This letter, the authors note, is the first time this so many Buddhist leaders have united to take a stance on a global issue.

Protecting the planet, they write, is a pillar of Buddhism:

Our concern is founded on the Buddha's realization of dependent co-arising, which interconnects all things in the universe. Understanding this interconnected causality and the consequences of our actions are critical steps in reducing our environmental impact. Cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our planet. Buddhist leaders have been speaking about this for decades. However, everyday life can easily lead us to forget that our lives are inextricably interwoven with the natural world through every breath we take, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Through our lack of insight, we are destroying the very life support systems that we and all other living beings depend on for survival.

"When we harm the earth, we harm ourselves," said signatory [Sister Chan Khong](#) of the Plum Village International Community of Engaged Buddhists in a related press release. "The earth is not just our environment. The earth is our mother. We are all children of the earth, and we must help one another as brothers and sisters of one big planetary family. We must take action, not out of a sense of duty but out of love for our planet and for each other."

She added, "The Buddha has shown us that we can all live simply and still be very happy."

The Buddhist leaders' contention that their spiritual beliefs compel them to embrace conservation echoes that of Pope Francis, who made the same argument about Catholicism in his encyclical on the environment.

"[We are not God](#)," the pope wrote in his encyclical, released in June. "The Earth was here before us and was given to us."

There are more than a billion Roman Catholics and between 500 million and a billion Buddhists ([depending on how you count them](#)). Although they won't all fall in step behind their religious leaders, their numbers amount to a quarter or more of the world's population.

The Dalai Lama also spoke out in support of climate change action earlier this month in a video he released through a campaign launched by the Tibetan government-in-exile.

"This is not a question of one nation or two nations. This is [a question of humanity](#). Our world is our home," he said in that video. "There's no other planet where we may move or shift."

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/buddhists-climate-change-letter_56310898e4b00aa54a4c4208

October 30, 2015

15 Buddhist leaders pen climate change statement to world leaders

Lion's Roar

On Thursday, 15 Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Karmapa, and the King of Bhutan issued a [Buddhist Climate Change Statement](#), calling on world leaders to completely phase out fossil fuels.

The statement is the latest effort by the [Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective](#), which was formed in September 2015 to facilitate a Buddhist contribution to COP21, the United Nations conference on climate change, happening in Paris from November 30 to December 11.

Already, in the lead-up to COP21, the Dalai Lama [made comments about climate change](#), activists called for [24 hours of meditation](#) for the environment, One Earth Sangha issued [a Buddhist declaration on climate change](#), and Buddhist teacher Bhikkhu Bodhi gave a talk on [“The Four Noble Truths of the Climate Crisis”](#) at the White House.

The new statement reads, “Our concern is founded on the Buddha’s realization of dependent co-arising, which interconnects all things in the universe.”

The Buddhist leaders also called on the global Buddhist community to, “recognize both our dependence on one another as well as on the natural world. Together, humanity must act on the root causes of this environmental crisis, which is driven by our use of fossil fuels, unsustainable consumption patterns, lack of awareness, and lack of concern about the consequences of our actions.”

Sister Chan Khong of the Plum Village International Community of Engaged Buddhists shared on [Facebook](#), “We must take action, not out of a sense of duty but out of love for our planet and for each other. The Buddha has shown us that we can all live simply and still be very happy.”

<http://www.lionsroar.com/15-buddhist-leaders-pen-climate-change-statement-to-world-leaders/>

October 31, 2015

Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders 2015

Plum Village

Thay, Sister Chan Khong and over 40 Plum Village Dharma Teachers from all over the world signed the [Buddhist Climate Statement to World Leaders](#) yesterday, October 29th, 2015.

This new declaration builds on Thay’s powerful message [“Falling in love with the Earth”](#), submitted to the United Nations last year, and his call to action in his bestselling books on Buddhism and ecology, [The World We Have](#) (2008) and [Love Letter to the Earth](#) (2013).

>> Offer your own signature [here](#).

Yesterday’s declaration was also signed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Buddhist leaders from over a dozen countries – making it one of the most inclusive statements of its kind ever issued by Buddhist leaders. It has received positive media coverage, including from the [BBC](#), the [Huffington Post](#), the [Christian Science Monitor](#), [PBS](#), the [Bangkok Post](#) and [China Post](#).

We hope that this statement will lay the foundations for the global Buddhist community to engage at all levels to offer our practice, insights, compassion and support towards successful Climate Talks in Paris this December.

Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders

Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective

October 29th, 2015

We, the undersigned Buddhist leaders, come together prior to the 21st Session of the Conference of Parties (COP21) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris, in order to add our voices to the growing calls for world leaders to cooperate with compassion and wisdom and reach an ambitious and effective climate agreement.

We are at a crucial crossroads where our survival and that of other species is at stake as a result of our actions. There is still time to slow the pace of climate change and limit its impacts, but to do so, the Paris summit will need to put us on a path to phase out fossil fuels. We must ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, through visionary and comprehensive mitigation and adaptation measures.

Our concern is founded on the Buddha's realization of dependent co-arising, which interconnects all things in the universe. Understanding this interconnected causality and the consequences of our actions are critical steps in reducing our environmental impact. Cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion, we will be able to act out of love, not fear, to protect our planet. Buddhist leaders have been speaking about this for decades. However, everyday life can easily lead us to forget that our lives are inextricably interwoven with the natural world through every breath we take, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Through our lack of insight, we are destroying the very life support systems that we and all other living beings depend on for survival.

We believe it imperative that the global Buddhist community recognize both our dependence on one another as well as on the natural world. Together, humanity must act on the root causes of this environmental crisis, which is driven by our use of fossil fuels, unsustainable consumption patterns, lack of awareness, and lack of concern about the consequences of our actions.

We strongly support "The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change," which is endorsed by a diverse and global representation of Buddhist leaders and Buddhist sanghas. We also welcome and support the climate change statements of other religious traditions. These include Pope Francis's encyclical earlier this year, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, the *Islamic Declaration on Climate Change*, as well as the upcoming *Hindu Declaration on Climate Change*. We are united by our concern to phase out fossil fuels, to reduce our consumption patterns, and the ethical imperative to act against both the causes and the impacts of climate change, especially on the world's poorest.

To this end, we urge world leaders to generate the political will to close the emissions gap left by country climate pledges and ensure that the global temperature increase remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels. We also ask for a common commitment to scale

up climate finance, so as to help developing countries prepare for climate impacts and to help us all transition to a safe, low carbon future.

The good news is that there is a unique opportunity at the Paris climate negotiations to create a turning point. Scientists assure us that limiting the rise in the global average temperature to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius is technologically and economically feasible. Phasing out fossil fuels and moving toward 100 percent renewable and clean energy will not only spur a global, low-carbon transformation, it will also help us to embark on a much-needed path of spiritual renewal. In addition to our spiritual progression, in line with UN recommendations, some of the most effective actions individuals can take are to protect our forests, move toward a plant-based diet, reduce consumption, recycle, switch to renewables, fly less, and take public transport. We can all make a difference.

We call on world leaders to recognize and address our universal responsibility to protect the web of life for the benefit of all, now and for the future.

For these reasons, we call on all Parties in Paris:

1. To be guided by the moral dimensions of climate change as indicated in Article 3 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
2. To agree to phase out fossil fuels and move towards 100 percent renewables and clean energy.
3. To create the political will to close the emissions gap left by country climate pledges so as to ensure that the global temperature increase remains below 1.5 degrees Celsius, relative to pre-industrial levels.
4. To make a common commitment to increase finance above the US\$100 billion agreed in Copenhagen in 2009, including through the Green Climate Fund (GCF), to help vulnerable developing countries prepare for climate impacts and transition towards a low-carbon economy.

The time to act is now.

Yours sincerely,

His Holiness the Dalai Lama Tenzing Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama

Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, Patriarch of the Plum Village International Community of Engaged Buddhists

His Holiness the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Head of the Karma Kagyu

His Holiness Dr. Dharmasen Mahathero, The Supreme Patriarch (Sangharaja) of the Bangladesh Sangha

Rev. Hakuga Murayama, President, All Japan Young Buddhist Association (JYBA)

His Eminence Jaseung Sunim, President, Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism

Bhante B. Sri Saranankara Nayaka Maha Thera, Chief Adhikarana Sangha Nayaka of Malaysia , Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

His Eminence Rev. Khamba Lama Gabju Demberel, The Supreme Head of Mongolian Buddhists

His Holiness Dr. Bhaddanta Kumarabhivamsa, Sangharaja, and Chairman State Sangha Maha Nāyaka Committee, Myanmar

His Eminence Agga Maha Panditha Dawuldena Gnanissara Maha Nayaka Thera, Mahanayaka Thero, The Supreme Prelate of the Amarapura Maha Nikaya, Sri Lanka

His Holiness Thich Pho Tue, Supreme Patriarch of All Vietnam Buddhist Sangha

Venerable Lama Lobzang, Secretary General of the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC)

Venerable Olivier Reigen Wang-gen, President, Buddhist Union of France (UBF)

Venerable Bhikku Bodhi, President, Buddhist Association of the USA

Royal Highness Ashi Kesang Wangmo Wangchuk, Bhutan

Download PDF [Buddhist Climate Statement Oct 29](#)

<http://plumvillage.org/news/buddhist-climate-change-statement-to-world-leaders-2015/>

November 2015

Green Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=68&key=65f2bef1e5794e4773ce99fa868ed2a0&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

November 2015

The Francis Effect

Yale Project on Climate Change Communication

We are pleased to announce the release of a special report from our new study: *The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis changed the conversation about global warming*. Today more Americans and more American Catholics are worried about global warming than six months ago and more believe it will have significant impacts on human beings. Some of these changes in Americans' and American Catholics' views can be attributed to the Pope's teachings, as 17 percent of Americans and 35 percent of Catholics say his position on global warming influenced their own views of the issue.

The report's results draw from a unique study design of within-subject surveys of a nationally representative sample of American adults conducted in the Spring, prior to the release of the Pope's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, and again in the Fall, after the Pope's visit to the United States.

Key findings include:

Americans have become more concerned about global warming

- More Americans say that global warming is happening (Americans: from 62% in March to 66% in October, +4 points; American Catholics: from 64% in March to 74% in October, +10 points).
- More Americans have become worried about global warming (Americans: from 51% in March to 59% in October, +8 points; American Catholics: from 53% to 64%, +11 points).
- More Americans say that the issue of global warming has become very or extremely important to them personally (Americans: from 19% to 26%, +7 points; American Catholics: from 15% to 23%, +8 points).

More Americans think global warming will harm people here and abroad

- More think global warming will cause a great deal or moderate harm to people in developing countries (Americans: from 48% to 63%, +15 points; American Catholics: from 45% to 62%, +17 points).
- More think global warming will harm the world's poor (Americans: from 49% to 61%, +12 points; American Catholics: from 42% to 62%, +20 points).
- More think global warming will harm future generations of people (Americans: from 60% to 70%, +10 points; American Catholics: from 63% to 74%, +11 points).
- More Americans (from 48% to 57%, +9 points), and more American Catholics (from 45% to 58%, +13 points), think global warming will harm people in the United States a great deal or a moderate amount.

Aligned with Pope Francis's message, Americans are more likely to think global warming is:

- A moral issue (Americans: from 32% to 38%, +6 points; American Catholics: from 34% to 42%, +8 points).
- A social fairness issue (Americans: from 21% to 29%, +8 points; American Catholics: from 21% to 25%, +4 points).
- A religious issue (Americans: from 8% to 12%, +4 points; American Catholics: from 6% to 13%, +7 points).

The report includes many more fascinating results, including public views of Pope Francis, the salience of global warming as an issue, changes in key beliefs, feelings and thoughts about global warming, changes in how the issue is conceptualized by Americans, their moral responses, and their support for climate action.

Download the report:

“The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis changed the conversation about global warming”

http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/files/The_Francis_Effect.pdf

<http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/article/the-francis-effect/>

November 2015

The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis changed the conversation about global warming”

By the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication

http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication/files/The_Francis_Effect.pdf

November 2015

Conservancy renames Tallgrass Prairie Preserve to honor Joseph H. Williams

By Kelly Bostian
Tulsa World

It is now the Joseph H. Williams Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.

With a gathering Sunday at the 40,000-acre preserve north of Pawhuska, fellow founders, family and friends joined The Nature Conservancy in renaming the country’s largest preserved tract of native tallgrass prairie for the man credited with making it happen. He is former Williams Co. CEO, chairman of both the Oklahoma Board of Trustees and the National Board of Governors for The Nature Conservancy, and lifelong hunter, fisherman and conservationist, and his name is Joseph Williams.

“Without Joe Williams it simply would not exist,” said longtime Tallgrass Preserve advocate and its first director Harvey Payne.

Payne was there for initial meetings of a group of founders who began talking about the possibilities in 1984 and called themselves the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Association. Williams

not only lent his experience and business acumen to the fledgling effort, he bought the envelopes and paid for the postage for the grass-roots group.

“I’d forgotten about that,” Williams said to his wife, Terry, as the nearly 80 people gathered at the Preserve headquarters on the 26th anniversary of the purchase of the 26,000-acre Barnard Ranch shared a laugh.

The purchase of the ranch cemented the future of the Preserve, but the opportunity to make that \$15 million purchase came at a time when oil prices fell through the floor and Oklahoma’s economy tanked.

The effort needed — as Tallgrass Preserve Director Bob Hamilton put it, borrowing a NASA phrase made popular in the movie Apollo 13 — “a steely-eyed missile man.”

“What he said is, ‘we cannot *not* do the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. It is too important to let this opportunity pass,” Harvey Payne said.

Multiple speakers, including rancher Fred Drummond and Osage Nation Chief Geoffrey Standing Bear, lauded Williams for his leadership and determination in making the prairie preserve a reality.

“The Osage People did not always support this project, as you remember,” Standing Bear said, addressing Williams.

In convincing elder members of the Osage Tribe, including the late Ed Red Eagle, whose son Eddy offered the invocation for Sunday’s ceremony in his Native tongue, a new direction was set, Standing Bear said.

“We were convinced your vision should be our vision and we followed you, and we thank you for your leadership on this,” he said.

Standing Bear presented Williams with a woolen robe with bison designs on behalf of all in attendance. He explained that, in the Osage language, to “keep you warm” means to keep a person emotionally safe and extend the well wishes of the entire tribe.

“Not just one person to another person, it represents all of us to that person and under the shield of God... It is my honor to put this on you, ‘to keep you warm,’” he said.

Williams was emotionally touched by the gesture. “I’m so humbled and so honored, it is unbelievable,” he said. “I will treasure this forever.”

While he is known historically in Tulsa first as an oilman (and the event Sunday saw the gathering of four former and current Williams Co. CEOs), Williams’ friends and family speak of him as a bird hunter and conservationist and then an astute businessman and oilman.

Four of his children and three grandchildren attended the event. Son Jamie, who is national president of The Wilderness Society, recalled many mornings growing up that they accompanied their father to the woods in the early morning.

“He loved to sit quietly and see nature come alive around him and watch things, and learn,” he said. “He really instilled a love for nature in all of us.”

Joseph Williams said bird hunters in particular see ecological changes because they are in tune with the lands they walk and hunt. After spending 10 years working and living overseas, Williams said his eyes were opened when he returned to his home stomping grounds.

“I found places where I had hunted and fished when I came back had been built up in housing developments, planted over in crops instead of natural grasslands, and I began to become really worried about it,” he said.

Payne said the honor and renaming of the Oklahoma preserve is something that he sought for years. Williams said that, in the end, “it’s really hard to say ‘no’ to Harvey Payne.”

Williams’ efforts on the project carried an impact far beyond Oklahoma, as it changed the way the Nature Conservancy looked at its projects, Payne said. While it was a national organization, projects were tackled on a state-by-state basis.

With a need for \$15 million in the late 1980s, Williams knew Oklahoma could not raise the money on its own, Payne said. “(Williams) galvanized the national board of directors,” Payne said.

For the Tallgrass, \$6 million of the capital came from Oklahoma, the other \$9 million came from outside the state. “That’s the time the Nature Conservancy adopted their line of ‘one conservancy,’ he said. “What he did was monumental.”

Williams now lives in South Carolina and remains involved in conservation efforts there and in Oklahoma.

Kelly Bostian, 918-581-8357

kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com

http://m.tulsaworld.com/conservancy-renames-tallgrass-prairie-preserve-to-honor-joseph-h-williams/article_3f4ac519-e18f-521d-ac87-d9df3dd92a33.html?mode=jqm

November 3, 2015

Concern for Earth must be priority, cardinal from Ghana tells central Ohioans

By JoAnne Viviano
The Columbus Dispatch

A Roman Catholic cardinal who helped Pope Francis write a wide-ranging environmental document said on Monday that humankind must experience an ecological conversion to save not only the Earth, but also its poorest and most vulnerable inhabitants.

Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana told a packed auditorium at Ohio State University's Wexner Center for the Arts that the way we treat the Earth and the way we treat one other — including the poor, the elderly and the disabled — are inextricably linked.

“The Earth, our mother, is crying badly from abusive treatment, just as the poor in our midst are also crying,” Turkson said.

“So, in this encyclical, two elements are crying, two fragile elements — the Earth abusively treated and segments of our society, which according to Pope Francis are excluded.”

Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, has been in Columbus for several days to spread the word about the pope's *Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home*.

The 191-page encyclical, or teaching document, was released in June and is addressed to not just Catholics but all people. It has received support from climate-change experts and environmental advocates from various religious and academic backgrounds.

Along with his speech at Ohio State, Turkson discussed the encyclical at a Saturday conference that included representatives from all six dioceses in Ohio. On Sunday, he celebrated a Feast of All Saints Mass at St. Anthony Church on the North Side, which has a large Ghanaian immigrant population.

Earlier on Monday, he mingled with Ohio State students working to address environmental issues and spoke to Catholic schoolchildren at St. Francis DeSales High School on the North Side.

At the evening lecture and question-and-answer session, he said he was confident that the encyclical could provide “moral fiber” and “moral backbone” for world leaders who will gather in Paris beginning on Nov. 30 for the United Nations Climate Change Conference. He said various conferences of Catholic bishops have committed to encouraging political leaders to make decisions that lead to concrete action.

Turkson said the encyclical discusses climate change, but is about more than a single environmental issue and most importantly, about the abusive treatment of the Earth and inequality. He also noted that it tasks humanity with leaving its future generations a garden, not a desert, and stressed that a main thrust of the document is “care” for the environment, not simply stewardship.

The document suggests that three relationships — those between people and God, those between one another, and those between people and their world — are interrelated.

“Only with attentive care for these bonds, says Pope Francis, will we come to find adequate ways of solving the more complex problems of today’s world, particularly those regarding the environment and the poor,” Turkson said. “These problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests.”

He said that change will take dialogue among people of faith, scientific researchers, politicians and everyday people.

“Every voice and every opinion needs to be heard in this great task that we all face about protecting the Earth, our common home,” he said.

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2015/11/02/Cardinal-takes-on-environmental-issues.html>

November 3, 2015

Science alone cannot save the planet, insists spiritual leader of Orthodox Church

Archbishop of Canterbury and Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople urge millions of followers around the world to back action on carbon emissions

By John Bingham, Religious Affairs Editor
The Telegraph

Science alone cannot save the planet the spiritual leader of an estimated 300 million Orthodox Christians has insisted, as he joined forces with the Archbishop of Canterbury urging followers around the world to fight climate change.

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, insisted that global warming is a “moral crisis” requiring millions of people to change their day-to-day behaviour as much as politicians making treaties on the environment.

The two leaders hope to mobilise their churches’ support across the world ahead of the [UN conference in Paris next month aimed at reaching a new global agreement to limit carbon dioxide emissions](#).

Patriarch Bartholomew joined the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, at Lambeth Palace for prayers and private talks on issues such as the refugee crisis and persecution of Christians in the Middle East.

They also joined other bishops addressing an audience of faith leaders and green activists discussing climate change.

The Church of England has been urging worshippers to [dedicate one day every month to fasting and prayer for the planet](#) as part of a major drive to instil green ideas in its followers.

It is also sending a delegation on a 250-mile walking “pilgrimage” to Paris in the run-up to the conference.

Patriarch Bartholomew was the first world faith leader to raise climate change as a key religious issue and was a major influence [on Pope Francis’s recent encyclical on the environment](#).

Speaking in Lambeth Palace on Tuesday, he said that for Christians protecting the planet was a “sacred task and a common vocation”.

“Global warming is a moral crisis and a moral challenge,” he said.

“It is a crisis about and within the human heart.

“The solution to the ecological problem is not only a matter of science, technology and politics but also, and perhaps primarily, a matter of radical change of mind ... a new ethos.”

He said that central to Orthodox theology is the idea of “metanoia” which he said could translate from the Greek as meaning a “shift of mind, a total change of heart”.

“This is very important because during the last century, a century of immense scientific progress we also experienced the biggest destruction of the natural environment,” he said.

“Science will inform us about the world but it cannot reach the depths of our soul and mind.

“Today we know and yet we still continue to act against our knowledge.

“Knowledge has not resulted in metanoia.”

He added: “Our world is in deep crisis yet never before in history have human beings had the opportunity to bring so many positive changes to so many people in the global community.

“There has never been so much turmoil on our planet but there has never been greater opportunity for communication, cooperation and dialogue.”

During questions, Caroline Spelman, the former Environment Secretary, who now speaks for the Church of England in the Commons, asked the patriarch and other faith leaders to “pray for” her colleagues at Paris.

She said: “Will you pray earnestly for those politicians who must reach a decision?”

“Some are converted absolutely to the cause of combating climate change but others are apprehensive and we need those who have the political will to make the decision to feel the impact of your prayers.”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11973107/Science-alone-cannot-save-the-planet-insists-spiritual-leader-of-Orthodox-Church.html>

November 6, 2015

Keystone XL Rejection: Indigenous Resistance Exults, Trudeau ‘Disappointed’

Indian Country Today Media Network

Indigenous activists and environmentalists hailed President Barack Obama’s rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline on Friday November 6, calling it a victory for Mother Earth and a step toward shutting down the Alberta oil sands entirely.

“In the fight against Keystone XL our efforts as indigenous peoples, whether Lakota, Dakota, Assiniboine, Ponca, Cree, Dene or other, has always been in the defense of Mother Earth and the sacredness of the water,” said Tom Goldtooth, head of the Indigenous Environmental Network, in a statement. “Today, with this decision, we feel those efforts have been validated. With the rejection of Keystone XL we have not only protected the sacredness of the land and water but have also helped our Cree & Dene relatives at the source take one step closer to shutting down the tar sands. The black snake, Keystone XL, has been defeated, and best believe we will dance to our victory!”

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, a Liberal who was sworn in on Tuesday November 4, expressed his disappointment. But unlike his predecessor, Conservative Stephen Harper, Trudeau said the rejection would not harm relations between the two countries. Although Trudeau had supported the oil sands project, he has also pledged to take a stronger stand on climate change than Harper did.

“We are disappointed by the decision but respect the right of the United States to make the decision,” Trudeau said in a statement. “The Canada-U.S. relationship is much bigger than any one project and I look forward to a fresh start with President Obama to strengthen our remarkable ties in a spirit of friendship and co-operation.”

Environmentalists invoked Indigenous Peoples in their praise of Obama’s move, in which he deemed the project to be not in the national interest.

“The pipeline’s rejection marks a historic victory for farmers, ranchers, tribal nations and the unlikely alliance that formed to fight this uphill, six-year battle that no one believed we’d ever win,” said Bold Nebraska, a group formed specifically to spearhead Keystone XL resistance in that state, in a media release.

Others called it a step in the right direction to combat climate change.

“This represents a courageous leap forward in the climate fight,” said Rhea Suh, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), in a statement. “Rejecting the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline is right for our nation, for our children and for our planet. It would have locked in, for a generation or more, massive development of among the dirtiest fuels on the planet—posing a serious threat to our air, land water, and climate. The proposal, pushed largely by the fossil fuel industry, was a recipe for disaster. In no way was the pipeline in America’s national interest.”

Further, his move should inspire others, Suh said.

“Dangerous climate change is the central environmental challenge of our time, and it’s time for everyone to step up now and meet that challenge,” Suh said.

Those sentiments were echoed by the Sierra Club, whose executive director, Michael Brune, also expressed relief and hope.

“Today President Obama said yes to clean energy and public health, and no to dirty oil and dangerous pollution,” Brune said in a statement. “Stopping the Keystone XL pipeline is a victory for the planet, for the health and well-being of the communities along the pipeline route, and for future generations to come. It also demonstrates the power of the millions of people who raised their voices in opposition to the pipeline, and of the growing movement to end our dependence on dirty fossil fuels.”

The Center for Biological Diversity, too, acknowledged the numerous voices and strong opposition that went into defeating the proposal.

“This is a historic moment, not just for what it means about avoiding the impacts of this disastrous pipeline but for all of those who spoke out for a healthy, livable climate and energy policies that put people and wildlife ahead of pollution and profits,” said Valerie Love with the Center for Biological Diversity, in a media release. “President Obama did the right thing, but he didn’t do it alone: Millions of Americans made their voices heard on this issue, and will continue pressing Obama and other political leaders to do what’s necessary to avoid climate catastrophe.”

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/11/06/keystone-xl-rejection-indigenous-resistance-exults-trudeau-disappointed-162354>

November 6, 2015

Tribal, Grassroots, & Treaty Leaders Respond to President Obama Rejecting Keystone XL Pipeline

Indigenous Environmental Network

Washington D.C. – President Obama has rejected the Keystone XL cross-border application filed by TransCanada to the U.S. State Department. This is a huge victory for the Tribal Nations and communities along its proposed route that have been fighting this dirty tar sands project for the past seven years. This rejection is a sincere affirmation of the struggle to protect the sacredness of Mother Earth and her life blood, the water. The following are response statements by Tribal, grassroots and treaty leaders to President Obama’s rejection of Keystone XL cross-border permit application:

Dallas Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network KXL Campaign Organizer, “This is a tremendous victory for all the pipeline fighters who have spent several years fighting the TransCanada “black snake”, Keystone XL! The President’s decision is a clear affirmation of our struggle to defend the sacredness of Mother Earth and to protect the future generations of all our relatives, human and non-human alike. We celebrate this as a win and a powerful step to the greater goals of keeping fossil fuels in the ground and shutting down the tar sands at the source!”

Harold Frazier, Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, “On behalf of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe we are grateful to President Obama for rejecting the Keystone XL pipeline and give thanks to everyone who helped make this happen. We must continue to fight this war against tar sands. We need to stay united with all our Native brothers and sisters here in Canada, and around the world to stop the pollution of our water so our young people can grow up to live good healthy lives.”

Lewis Grassrope, Chairman of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, “In the greatest effort of all indigenous people’s to stop the kxl pipeline our prayers were heard. As its a great day for all as our connections spiritually were answered. Thank you to all for the perseverance, fortitude, humility, and courageous acts to stop this black snake from coming onto our lands. One giant step for our children’s future. A great victory today for all indigenous peoples.”

David Archambault Jr., Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, “The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe applauds President Obama’s decision to deny the permit to the KXL pipeline project. After several years of vigorous debate by many parties, the president resolved the issue by focusing on the big picture. President Obama’s decision is consistent with Tribal values that respect the environment and honor our roles as guardians of our children’s’ futures.”

A. Gay Kingman, Executive Director of Great Plains Tribal Chairmans Association, “Wopila President Obama for rejecting the Keystone XL. Wopila to all our Relatives who stood strong to oppose the KXL, But, keep the coalitions together because there are more Pipelines proposed and we must protect our Mother Earth for our Future Generations.

Paula Antoine, Chairwoman of Rosebud NO KXL Spirit Camp, Oyate Wahacanka Wocun (Shielding the People), “We, along with the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, are extremely honored by President Obama’s decision to reject the Keystone XL pipeline. We have stood united with all those who protect Unci Maka. Our children’s grandchildren will benefit and remember this day as a victory! We affirm our rights as the original caretakers and stewards of the land, resources and oyate. We remain, in solidarity shielding the People. One heart ~ one mind ~ one prayer.”

Faith Spotted Eagle, Ihanktowan Treaty Council Spokesperson, “This is what unity, hard work and breaking down barriers looks like....all for protecting sacred water and land for the generations. Today we stand in thankfulness for Obama, adopted son of the Crow Nation. We stood united in this struggle, Democrat, Republican, Native, Cowboy, Rancher, landowners, urban warriors, grandmas and grandpas, children..... and through this fight against KXL we have come to see each other in a new better, stronger way!”

Frank Waln, Sicangu Lakota, Music Producer and Artist, “For those of us whose homes were on the frontlines of this proposed pipeline, this is a huge step forward. Our efforts to resist all forms of colonization, including natural energy extraction on Indigenous lands are not in vain. I commend all my relatives who have dedicated their time, energy and lives to stopping this pipeline, when society and the government told us otherwise. Indigenous nations are rising. This is only the beginning!”

Aldo Seoane, Wica Agli, “We are excited by the president’s decision to reject Keystone XL. The project not only would have put the environment in harms way but it would have also put the women and children along the pipeline route at a higher risk of domestic and sexual violence. We are encouraged by the president’s choice of people and the environment over politics and big oil.”

Joye Braun, Community Organizer Cheyenne River Sioux reservation, “Today marks a historic day for the people of the Oceti Sakowin, and our allies. I say thank you to President Obama, and Secretary Kerry for seeing the truth behind the Keystone XL pipeline and rejecting the black snake. We must stay vigilant against tar sands and continue our support to our First Nation cousins in Canada who are on the frontline of this world disaster. We will continue to pray and support the fight against tar sands. ”

Press contacts: Dallas Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network, 708-515-6158, ienpipeline@igc.org

Harold Frazier, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, 605-964-4155

Lewis Grassrope, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, 605-208-0880

David Archambault Jr., Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, (701) 854-7560

A.Gay Kingman, Great Plains Tribal Chairmans Assoc., (605)-484-3036

Paula Antoine, Shielding the People No KXL Spirit Camp, (605) – 828-0740

Faith Spotted Eagle, Ihantonwan Treaty Council, (605)-481-0416

Frank Waln, franciswaln@gmail.com Aldo Seoane, Wica Agli, (605)-319-8151

Joye Braun, Cheyenne River Grassroots, jmbraun57625@gmail.com

<http://www.ienearth.org/tribal-grassroots-treaty-leaders-respond-to-president-obama-rejecting-keystone-xl-pipeline/>

November 6, 2015

President Obama rejects Keystone XL pipeline

By Brian Roewe
National Catholic Reporter

President Barack Obama rejected Friday the construction of the Keystone XL transnational pipeline, in part on grounds that approving the politically contentious project would have undercut U.S. leadership on the world stage in addressing climate change.

The proposed Keystone XL pipeline sought to move daily as many as 830,000 barrels of Canadian crude oil from Alberta tar sands fields to refineries in the Gulf of Mexico. The project would have stretched 1,100 miles, crossing the U.S.-Canadian border in Montana before linking with already-constructed Keystone pipelines. Unlike the southern leg, the northern leg, due to crossing an international border, required a presidential permit.

The president made the announcement before noon in Washington, flanked at the White House by Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry. He said Kerry had informed him Friday morning that "after extensive public outreach, and consultation with other Cabinet agencies, the State Department has decided that the Keystone XL pipeline would not serve the national interests of the United States."

"I agree with that decision," Obama said.

He added that for years Keystone has held an "overinflated role in our political discourse," with supporters and opponents each overstating its potential benefit or harm.

"It became a symbol too often used as a campaign cudgel by both parties rather than a serious policy matter. And all of this obscured the fact that this pipeline would neither be a silver bullet for the economy, as was promised by some, nor the express lane to climate disaster proclaimed by others," Obama said.

As it turns out, the debate over Keystone, first proposed in September 2008, stretched more than double the days (2,604) than the miles (1,179) it would have traveled.

In his comments at the White House, the president briefly outlined the State Department's decision, saying it concluded the pipeline would not provide a long-term boost to the economy, that it would not lower gas prices for Americans, and that it would not increase American energy security. In the absence of the pipeline, Obama touted the recent jobs report of 268,000 jobs created in October, and noted gas prices have lowered, down \$1 per gallon from 2013. He said

the U.S. has become more energy independent through producing more oil nationally while at the same time using less of it.

“So while our politics have been consumed by a debate over whether or not this pipeline would create jobs and lower gas prices, we’ve gone ahead and created jobs and lowered gas prices,” he said.

Steps to increase fuel efficiency and renewable energy while decreasing carbon pollution have established the U.S. as a world leader on climate change, the president said, and has led in part to nations representing almost 90 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions to [put forward plans to cut pollution](#) ahead of United Nations climate talks in Paris in December.

"America is now a global leader when it comes to taking serious action to fight climate change. And frankly, approving this project would have undercut that global leadership," he said.

Throughout the project’s lifespan, environmental activists have relentlessly raised Keystone as a "line in the sand" issue, with numerous religious groups joining the push against the pipeline. Many of the groups active in the anti-Keystone campaign celebrated Friday as a monumental victory.

“It has been a long struggle, but the call to care for the earth by turning away from fossil fuels is being heard,” said the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns in a statement.

Patrick Carolan, executive director of Franciscan Action Network (FAN), told *NCR* he was pleased the president reached a decision that was long overdue. FAN has advocated against the pipeline since 2010, with several of its members arrested at various points outside the White House while protesting. In October, he and other religious leaders met with the State Department to talk about Keystone.

“We wanted to get the message to the White House that we thought this would be a really strong, powerful statement to make before Paris,” he said.

Carolan also viewed the Keystone denial as sending a strong message on the power of grassroots organizing to make a difference.

“Five years ago everybody said Keystone was a foregone conclusion, there’s nothing we could do to stop it. ... [When] people of all different faiths and different personalities and different political persuasions come together on an issue, I think we can stop everything from anything, and change can happen,” he said.

TransCanada, the company that sought to build the pipeline, attributed its application rejection to “misplaced symbolism” and said the decision ran counter to numerous studies that found the pipeline a safer transport option to trains, trucks or tankers and posing minimal environmental impact.

“Through the course of its review, the U.S. State Department issued five very comprehensive and balanced scientific reviews of Keystone XL since 2010. Tens of thousands of pages of evidence from its own employees and agencies irrefutably show Keystone XL is the safest, most environmentally sound way to transport needed energy to Americans,” said Russ Girling, TransCanada president and CEO, in a statement.

TransCanada and its supporters projected the pipeline would create 9,000 U.S. construction jobs and as many as 40,000 related jobs throughout the U.S. supply chain, opponents challenged those figures.

Canadian leadership had supported the project since its proposal, extending to new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who expressed disappointment with the ruling but respected U.S. authority to do so. Obama said he called Trudeau this morning to inform of his decision. Both leaders stressed a desire for both countries to work closer together on numerous issues, including energy and climate change.

Back in the U.S., Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said he was not surprised by the president’s decision, and vowed it would not signal the end for a project important to North American energy independence: “The question remains not if but when Keystone will be built.”

“Our nation’s long-term need for the energy and jobs Keystone would provide will certainly outlast the little over a year remaining in the term of the current Administration,” said McConnell, who in January made Keystone the first order of business for the 114th Congress, in a statement.

Likewise, newly elected Speaker of the House Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) said Obama’s decision “isn’t surprising, but it is sickening. By rejecting this pipeline, he is rejecting tens of thousands of good-paying jobs,” while catering to special interests.

Rather than prioritize a Keystone revival, Obama challenged Congress to pass a bipartisan infrastructure plan he estimated would create more than 30 times as many jobs than the pipeline. In his own statement, Kerry said the U.S. needs to prioritize renewable energy opportunities and transition its manufacturing base to related jobs.

“Clean energy is not just the solution to climate change; it’s also one of the greatest economic opportunities the world has ever seen. If we continue to make smart choices, American businesses -- and American workers -- stand to benefit enormously,” he said.

In February, Obama [vetoed a bill](#) put forth through the Republican-led Congress that sought to fast track the pipeline’s construction and bypass the State Department review. On Wednesday, the State Department rejected a request by TransCanada to delay review of the project.

During the summer, Mercy Sr. Mary Pendergast visited the Alberta tar sands, comparing the large holes in the earth she saw there to a war zone where “sickening orange and yellow green pools of water fill smaller craters.”

The Sisters of Mercy, like other religious groups, have engaged the State Department about Keystone, most recently in 2014. The pipeline has been not only a national concern, but one for sisters in Latin America, the Philippines and areas experiencing melting glaciers, rising seas and extreme weather, said Sr. Patricia McDermott, president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

“By this action, the President has signaled that we join the world in recognizing climate change and our dependence on fossil fuels as issues that must be addressed,” she said in a statement.

Dallas Goldtooth, the primary organizer against the pipeline of the Indigenous Environmental Network, said Obama’s decision validated the efforts of numerous tribes, particularly those living near the Canadian tar sands.

“With the rejection of Keystone XL we have not only protected the sacredness of the land and water we have also helped our Cree & Dene relatives at the source take one step closer to shutting down the tar sands,” he said.

Eli McCarthy, director of justice and peace for the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, saw significance in Obama’s connection of his decision to climate change, in that it created political space for him to operate in Paris.

“It sounds like he’s going to really make this a priority in the last part of his term, and I think there’s going to be more and more Catholics that are going to start to really support and try to move that forward,” said McCarthy, noting the past year has seen male religious prioritize creation care, culminating in a [resolution passed in August](#).

“President Obama is the first world leader to reject a project because of its effect on the climate. That gives him new stature as an environmental leader, and it eloquently confirms the five years and millions of hours of work that people of every kind put into this fight,” said Bill McKibben, co-founder of 350.org and one of the anti-Keystone leaders.

May Boeve, 350.org executive director, added that the Keystone rejection, while “a clear sign” of the movement’s strength, doesn’t represent the end of the road, saying it “will not rest” until the U.S. economy shifts fully from fossil fuels.

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/president-obama-rejects-keystone-xl-pipeline>

November 8, 2015

Leeds Diocese 'Climate Change Conference'

By Ellen Teague
Independent Catholic News

The Leeds Justice and Peace Day on Saturday was opened by the Chair of the Justice and Peace Commission, John Battle, who reflected that the Commission has been highlighting the Church's social teaching for 40 years, and its current campaigns are: 'Poverty in the UK', 'Palestine', and 'Climate Change'. With the help of three speakers the Saturday event focused on Climate Change and links with the Pope's environment encyclical 'Laudato Si'. It was held at St Benedict's Parish Centre in Garforth, and, at the end of the day, panels along one side of the centre showed more than 200 actions which around 50 participants had suggested. A small group of participants had joined the day from Sheffield in Hallam Diocese.

Actions included studying 'Laudato Si' using the Columban study programme and supporting awareness raising work leading up to the Paris climate talks, plus signing the CAFOD Climate petition. Participants will also be examining their pension funds and looking into ethical investment. It was pointed out that the National Justice and Peace Network Environment Group recently wrote to all the bishops to give suggestions for a Diocesan Environmental Policy. Tackling vested interests would be followed up with Global Justice Now, the London Mining Network, the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility and Columbans UK. A 'Laudato Si' prayer card would be widely distributed throughout Leeds Diocese. Personal lifestyle changes were aired, with the aim of reducing carbon footprints.

Ellen Teague of Columban JPIC pointed out key issues in Laudato Si' - Climate Change, Biodiversity and Water - and the concept of integral ecology where Pope Francis says that we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. Climate Change is a moral issue and we must hear "both the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor". Indeed, "ecological conversion" is called for.

Andy Challinor, Professor of Climate Impacts at the University of Leeds, spoke of his research work examining the impact of Climate Change on food production and security. He is currently working on the UK Food Security Risk Assessment - evaluating the risks to our own food security arising from Climate Change. Although the UK is more buffered than tropical regions, he said, already half a million British people lack good access to food and the European Union throws away 89 million tonnes of food each year. There needs to be more "systemic resilience" in food production. "There is no evidence for an optimistic view of Climate Change" he said, "but I am ever optimistic about human resilience and action by faith-based groups".

Alex Scrivener, the Policy Officer with Global Justice Now (formerly the World Development Movement), saw little evidence of political will mounting for a strong deal at the UN Climate talks in Paris at the end of this month. He suggested some "righteous anger" was needed to demand justice for poor countries suffering the world impacts of Climate Change. "If Climate Change is not a reason to have righteous anger then I don't know what is" he suggested. There should be significant lobbying of corporations, particularly over such trade deals as the TTIP, which undermine the rights of the nation states to protect their environment. "There is massive vested interest in continuing the fossil fuel economy", he warned, but felt faith-based groups could be a powerful force for tackling economic powers. He agreed with Pope Francis that "a true ecological approach is a social approach" and thought 'Laudato Si' was a powerful and influential document.

The speakers were all impressed with the justice, peace and ecology commitment of St. Benedict's parish, which includes setting up a parish garden and supporting fair trade. The parish is working towards the Livesimply Parish Award, which is being promoted throughout Leeds Diocese.

Read more here: www.leedsjp.org.uk

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=28758>

November 9, 2015

How an Unlikely Coalition of Environmental Activists Stopped Keystone XL

By Anthony Swift, Canada Project Director, NRDC
Huffington Post

A decade ago, Susan Casey-Lefkowitz got one of her first eye-opening looks at the destruction wrought by the fast-expanding Canadian tar sands industry. A lawyer who specialized in international environmental issues, Casey-Lefkowitz was now a policy advocate at the nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council, focused on the group's growing work in Canada.

Sitting in a darkened hotel conference room with allies from Canadian activist groups, Casey-Lefkowitz (the only U.S. representative in the room) watched a set of slides showing the extent of the industry's ugly spread in northern Alberta, and she knew that the environmental movement would need to mobilize against the devastation - and its potential consequences for the entire planet.

As she would later describe it:

"I didn't want to face my grandchildren 20 years down the road and know that I had made the wrong choice at a crossroads moment for fighting climate change."

Tar sands weren't an entirely new threat. At least as far back as the 1930s, boosters had been proclaiming the thick deposits of bitumen in the boreal forest "probably the largest potential oil field in the world."

By 2004, production had reached one million barrels per day, and oil companies were salivating over the possibility of more production and greater profits. But the challenge wasn't just getting the thick, silty deposits out of the ground -- which required some of the largest and most destructive open-pit mining operations on earth. Oil companies also had to get the deposits to refineries, and then to market. If the industry were to keep expanding, that would mean more pipelines out of Canada and into the United States.

In the months after her eye-opening experience, Casey-Lefkowitz and her NRDC colleague Liz Barratt-Brown began working with their Canadian counterparts including the Pembina Institute,

Environmental Defence Canada, and Greenpeace Canada to fight the industry's expansion. They created a strategy to raise public awareness about what was already happening -- and how much worse it could get if the industry's plans went ahead unimpeded.

Their fears were well founded. In September 2008, while U.S. senators Barack Obama and John McCain were still running for president, a powerful, well-connected Canadian company filed an application with the U.S. State Department. TransCanada wanted quick approval for a 1,700-mile pipeline that would ship tar sands crude directly to refineries on the Gulf Coast, where the oil could easily be exported overseas.

Along the way, the Keystone XL pipeline would cross environmentally sensitive and agriculturally important areas, including Nebraska's Sandhills and the Ogallala Aquifer. It would threaten tribal homelands and increase carbon pollution. Oil spills along its route -- almost guaranteed, given the pipeline industry's safety record -- would expose farms, ranches, and communities to devastating economic and environmental damage. And yet despite all that, the project attracted little public attention at the time -- and, it seemed, there was scant chance of stopping it.

Well into President Obama's second term in office, after years of contentious debate and grassroots activism, Keystone XL has been rejected once and for all. This is the behind-the-scenes story of how a small group of unlikely allies turned what everyone expected to be a routine governmental approval process into one of the most heated environmental battles in U.S. history -- and prevailed.

Forging Alliances

In 2006, Canada brought its marketing campaign for tar sands oil to Washington, D.C., in the form of an exhibit at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the National Mall. Sponsored by the oil industry and the province of Alberta, it featured cheerful activities for children and a photographic display that purported to show how tar sands mines and wetlands could co-exist. NRDC and its allies were on the scene -- distributing fliers and explaining the real impact of tar sands mining, telling the performing musicians how ugly it was to see this industry portrayed as "folklife."

In those early days, the work to stop tar sands was unrewarding. Casey-Lefkowitz and Barratt-Brown trudged from congressional offices and federal agencies to the White House, armed with photos and sounding the alarm. They showed anyone who would listen images of Canada's lush green boreal forest and what happened once the industry dug in -- a lunar landscape of mines that stretched one to two miles across, surrounded by enormous mounds of sulfur and pet coke from refineries. Predictably, officials were horrified. But it was hard to get traction for what many viewed as a Canadian problem. Twice, NRDC and its allies had fought pipelines that crossed the border to U.S. refineries; twice, they lost those battles.

Then TransCanada applied for a permit to build Keystone XL. This project was so large and potentially devastating, its consequences so far-reaching and grave, that it gave NRDC and other environmentalist activists the basis to launch a major campaign against the tar sands.

As a first step, NRDC joined forces with Corporate Ethics International, a nonprofit that works to promote corporate responsibility, including in the energy industry. CEI had commissioned research into tar sands oil and the awful consequences of its potential expansion, including the devastation in Canada and contribution to climate change.

CEI's Michael Marx became the coordinator of an international campaign against tar sands, and Kenny Bruno, who was affiliated with CEI, coordinated the U.S. effort. Working with NRDC, Marx and Bruno recruited other groups to the cause, including Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, the League of Conservation Voters, and Oil Change International.

Their task was daunting.

The American public knew almost nothing about tar sands production or its drawbacks. And tar sands boosters had a good storyline to sell: Why not get oil from friendly Canada instead of unstable, often unfriendly countries in the Middle East? Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper was a huge fan of tar sands, along with the well-funded and politically powerful oil industry and a host of influential Washington insiders. The rag-tag environmentalists were outnumbered and could easily be outspent.

Barratt-Brown called U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat and political leader on climate change issues, to ask for advice.

"He immediately shot back that we needed senators from along the proposed route," she recalls.

Local opposition would be critical to any stop-the-pipeline effort, and that meant Plains States senators would have to hear from their constituents. In largely conservative and often oil-friendly states (KXL would cross Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas), that seemed like a tall order.

Political Pressure

In 2009, President Obama planned to make his first trip abroad--to Canada, one of America's closest allies. For those who wanted to bring attention to the tar sands and the KXL project, it was a huge opportunity. The State Department would determine whether the pipeline was in the national interest, but it was the president who would have final say over whether to issue a permit.

Just before Obama left for his Canadian trip, NASA's James Hansen, one of America's leading climate scientists, wrote an op-ed warning that the tar sands were "one of our planet's greatest threats." Later, Hansen would famously say that if Canada were to fully exploit its vast tar sands reserves, it would be "game over" for the climate.

In Ottawa, Obama noted activists' concerns, saying:

We are very grateful for the relationship that we have with Canada, Canada being our largest energy supplier. But I think increasingly that we have to take into account that the issue of climate change and greenhouse gases is something that's going to have an impact on all of us.

Despite this encouraging signal, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would later say that her department was "inclined" to sign off on the KXL project. Clearly, one scientist's op-ed wouldn't be enough to reach the administration. In 2010, the State Department issued the first draft of an environmental impact report required before a pipeline permit could be issued. The finding: Keystone XL would have "limited adverse" impacts. Tar sands proponents celebrated.

But the State Department wouldn't make the decision alone; other federal agencies needed to weigh in, and the Environmental Protection Agency countered that State's assessment was "inadequate." It recommended reviewing a broader range of environmental issues, including the potential impacts of a major spill. In a foreshadowing of debates to come, the EPA also stated: "We believe the national security implications of expanding the nation's long-term commitment to a relatively high carbon source should also be considered."

Just 10 days later, the EPA's warning proved justified.

A pipeline operated by TransCanada's biggest competitor, Enbridge Inc., ruptured in Michigan, spilling nearly one million gallons of tar sands oil into the Kalamazoo River. Hundreds of residents went to the hospital complaining of health problems. And now the activists had another revealing photo to carry around by way of warning -- the Enbridge pipeline looked as if a bomb had exploded inside it.

Enbridge initially denied that its busted pipeline had been carrying tar sands oil, but it was forced to retract after NRDC's onEarth magazine asked tough questions and prodded investigators to confirm it. In a subsequent report, NRDC and its allies demonstrated that "dilbit" -- the chemically diluted bitumen carried by tar sands pipelines -- is "significantly more corrosive to pipeline systems than conventional crude."

In other words, tar sands pipelines will, inevitably, leak, with greater impact on the environment due to the heavy, thick nature of tar sands crude (which sank to the bottom of the Kalamazoo River, rather than floating on top).

Tar sands spills require "significant personnel, equipment, supplies and other resources" for cleanup, the NRDC report concluded. And indeed, cleanup of the Kalamazoo has cost more than \$1 billion. Five years later, it is still ongoing.

Grassroots Mobilization

Armed with graphic evidence that tar sands oil was a threat to their land, homes and rivers, NRDC and its allies put new energy into connecting with the farmers, ranchers, and tribespeople along the Keystone XL route -- the ones who would suffer most directly from a spill like the one in Kalamazoo.

One of their staunchest new supporters was Jane Kleeb, a young progressive married to a Nebraska farmer. She had founded Bold Nebraska with the idea of fostering community action in the state; the more she learned about the dangers of the pipeline, the more she realized that this was a cause that would unify Nebraskans, who learn in grade school of the importance of protecting the Ogallala Aquifer that provides much of their state's water. A threat to the aquifer was a threat even unlikely allies would understand.

One of those unlikely allies was a Republican rancher named Randy Thompson. His family had raised cattle for generations on land that TransCanada would need to build the pipeline. He became the face of a campaign called All Risk, No Reward, and "I Stand With Randy" became a common slogan on the signs and T-shirts of pipeline opponents.

As groups like these coalesced, a national movement was being born. The No Tar Sands Oil campaign, sponsored by groups including CEI, NRDC, Sierra Club, 350.org, National Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and Rainforest Action Network, had a fresh strategy.

In the past, Secretary Clinton and the State Department had been the focus of protest. The disastrous ruling of 2010 led the groups to switch their attention to President Obama. Increasingly the activists named him as the decision-maker and directed all public appeals to the White House.

In early 2011, on the eve of a meeting between Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Harper, 86 groups representing millions of Americans -- from the Idaho Wildlife Federation to the Texas Conservation Alliance -- signed a letter urging the president to reject the pipeline.

That spring, the writer and activist Bill McKibben, founder of the group 350.org, contacted coalition members about the pipeline campaign, testing their appetite for civil disobedience in Washington. All were in favor. In the course of two hot weeks during the summer of 2011, more than 1,200 people were arrested during sit-ins on the sidewalk in front of the White House, from farmers and ranchers to actress Daryl Hannah.

This was the turning point for the tar sands movement, the moment when James Hansen's science and Bill McKibben's convening power were directed at Keystone XL, and the world started to take notice.

Young people swarmed to the movement, which led to some tense confrontations. In October 2011, pipeline opponents were camping out overnight to get a speaking slot at the next day's State Department hearing in Washington. They faced off against pipeline proponents, and CEI's Bruno received a late-night call from a demonstration organizer, asking him to come help ease tensions.

At the next day's hearing, a Nebraska rancher's daughter broke down in tears and implored union members who supported the pipeline: "We are workers, too. Don't you care about our jobs?"

One month later, exactly a year before President Obama's second election, 12,000 people encircled the White House to proclaim: "Yes We Can... Stop the Pipeline." John H. Adams, the founding president of NRDC and one of the giants of the environmental movement, was there. "Our ring around the White House was 10 people deep at points," he wrote, calling it the "largest environmental demonstration I've ever witnessed."

Casey-Lefkowitz was there, too.

"We could feel the ground shifting politically," she says. Surrounding the White House was symbolically powerful. So was the broad diversity of those speaking out against the pipeline. In Bruno's words: "It was a giant embrace of the president by people who had supported his candidacy. But this was not unconditional love. It required climate action, starting with Keystone XL."

Bringing the Heat

With a broad coalition of activists fighting in the streets, NRDC and its allies also continued to marshal intellectual and economic arguments against the pipeline.

- Retired Brigadier General Steven Anderson, the Army's chief logistician in Iraq in 2006-2007, testified to Congress that Keystone XL would "degrade our national security" by keeping the nation addicted to oil.
- More than 100 scientists wrote to President Obama to oppose KXL, with one group of 20 climate scientists declaring that the pipeline was "not only not in the national interest, it's also not in the planet's best interest."
- Researchers from Rainforest Action Network and National Wildlife Federation uncovered information from TransCanada showing that Keystone XL might raise oil prices in the Midwest.
- An Oil Change International report called "Exporting Energy Security" showed that much of the oil from Keystone XL would ultimately be exported.
- NRDC pointed out that, in less than a year of operation, the first part of the Keystone pipeline networked had leaked 12 times. (In subsequent years, NRDC would continue to document all the ways in which TransCanada had amassed a terrible safety record.)
- The Cornell Global Labor Institute released a report showing that Keystone XL would create no more than 2,000 jobs for two years. And institute staff, along with a young First Nation leader from Alberta named Melina Laboucan Massimo, were instrumental in recruiting the first labor unions to oppose the pipeline.

The president appeared to be paying attention. In November, he told a Nebraska radio station that he shared concerns about the pipeline's route through the Sandhills and Ogallala Aquifer. He suspended the State Department review, asking the department to consider an alternative route and address environmental concerns.

The backlash was ferocious.

In the closing days of Congress in 2011, Republicans presented a bill that required a decision on Keystone XL within 90 days, attaching it to a must-pass tax bill. Forced into a decision, President Obama rejected the project, at least for the moment, noting that his decision was based solely by the "rushed and arbitrary deadline" congressional Republicans had imposed.

TransCanada promptly segmented the pipeline and submitted a fresh proposal -- one for a southern leg that didn't cross the Canadian border. NRDC led a swift and thorough response, engaging experts and submitting hundreds of pages of technical input to the government, including 50,000 comments from activists. (Subsequent efforts would generate hundreds of thousands of comments opposing the pipeline.)

Facing a reelection campaign, Obama now took a cautious approach. Instead of rejecting Keystone XL outright, he agreed to an expedited permitting process for the pipeline's southern leg. TransCanada had achieved a partial victory -- but only partial. It could build in Oklahoma and Texas, but the stretch of pipeline crossing into Canada was the key to expanding the tar sands industry, and it remained in the president's power.

Maintaining Momentum

As the president sought reelection, powerful donors urged him - in public and private -- to reject the pipeline once and for all. As he settled in for a second term, more than 35,000 people marched on the National Mall in bone-chilling temperatures in February 2013 for the "Forward on Climate" rally. They included busloads of college students, religious groups, tribal representatives, landowners, business leaders, the Hip Hop Caucus, and National Nurses United. The coalition continued to grow.

In June 2013, in a major climate speech at Georgetown University, President Obama addressed Keystone XL, saying: "Our national interest will only be served if this project does not significantly exacerbate the problem of carbon pollution."

This was significant.

The president had established a climate test for the project, said Danielle Droitsch, who was now NRDC's Canada project director. (Casey-Lefkowitz had moved up to lead the group's international program.) "Keystone XL was clearly a driver of tar sands expansion, and therefore would make climate change worse," Droitsch said. If activists could make that clear, the president's own test would prohibit him from approving the project.

"What was profound is that the president said that impact on climate would determine whether it was in the national interest," said CEI's Bruno. "And it was the doggedness of Keystone XL protesters that had brought him to that realization."

That doggedness would need to continue. Over the next year, the debate continued to drag out. In early 2014, the State Department issued a final -- and somewhat ambiguous -- environmental impact assessment. Other federal agencies were then asked to weigh in. In Nebraska, court challenges to the pipeline route -- and a state law that had allowed TransCanada to use eminent

domain to seize land for the project -- kept the route in doubt. Representatives of 16 Indian tribes in three states also challenged TransCanada's right to cross their land.

Congressional Republicans, though, urged on by fossil fuel interests, kept trying for force the project through. In January 2015, after taking control of both houses of Congress, they sent a pipeline-approval bill to the White House. President Obama vetoed it. Shortly thereafter, the Environmental Protection Agency weighed in on the State Department's environmental review, concluding that Keystone XL would lead to expanded tar sands oil production, and as a result, significantly increase carbon pollution, just as NRDC's analysts had argued for years.

Today the seven-year battle finally ended with President Obama's rejection of the Keystone XL proposal. "America is now a global leader when it comes to taking serious action to fight climate change," the president said. "And, frankly, approving this project would have undercut that global leadership."

Bruno, who spent more than six years organizing groups to fight the pipeline, says: "If the Keystone XL campaign has raised awareness about the threat of tar sands and slowed its expansion -- and the evidence is that it has -- then we did the job we set out to do. The heroes of this story are the activists who kept coming out to meet the president, who held signs, who sent letters and signed petitions and traveled and never tired."

For Casey-Lefkowitz, the journey that started in that darkened room has reached a conclusion -- but it's far from the end. "I predict that down the road," she says, "we'll be able to look back at the Keystone XL campaign as a moment when the American environmental movement was rejuvenated to confront, and eventually reverse, climate change."

Written with the NRDC editorial staff.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anthony-swift/unlikely-environmental-activists-stopped-keystone-xl_b_8513650.html

November 9, 2015

Young Activists and the Long Haul

By Rev. Jim Conn
Capital & Main

Old people often shake their heads and mutter about "the younger generation." Or they'll say to one another, "It's not the way it used to be," with a solemn look of dismay as if the world was "going to hell in a hand basket." That's the problem when an elder like me writes about human-caused climate change: I come close to being a cliché.

Perhaps such sentiments come from nostalgia for a time earlier in one's life, an era viewed as simpler, slower and more familiar. Friends occasionally email me photo collections that

supposedly represent a decade such as the 1950s without a single photo of anyone of color. It's as if no one other than white people lived in this country. On the other hand, since most filmgoers are younger than my cohort, and if the top 10 grossing movies of a typical week are any indication, most people attending movies today choose deeply dystopian films about the violent end of civilization as we know it.

Reading the material about climate change that's found on the Internet or stumbling across short pieces in the daily newspaper about [freak storms in Yemen](#), or the [diminishing trade winds](#) in Hawaii, would confirm that maybe we are not headed in a direction that could likely sustain civilization. Immersion in this kind of information easily leads to apocalyptic thinking – “The end is near, be very afraid.”

Alternatively, I am encouraged by the energy, [courage and commitment](#) of so many young people. Recently we visited a friend of our generation whose son led the Greenpeace campaign that attempted to stop Shell Oil's Arctic exploration vessel from leaving Portland. Repelling off a bridge to stop a ship requires dedication, yes — also a set of skills I do not have and never did. Another friend's son works on the restoration of the San Francisco Bay. Climate justice issues attract young people from Houston to Harvard. They organize demonstrations like last year's People's Climate March that filled New York City's streets with 300,000, and they lead blockades like those that derailed the Keystone XL pipeline.

Grace Cagle was only 23 at the time she launched the KXL campaign. She was studying biology at North Texas University when she became an activist. “I know it's going to take massive, almost unimaginable system change,” [she told Wen Stephenson](#), the author of *What We're Fighting for Now Is Each Other*. That's a far cry from the environmentalism of the established conservation organizations that cut deals with Big Oil and that appear to worry about economic growth as much as the habitability of the planet.

Tim DeChristopher was the guy who made the winning bid at an oil auction in Utah a few years back. He served two years in federal prison because he didn't intend to actually exploit his purchase — which he also didn't have the money to buy. Now a seminary student at Harvard Divinity, he seeks to [deepen his core values](#), which, he expects, will be required to stop human-caused climate change. When he speaks of this he talks about “this new challenge of maintaining our humanity as we navigate this period of rapid and intense change.”

Such young deep-ecology activists understand that the struggle will be over everything, that something profound will be required of us, whether or not we save the earth.

Perhaps, in this context, Worcester Polytechnic Institute philosophy professor Roger Gottlieb [asked the right question](#): “Even if we won't win, should we stop trying to live with love?”

Eve Ensler, famous for writing *The Vagina Monologues*, might have answered this question when she finished a [thought-provoking essay](#) on sex trafficking by saying: “This led me to love, thinking about love, how the failure of this century is a failure of love. What are we being called to do, what are we really made of, each of us alive on this planet today? What kind of love, what depth of love, what fierceness and searing love is required?”

As the human-caused climate change crisis sharpens, the most difficult task will be to continue to love our neighbors, to love one another, as most religious traditions put it. That will require a fortitude and courage beyond our imagination. To love will call upon our deepest reserves, whether we are old or young or somewhere in between.

<http://capitalandmain.com/latest-news/issues/environment/young-activists-and-the-long-haul-1109/>

November 10, 2015

Berkley Center symposium panel examines relationship between religion and climate change

By Justin Plumb
The Georgetown Voice

On Nov. 9, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs in conjunction with the U.S. Department of State held a symposium on religion and climate change in the Healey Family Student Center.

The symposium featured a panel discussion on climate concerns in a religious context. Moderating the panel was Professor of Ethics and Global Development Drew Christiansen, S.J. The panel included a number of academic experts on issues that intertwined religion and the environment including Mary Evelyn Tucker, research scholar at Yale University, Akbar Ahmed, professor at American University, Julia Watts Belser, professor at Georgetown University, and Willis Jenkins, professor at the University of Virginia.

A major theme of the panel was placing climate concerns in the context of the different world religions. Tucker emphasized that Catholicism's attention to the environment didn't start with the recent concerns posed by Pope Francis. "I want to suggest that this movement is at least two decades old," she said. She cited statements by various leaders in the Church that related to the environment dating back to 1987 when a bishop in the Philippines made a statement calling for environmental protection.

Tucker also noted that more religions than just Catholicism see the importance of mitigating climate change. "It was in 2000 and 2001 that [my husband and I] held one of the first conferences on religion and climate change at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge and published a volume, *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change? Views of All the World's Religions*," she said.

Others panelists went on to explain various religion's doctrine that related to climate change. Ahmed discussed Islam's relationship with the Earth. "Islam is the religion of green. It's color is green," he said. "From early Islam, read the rules of war from the time of the first caliph Abu Bakar. A Muslim in the midst of war cannot touch the foliage because nature and the Earth belong to God."

Watts Belser spoke of Judaism by relating an ancient Jewish story to globalization where one group of feasters celebrated safety from Caesar while Caesar's men slaughtered Jews on the other side of the mountain and the feasters did not know. "I think of globalization like a light which shines brighter and brighter on a few people and the rest are in darkness wiped out, they simply can't be seen. So, one side did not know about the other," she said, quoting author Arundhati Roy.

The panel also talked about a number of other climate issues, including the possible solutions to the climate crisis, and Jenkins warned the panel of some solutions' intentions. "We have a high incentive to do something but not that much, and to pass off the problem as much as possible to future generations under the cover of having done something," he said. "We could take [climate change] as a problem to be fixed and ... the North Atlantic World has some really great ways of fixing it – they all involve climate engineering and carbon markets. What will these things do? They will reinscribe the advantages of the North Atlantic World into the climate. That's a real peril."

<http://georgetownvoice.com/2015/11/10/berkeley-center-symposium-panel-examines-relationship-between-religion-and-climate-change/>

November 13, 2015

Christians set out on climate 'pilgrimage' from London to Paris

Members of different denominations embark on a two week long march to the Paris climate change talks to raise awareness of environmental issues

By Emma Howard
The Guardian

"Not getting lost in London will probably be the first hurdle," laughed Jade Till, a teacher from Stroud, before adding that walking 19 miles on a cold November day will also be a challenge.

Sat in the crypt of St Martin's-in-the-Fields on the edge of Trafalgar Square on Friday, Till was about to walk 200 miles to Paris [on a two week "pilgrimage"](#) to crunch UN climate change talks where world leaders [aim to negotiate a new deal on limiting greenhouse gas emissions](#).

She is joined by 44 other Christians, among them Methodists, Baptists and Catholics, from 18-year-old students to 75-year-old retirees. Many more will join for smaller sections along the way as the group stop to give talks and stay with schools, churches and environmental groups.

"What we are trying to do is to get the church to see that the care of God's creation, the care of the Earth is central to our Christian life and not a nice addition for some people who are keen on it. This is one of the key things about being a Christian today," Bishop of Salisbury, Nick Holtam, the lead Bishop on the environment for the Church of England (CoE) told the Guardian.

“Those of you making the journey will feel it through the soles of your feet. It’s a very physical thing you are about to do. It is November – cold days, wet weather – physically it will be a challenge,” he told the “pilgrims” before leading a service to mark the journey.

Holtam is not the only church leader calling for stronger action on climate change within faith communities. Many hope that [the Pope’s landmark climate change encyclical](#) on the issue will galvanise believers worldwide, [and in particular sceptics in the US](#). Islamic leaders and the Dalai Lama have issued similar calls to action.

On Friday the “pilgrims” walked 16 miles through Whitehall and across Westminster Bridge to Banstead, a few miles inside the M25. Other days will see the group cross through countryside, towns and along a disused railway. The longest day is 19 miles.

After taking the ferry from Newhaven to Dieppe, they will arrive in Paris in two weeks time and join the [climate change march](#) taking place there and other cities around the world. They will also deliver a series of petitions from faith organisations to Christiana Figueres, the Costa Rican diplomat leading the UN’s climate negotiations.

Kevin and Ros Durrant from Gloucester, both 56, were prompted to join the pilgrimage after hearing economist Nicholas Stern speak at the Hay Festival in May.

“It was a bit of a throwaway line – but he said that the faith communities could be doing more in the run-up to the conference. It prompted us to come and find out what the Baptist church is doing,” said Ros Durrant.

“Like lots of people we’ve been armchair environmentalists for a long time and we wanted to show our commitment in some way,” added Kevin.

The pair have only done “social pub-to-pub walking” before and have been training for three months. Their church is in the process of being credited as an “eco-congregation” for taking environmental measures such as getting energy from renewable sources, teaching on environmental issues and encouraging members of the congregation to make lifestyle changes

Other environmentalists around the world are also taking a symbolic journey to the talks. Yeb Saño, the Filipino diplomat who shot to fame after breaking down and leading a two week fast at climate talks in Poland two years ago, has already [been on the road for six weeks](#) as part of a 1,500km “people’s pilgrimage” from Rome to the French capital.

Two climate scientists have gone many steps further, leaving their desks to [walk and cycle from the two polar regions](#) to the conference in an effort to raise awareness.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/nov/13/christians-set-out-on-climate-pilgrimage-from-london-to-paris>

November 17, 2015

Indigenous Stories: Enduring Memories of Ancient Sea Rise

By John Upton via Climate Central
Kosmos

To most of us, the rush of the oceans that followed the last ice age seems like a prehistoric epoch. But the historic occasion was dutifully recorded — coast to coast — by the original inhabitants of the land Down Under.

Without using written languages, Australian tribes passed memories of life before, and during, post-glacial shoreline inundations through hundreds of generations as high-fidelity oral history. Some tribes can still point to islands that no longer exist — and provide their original names.

That's the conclusion of linguists and a geographer, who have together identified 18 Aboriginal stories — many of which were transcribed by early settlers before the tribes that told them succumbed to murderous and disease-spreading immigrants from afar — that they say accurately described geographical features that predated the last post-ice age rising of the seas.

“It's quite gobsmacking to think that a story could be told for 10,000 years,” [Nicholas Reid](#), a linguist at Australia's University of New England specializing in Aboriginal Australian languages, said. “It's almost unimaginable that people would transmit stories about things like islands that are currently underwater accurately across 400 generations.”

The Australian National University led research, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, tracked prehistoric changes in sea levels. The study included this figure, showing the oceans rising more than 100 meters (330 feet) during the past 20,000 years. How could such tales survive hundreds of generations without being written down?

“There are aspects of storytelling in Australia that involved kin-based responsibilities to tell the stories accurately,” Reid said. That rigor provided “cross-generational scaffolding” that “can keep a story true.”

Reid and a fellow linguist teamed up with [Patrick Nunn](#), a geography professor at the University of the Sunshine Coast. They combed through documented Aboriginal Australian stories for tales describing times when sea levels were lower than today. The team analyzed the contours of the land where the stories were told and used scientific reconstructions of prehistoric sea levels to date the origins of each of the stories — back to times when fewer than 10 million people were thought to have inhabited the planet.

Nunn has drafted a paper describing sea level rise history in the 18 identified Aboriginal Australian stories, which he plans to publish in a peer-reviewed journal. He's also scouring the globe for similar examples of stories that describe ancient environmental change.

“There’s a comparably old tradition among the Klamath of Oregon that must be at least 7,700 years old – it refers to the last eruption of Mount Mazama, which formed Crater Lake,” Nunn said. “I’m also working on ancient inundation stories and myths from India, and I’ve been trying to stimulate some interest among Asian scholars.”

The highlights of the results of the trio’s preliminary analysis of six of the ancient Australian tales was [presented during an indigenous language conference](#) in Japan. The stories describe permanent coastal flooding. In some cases, they describe times when dry land occupied space now submerged by water. In others, they tell of wading out to islands that can now only be reached by boat.

“This paper makes the case that endangered Indigenous languages can be repositories for factual knowledge across time depths far greater than previously imagined,” the researchers wrote in their paper, “forcing a rethink of the ways in which such traditions have been dismissed.”

<http://www.kosmosjournal.org/news/tales-of-ancient-sea-rise-told-for-10000-years/>

November 17, 2015

Promoting Environmental Awareness Among Practicing Hindus

By Kirk Semple
New York Times

On an overcast morning this month, a dozen or so people, most of them Hindus, gathered in a circle on the shore of Jamaica Bay and bowed their heads as a priest invoked the deities.

The location they had chosen, next to Cross Bay Boulevard in southern Queens, has for years been [a popular site](#) for New York’s Hindus to conduct rituals that involve the casting of religious offerings into the water, including food, statuary and fabric. Many of the items later wash ashore as flotsam.

But on this particular morning, the group was seeking divine inspiration for a countervailing reason: to clean up the debris left by their fellow Hindus. “This beach, this water, is our mother,” said the priest, Arjunen Armogan, who leads a temple in Jamaica, Queens. “We’re supposed to keep it clean, just as we look after our mother.”

The effort was part of a campaign by [Sadhana](#), a four-year-old Hindu group based in New York, to spread environmental awareness and best practices among fellow believers.

For the past two years, members of the group and other volunteers have gathered once a month at the south end of the Joseph P. Addabbo Memorial Bridge, which links Howard Beach and Broad Channel, to clean the beaches lining Cross Bay Boulevard, popular places for Hindus to perform the rituals. The group’s leaders have also visited Hindu temples to speak with priests and their congregations about adapting ancient traditions to modern environmental regulations.

The effort has challenged cultural conventions and caused friction within the Hindu population. But officials with the National Park Service, which manages the bay as part of [Gateway National Recreation Area](#), said the project had contributed to a significant reduction in the amount of debris left by Hindus in the past couple of years.

“In New York, I’ve seen it go from something that is taboo to something that is acknowledged and talked about,” said Sunita Viswanath, a founder of Sadhana, who was [recognized by the White House](#) this year as a Champion of Change for her faith-based environmental work. “It gives me so much hope.”

Sadhana is seeking to strengthen the liberal voice in the Hindu population and become a flag-bearer for social justice and social action. Its leaders have spoken out in favor of gay marriage and against homophobia and Islamophobia, among other issues. And they have taken a particularly strong stance against the caste system.

“We want to stand for human rights and justice for all,” Ms. Viswanath said. “If the rights of Hindus have been violated, we will stand in protest of that violation. If Hindus perpetrate an atrocity, we will stand against that.”

Their efforts have met some resistance, the group’s leaders say.

“It’s hard to tell someone not to do something they’ve been doing for decades,” said Aminta Kilawan, a Sadhana founder who serves as a legislative analyst for the New York City Council.

The group has focused its environmental lobbying on the temples of the Indo-Caribbean population, which has a large presence in Queens, especially Richmond Hill and Ozone Park, just north of Jamaica Bay.

At the heart of the matter is [the practice known as puja](#), in which Hindus make offerings to the gods to commemorate births, deaths, marriages and other key events.

In India, the Ganges River is the most important site for such rituals. But in New York City, Hindus have made do with other bodies of water, especially Jamaica Bay.

Parks officials tried for years to make a dent in the litter problem by doing their own outreach among the Hindu population, visiting temples and speaking at Hindu events.

Their campaign received a significant lift with the cooperation of Sadhana’s members, who brought to the green puja campaign, called Project Prithvi, the advantage of being Hindu themselves.

While the problem is still chronic — the group’s last cleanup of the year, on Nov. 7, netted 40 bags of trash in three hours, with ritual debris still littering the shoreline — parks officials say they have seen a measurable reduction in the amount of waste left behind by worshippers.

“People are getting the message and I think it’s making a big change,” said Keith White, Gateway’s coordinator of volunteers. “The message comes across a lot better when it comes from within their own community.”

Daniel M. Hendrick, who has written [a book about Jamaica Bay](#) and is finishing a documentary on the same subject, said Sadhana had “transformed” the relationship between the Parks Service and the Hindu population, making it “less us-versus-them.”

“They’re changing the minds from inside,” Mr. Hendrick said.

Sadhana’s members have sought to show how religious practice can be compatible with environmental awareness, and have insisted that while the submersion of objects in water is important, worshipers need not leave them there.

The basic message: Leave no trace.

“Use saris and fabrics as needed in your puja, but take them home with you,” guidelines distributed by the group say. “Wash and press them, and give them to a needy or elderly person who could use them.”

Cindy Ramotar, a Guyanese immigrant, said, “You are trying to do the ritual but you’re also trying to keep the earth pollution-free.” She had come to the beach one Saturday morning several months ago with her parents, her son and other family members for an annual puja ceremony.

As Sadhana members and other volunteers combed the beach for trash — they would soon fill scores of extra-large trash bags — Ms. Ramotar and her relatives prepared their ritual.

On a white sheet, they laid out nine foam plates piled with fruit, flowers and candy. Ms. Ramotar and her mother, Seeta Venkatasami, folded the entire load on itself like a burrito and then, hiking up their skirts with a free hand, waded into the water up to their knees.

They dunked the bundle into the water, hauled it back to the beach, dumped it into a garbage bag and took it to their car.

Ms. Ramotar said that until about two years ago, the family would have left everything in the water. Asked whether any one person in the family had pressed for the change, she responded, “As a family, we all thought about it at the same time, that it was a wise thing to do.” But when her father turned away, she lowered her voice and whispered, “It’s always the younger generation that makes the change.”

“God will protect you no matter what,” she continued.

“But if you get a fine from the city,” she said, shrugging, “what are you going to do?”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/18/nyregion/promoting-environmental-awareness-among-practicing-hindus.html>

November 19, 2015

Taking Pope Francis to the classroom

By Cathal Barry
Irish Catholic

A number of students from one of Ireland's leading teacher training colleges have taken a unique approach to teaching children about the environment.

Papal documents aren't usually the top choice resource for teachers, especially at primary school level, but Pope Francis' recent encyclical on the environment has proven to be accessible for all ages.

That's what a group of student teachers from Limerick's Mary Immaculate College found when they took on the challenge of explaining *Laudato Si'* to a class of 12-year-olds at Corbally's Scoil Íde.

Third year student teacher David Walsh told *The Irish Catholic* he "thoroughly enjoyed" the experience and would "absolutely" consider using other Church documents in classes in the future as a result.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I loved working with the class and engaging with the students' questions and thoughts on the issue.

"I will absolutely be using Church documents when teaching in the future," he said, adding that encyclicals such as *Laudato Si'* are ideal resources for teachers as they deal with "contemporary" issues.

"It's about the now and the future rather than the past. It's about going forward," he said.

David also said he was "surprised" at the level of engagement from students with the Pope's encyclical and the subject of the environment.

"I was surprised that even though they were so young they had great insights and were able to express them perfectly," he said, adding that Pope Francis is a person young people "respect".

Passionate

"This Pope is concerned about the youth and the environment. I think he's a friendly and approachable Pope, set on doing the right thing.

“Pope Francis is a person the children respect and take heed of. They could clearly see that care of the environment is an issue he is passionate about and so understood the need for action,” he said.

Head of Theology at Mary Immaculate Prof. Eamonn Conway said “it’s important for students to engage with papal documents and see that they impact on real life”.

He said *Laudato Si’* in particular “touches on so many aspects” of the primary school curriculum, which “allows for the Christian perspective on a whole range of issues to be brought to life in the classroom”.

In preparation for the teaching initiative, which took place over a two week period and included four hours of direct teaching, the student teachers read *Laudato Si’* in depth and derived four main themes to focus on.

The themes selected, which would form the basis of four distinct lessons, were:

- Pollution.
- World hunger.
- Climate change.
- Endangered animals.

David explained that the group decided to open up the first lesson by showing the class a number of key quotes from *Laudato Si’* without revealing the Pope as the author.

The student teachers selected quotes such as: “The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.”

And: “Humanity has disappointed God’s expectations.”

David said the students were “shocked” to eventually discover that they were direct quotes from the Pontiff.

“These quotes really shocked and surprised the children as they are not things you would generally hear in today’s world. The children were shocked furthermore to discover that the Pope said these things himself. It’s not stuff you would expect a Pope to say,” David said.

Addressing the second topic, world hunger, the student teachers got the class to play the ‘biscuit game’, which involves dividing the class into different groups of different sizes representative of the continents.

They then gave each ‘continent’ a different number of biscuits which were representative of how much food that continent would have.

David explained that this “reflected the Pope’s message in the encyclical about the inequality of resources in our world”.

“That was something they really enjoyed. It was their favourite. They had really great questions afterwards. They could really reflect critically on the whole situation,” he said.

On the third issue, climate change, the student teachers focused on “how we are not caring properly for our common home”.

They also developed a ‘word cloud’ comprising of the most popular words within *Laudato Si*: world, human and God.

“We took from that the message that God created the world for humans and so it is up to humans to take care of the world for God,” David said.

Opportunity

Teachers also provided the class with the opportunity to ‘suggest’ to Pope Francis by means of a suggestion box ideas about how they could prevent climate change, with the children coming up with ideas such as walking or cycling to school rather than taking a lift in a car.

On the last topic, endangered animals, the student teachers played another game based on an old favourite – musical chairs – in an attempt to impress upon the children the issue of melting ice caps in the North Pole.

The children, pretending to be polar bears, had to walk around the class and jump onto pieces of newspaper, representing ice, laid on the floor whenever the music stopped.

As the game progressed, teachers removed more and more pieces of newspaper.

Concluding their teaching initiative, the student teachers invited the class to write a prayer on a sheet of paper in the shape of a leaf and attach it to their hand-crafted ‘*Laudato Si*’ tree’.

David said there were a “great variety” of prayers, with the children asking God to assist them “in their efforts to make the world a better place”.

Overall, David said the experience led him and the class to discover “the link between religion and nature”.

Prof. Conway said he was “hugely impressed” with the caliber of the student teachers involved in the project.

He raised in particular their “ability to translate the at times difficult language of the encyclical into perfectly sensible concepts for sixth class pupils”.

Prof. Conway said he was equally impressed with the children being taught.

“I was amazed at how quickly the pupils grasped the seriousness of the issues being discussed and how quickly they could relate to real issues and ask tough questions about the problem of evil and suffering in the world.

“I would definitely encourage other schools to look to do something similar,” he said.

<http://www.irishcatholic.ie/article/taking-pope-francis-classroom>

November 19, 2015

Catholic Multicultural Center puts pope's encyclical into action

By Laura Green
Catholic Herald

MADISON -- Pope Francis' recent encyclical *Laudato Si'* makes a firm and urgent case for taking care of God's creation in order to care for the poor and vulnerable among us.

He asserts that environmental stewardship must always be tied to social justice and vice versa. For the Catholic Multicultural Center (CMC), the encyclical is an affirmation of the work it has already been doing.

Bringing poor, environmental stewardship together

“The encyclical really brings the poor and the environment together, which is exactly what we have been doing, exactly what we at the CMC stand for,” said CMC Director Andy Russell.

Over the past several years, the center has made environmental stewardship an integral part of its mission of serving those in need.

This came in response to the fact that low-income and minority communities are often hit the first and the hardest by the consequences of environmental degradation, a theme that the pope touches on throughout his encyclical.

Installing solar panels

With this in mind, in the fall of 2014, the CMC installed a solar panel system on its roof to produce some of its own electricity from clean, renewable energy.

“The solar panels are one little way that we can lessen our harm not just to the poor, but to everyone,” said Russell. By using renewable energy, the CMC is reducing its contribution to the pollution and resulting harm caused by coal-fired power plants.

One other way the solar panels have an immediate impact on the poor is through their effect on the center's services. By saving money on electricity, the center can now spend more money directly on helping those in need and expanding its services.

Currently the money the panels save on an average annual basis equals the cost of providing approximately 10,000 meals through the daily free meal program.

The CMC is working to expand the solar project by the end of this year and install additional solar panels to see even more savings.

Going solar is certainly not a new idea for Catholic organizations. Pope Benedict XVI, who also issued many statements on the Catholic faith and the environment, ushered in the installation of solar panels at the Vatican in 2008.

The installation of solar at the CMC was a community led effort, with much of the funds for the first phase of the project coming from a partnership between St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Madison, St. Bernard Parish in Middleton, and St. Francis Xavier Parish in Cross Plains.

The solar project at the CMC gives people a way to live out their faith by becoming involved in a Catholic environmental stewardship initiative, according to Russell.

Food pantry garden

Working at the food pantry garden is another way CMC volunteers and supporters become involved in caring for creation.

Through a partnership with Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens, the CMC has been growing fresh, local produce for its food pantry and meal program for nearly five years.

During the growing season, guests find the CMC food pantry is fully stocked with an assortment of fresh local produce that they otherwise might not have access to.

“The vegetables we grow don't always look like the ones in the store, but they are always nutritious, tasty, and fresh,” joked volunteer garden leader Dick Reynolds, who offers his time to coordinate the all-volunteer-run garden.

From his perspective, growing food for those in need is a way for not only Catholics to live out their faith, but for people of all faiths to get involved in helping the community.

Reynolds explained the mutually beneficial relationships he sees through gardening. People suffering from food insecurity get fresh produce. The earth is cared for so that it may continue to sustain people in need for years to come.

And, people from many different backgrounds connect and learn with one another through their shared work in the garden.

“For volunteers who work full time or are busy with many other things in retirement, for them to take the time to come regularly is inspirational,” said Reynolds.

The results of the gardening efforts are inspiring as well. Last year, volunteers grew and harvested over 7,700 pounds of produce for the CMC’s food programs.

“I hope that the land is better than we found it as a result of our work there,” Reynolds said.

Helping neighborhood

The CMC reflects this same sentiment in regards to the South Madison neighborhood in which it resides. “[Caring for creation] is often forgotten in neighborhoods like this,” said Russell.

Lots of trash and a polluted creek are just a couple of the problems that plague the neighborhood, problems not often seen in more affluent neighborhoods with more resources to address those issues.

Workshops and neighborhood projects hosted by the CMC over the last year and a half have been trying to change that.

These programs aim to offer tools people can use to benefit their communities and their own lives, from saving money on electricity to creating positive neighborhood spaces like the CMC rain garden.

Patricia Hernandez, CMC neighbor and volunteer, regularly participates in these programs. According to her, the motivation for her participation is simply wanting to help out and make her neighborhood a better place for everyone, especially the poor among us.

Installing rain garden

Last spring, she helped install a rain garden at the CMC along with other community members and volunteers.

“The rain gardens clean the water that we all drink,” Hernandez explained. “If everyone did things like this, it would be better for our planet. Our grandchildren would live better lives than we do.”

As with the food pantry garden, Hernandez also commented on how working on projects like this unites people. She said participating in the programs at the CMC allowed her to meet new people that she otherwise wouldn’t have met, coming together with these new friends to work towards building a stronger community.

Part of one family

Hernandez explained, “We are all like family. We have to help one another out.”

Pope Francis' encyclical asks us to do just that, to help one another as one human family by being good stewards of creation and of one another.

As for the CMC, Russell says the center will continue to lead by example, living out the Catholic faith by serving the poor while also being a good steward of creation.

<http://www.madisoncatholicherald.org/news/around-diocese/6015-cmc.html>

November 19, 2015

A 'New Deal' of sorts for religion

Science alone can't force behavior change. Religion needs to step up.

By Douglas Fischer
The Daily Climate

RIETI, Italy – Religion needs a revolutionary shift, taking responsibility for our "common home" and rejecting fundamentalism, to point humanity to better, wiser solutions for problems like climate change.

Reason alone can't handle the job.

The message came from a panel convened here in Italy, where the papal encyclical issued this summer and the Paris attacks over the weekend were both very much present.

"Any fundamentalism breaks our common home," said Monsignor Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Council of Family. "This is the most important message stemming from Pope Francis and his encyclical."

Paglia spoke via a translator at the 12th International Media Forum on the Protection of Nature, an annual gathering of scientists and journalists in Italy. Environmental Health Sciences, publisher of The Daily Climate and Environmental Health News, is being honored at the conference with the International Greenaccord Media Award.

At a discussion on religion and science, several theological experts called for more than a simple rethinking in the longstanding, antagonistic relationship between the two.

"What are our values that shape our individual behavior? From where do we receive our onus on responsibility?" asked former Italian Prime Minister Giuliano Amato, a member of the Constitutional Court, one of two supreme courts in Italy. "Religions are an irrenouncable moral guide for a free society."

But for too long, Amato added via a translator, religion has stood as the antithesis to free society - a force that "darkens the mind," the enemy of science.

What's needed, said Paglia and others, is an ecological revolution "in the broadest possible sense."

"We have to rethink our relationship with this common home," Paglia said. "Humans are not the masters."

That message was explicit in Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, the *Laudato Si*, issued earlier this year. Almost 200 pages long, the landmark document mapped a more holistic ecology—one wrapping environmentalism, economics, science and faith together in an integral effort.

It calls, said Giancarlo Bosetti, director of Reset Dialogues on Civilization, an Italian nonprofit focused on intercultural understanding, not simply for a shift in "tone or style," but in "theological substance."

"This is a post-secular philosophy, open to dialogue, that allows us to produce many syntheses between faith and reason." -*Giancarlo Bosetti, Reset Dialogues on Civilization*

"It explicitly abandons dogmatic expression of faith," Bosetti said. "This is a post-secular philosophy, open to dialogue, that allows us to produce many syntheses between faith and reason."

And that pairing, Amato added, is crucial to breaking the "gigantic oxymoron" between unfettered economic growth and expression on one hand, and ecological preservation on the other.

"There is nothing more beautiful, more momentous, than the fact that we are able to choose, to design and build, our life project," Amato said. "But we are so often focused on desires centered around ourselves.... We have endangered our relationship with our collective interest."

Science has pointed out the folly of such choices. But it has little power to shift the underlying ethics and morals, panelists agreed.

"Science is telling us we are living as if we were ill," Amato said. "And science is helpless ... in telling us what we should do. "We need a form of ethics that can reset our relationship with ourselves and with our world."

<http://www.dailyclimate.org/tdc-newsroom/2015/11/a-new-deal-of-sorts-for-religion>

November 22, 2015

Catholics waking up to perils of climate change

By Michael Swan

The Catholic Register

Pope Francis has been getting ready for Paris for more than a year. In May of 2014 the Patriarch of Rome sat down in Jerusalem with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and issued a joint declaration as a challenge to the world's Christians.

“Together, we pledge our commitment to raising awareness about the stewardship of creation,” they wrote. “We appeal to all people of goodwill to consider ways of living less wastefully and more frugally, manifesting less greed and more generosity for the protection of God's world and the benefit of His people.”

As they signed the declaration, the spiritual heads of more than one billion Catholics and more than 300 million Orthodox Christians were already thinking about COP21, the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference coming up Nov. 30 to Dec. 11 in Paris. Work was then already underway at the Vatican to prepare a major statement on the environment. That statement turned out to be Francis' environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

So the Pope is ready — ready for 196 world leaders to get down to work on meaningful, measurable action to limit global warming to less than two degrees by mid-century. But are Catholics ready? Is the world ready?

A Pew Research Centre study of popular opinion in over 40 countries shows Catholic and world opinion catching up with the Pope.

Across all nations a global median of 54 per cent of us believe climate change is a very serious problem. Canadians fall a little short of the world standard with 51 per cent claiming the problem is very serious, but another 33 per cent grant it is somewhat serious. Canadians however, are more concerned than Americans. Only 45 per cent of U.S. residents believe climate change is very serious, with another 29 per cent saying it's somewhat serious.

The real concern over climate change is in Latin America, where 74 per cent call the problem “very serious,” and Africa, where on average 61 per cent of Africans told Pew researchers the problem is “very serious.”

Religiously, Catholics seem to have more personal concern about climate change. Among Canadian Catholics, 26 per cent said they were “very concerned that climate change will harm me personally.” That compares to just 16 per cent of Canadian Protestants. But Catholics still lag behind the religiously unaffiliated in this country. Thirty per cent of religiously unaffiliated Canadians expressed grave concern about how climate change will harm them personally.

On that personal sense of foreboding, Canadian Catholics trail their American co-religionists. Thirty-nine per cent of American Catholics (half of them Hispanic with ties to Latin America) claim to be very concerned with how climate change will affect them personally, compared with 27 per cent of the religiously unaffiliated Americans and 26 per cent of Protestants.

Results showing Canadian Catholics more concerned about climate change than Protestants were surprising to Dennis Patrick O'Hara, a theologian at Toronto's University of St. Michael's College.

"The Protestants have been doing a lot of work on climate change. It's not as if they've been bystanders in all of this," said O'Hara, the director of the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology. "What could be the difference? The only thing I could come up with is Pope Francis. And it's not just *Laudato Si'*, because he's been pushing this since as soon as his pontificate began."

The Canadian bishops have spoken up on the environment frequently, beginning with a 2003 pastoral letter on "The Christian Ecological Imperative" and most recently signing on to a September statement organized by the Canadian Council of Churches "On Promoting Climate Justice and Ending Poverty in Canada."

But the CCCB and the CCC will never have the clout or rhetorical oomph of a Pope who last November said, "This is what we do — destroy creation, destroy lives, destroy cultures, destroy values, destroy hope. How greatly we need the Lord's strength to seal us with His love and His power to stop this mad race of destruction! Destroying what He has given us, the most beautiful things that He has done for us, so that we may carry them forward, nurture them to bear fruit."

The Pope has not been satisfied to pontificate on climate change and the environment. He encouraged the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences to organize a Vatican workshop for global leaders in April. The workshop, titled "Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity: The Moral Dimensions of Climate Change and Sustainable Humanity," concluded with a statement that, "In the face of the emergencies of human-induced climate change, social exclusion and extreme poverty, we join together to declare that human-induced climate change is a scientific reality, and its decisive mitigation is a moral and religious imperative for humanity."

As an observer state at the United Nations, the Vatican will send an official delegation to the Paris meetings, but the cardinals and Vatican officials in the official delegation won't be alone. Catholic development organizations, including the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, will have representatives out on the Paris streets and in the convention halls urging world leaders to do better than they have so far.

While the Development and Peace delegation will be a small, self-financed group of just eight to 10, the European CIDSE group of agencies will have large contingents of their members who can make it to Paris by bus or train.

Those Catholic development agencies will run a Dec. 9 to 13 program in Paris that promises to re-orient and concentrate Catholic development efforts on behalf of poor people in Africa, Latin America and Asia based on the principles of *Laudato Si'*.

Jesuit Father John McCarthy doesn't underestimate the effect of Pope Francis speaking clearly, plainly and forcefully. But the scientist, author of *Do Monkeys Go to Heaven?* and winner of the

Canadian Environment Award Gold Prize for his work on boreal forest conservation from the Royal Geographic Society of Canada, believes it goes deeper than one Pope's pronouncements.

"There's definitely no doubt that Laudato Si' has really captured people's imaginations, moreso than any other Catholic encyclical that I can remember," he said.

But there's more to it. Catholics, with their sacramental understanding of the incarnation, have a religious instinct that tells them creation is sacred, McCarthy said.

"I've focused a lot on the creed that we profess each Sunday," he said. "Just the idea of God as creator of all that is seen and unseen — so there's the whole world. And then Jesus Christ in and through whom all things were made. And then the Spirit, the giver of life. For me, that's all life."

McCarthy will be presenting his view of how Laudato Si' and the sacraments fit together in a Nov. 18 talk at Guelph's Holy Rosary parish. He will have another go at the subject as part of a four-part series of popular theology talks at Regis College in Toronto on Wednesday evenings March 23 to April 13. Laudato Si's subtitle, "On Care for Our Common Home" provides the theme that ties together these four talks by Scripture scholar Fr. Scott Lewis, moral theologian Sr. Mary Rowell, McCarthy and systematic theologian Fr. Gordon Rixon.

The Scarboro Missions have also caught the fever. "Caring for Our Common Home" is a "signature workshop series" the Scarboros are presenting by request at parishes and schools all over southern Ontario. Using Laudato Si' as the key, the Scarboro team is willing to travel to any parish or Catholic school that thinks it could benefit from a deeper understanding of Church teaching, using the encyclical as a kind of key to understanding the Catholic tradition of engagement in the world.

Catholics will also be a big part of the 100% Possible marches across Canada planned for the eve of the COP21 meetings in Paris. Some 20,000 are expected on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, including a Development and Peace delegation. Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast and Gatineau Archbishop Paul André Durocher are expected in the Ottawa crowd urging Canada's new government to do more at the Paris showdown. In Toronto, Development and Peace is concentrating on the local march at Queen's Park.

The UN conferences on climate change have been bubbling along every year since the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, a framework which eventually produced the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. COP, as in COP21, stands for Conference of the Parties — meaning the parties which participated in the 1992 framework. Paris will be the 21st such meeting.

In Canada, COP conventions were big news when Kyoto was signed and again when Canada withdrew from Kyoto in 2011. But this time the news is even bigger.

For the first time ever, the Canadian prime minister will be accompanied at an international conference by all the provincial premiers. Added to the premiers will be federal opposition

leaders. If the new Liberal government is signaling a new and deeper commitment on the issue, they too are just catching up with Pope Francis.

“Our time cannot ignore the issue of ecology,” Pope Francis told us last November. “Which is vital to man’s survival. Nor (can we) reduce it to merely a political question. Indeed, it has a moral dimension that affects everyone, such that no one can ignore it. As disciples of Christ, we have a further reason to join with all men and women of good will to protect and defend nature and the environment. Creation is, in fact, a gift entrusted to us from the hands of the Creator. All of nature that surrounds us is created like us, created together with us. And in a common destiny it tends to find its fulfilment and ultimate end in God Himself. The Bible says ‘new heavens and a new earth.’ This doctrine of our faith is an even stronger stimulus for us to have a responsible and respectful relationship with Creation. In inanimate nature, in plants and in animals, we recognize the imprint of the Creator, and in our fellow kind, His very image.”

<http://www.catholicregister.org/home/international/item/21314-catholics-waking-up-to-perils-of-climate-change>

November 23, 2015

The Moral and Political Dimensions of Climate Change

Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)

Speakers:

Mitchell C. Hescoc, President and CEO, Evangelical Environmental Network

Erin Lothes, Assistant Professor of Theology, College of Saint Elizabeth

Mary Evelyn Tucker, Codirector, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

Presider: John Grim, Codirector, Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology

Description

Erin Lothes Biviano, assistant professor of theology at the College of Saint Elizabeth, Mitchell C. Hescoc, president and CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network, Mary Evelyn Tucker, codirector of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, and John Grim, codirector of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, discuss international efforts to address climate change, including faith-based approaches to environmental justice. This meeting took place at the American Academy of Religion 2015 Annual Meeting, as part of CFR's Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative.

[*Learn more about CFR's Religion and Foreign Policy Initiative.*](#)

To listen to the audio and read the transcript, visit:

<http://www.cfr.org/climate-change/moral-political-dimensions-climate-change/p37322>

November 23, 2015

Hindu Religious and Civil Society Leaders Urge Climate Change Action

Hindu Declaration on Climate Change Press Release

Over 60 Hindu leaders and organisations have signed the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change issued to-day, calling for action from both the world's 900 million Hindus as well as by the 196 governments meeting in Paris from 30 November to 11 December at the 21st Conference of Contracting Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21).

This Declaration (full text and list of signatories at www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org) follows similar documents issued by Islamic leaders (18 August), 154 Christian and other religious leaders (22 October), Presidents of Regional Catholic Bishops' Conferences (26 October), Buddhist leaders (29 October) which followed the Pope's Encyclical of June 18 calling for massive global action to slow climate change and deal with its impacts. (Faith declarations are to be formally presented to the COP 21 presidency and participants under arrangements to be announced shortly.)

The Declaration is an initiative of the [Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies](#) / [Bhumi Project](#), in partnership with the [Hindu American Foundation](#) the interfaith environmental organisation [GreenFaith](#) and the interfaith campaign for climate action [OurVoices](#). Signatories from India, EU and North America include the renowned scientist and activist Vandana Shiva, and spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. "We are at a historic moment in time, as Hindus worldwide experience first-hand the effects of climate change. Though their religious beliefs, they are recognising their individual and collective responsibility to address it." said Gopal Patel, Director of the Bhumi Project.

The Declaration asks the world's 900 million Hindus to transition to using clean energy, adopt a plant-based diet, and lead lives in harmony with the natural world. International and national action must be scientifically credible and historically fair, based on deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions through a rapid transition away from polluting technologies, especially away from fossil fuels. Renewable energies are also the best hope for the billions of people without electricity or clean cooking facilities to live better lives and reduce poverty.

As Mahatma Gandhi posited, "If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. We need not wait to see what others do."

The Declaration quotes the *Mahābhārata* (109.10) which states “*Dharma* exists for the welfare of all beings. Hence, that by which the welfare of all living beings is sustained, that for sure is *dharma*” and calls on all Hindus to expand their conception of *dharma* so as to consider impacts of personal actions on all other beings. National and international responses to climate change must be based on central Hindu principle that the Divine is all and all life is to be treated with reverence and respect. Three Sanskrit words from the *Īsopaniṣad*, characterise the Hindu outlook: “*Īśāvāsyam idam sarvam*. This entire universe is to be looked upon as the energy of the Lord.”

NOTE FOR EDITORS. For further information/interviews contact Gopal Patel, Bhumi Project Director: gopal@bhumiproject.org. Tel: +44 7958807506 (UK)

http://www.hinduclimatedeclaration2015.org/launch_announcement

November 28, 2015

Short Answers to Hard Questions About Climate Change

By Justin Gillis
New York Times

The issue can be overwhelming. The science is complicated. Predictions about the fate of the planet carry endless caveats and asterisks.

We get it.

So we’ve put together a list of quick answers to often-asked questions about climate change. This should give you a running start on understanding the problem.

1. How much is the planet heating up?

1.7 degrees is actually a significant amount.

As of October 2015, the Earth had warmed by about 1.7 degrees Fahrenheit since 1880, when records begin at a global scale. That figure includes the surface of the ocean. The warming is greater over land, and greater still in the Arctic and parts of Antarctica.

The number may sound low, but as an average over the surface of an entire planet, it is actually high, which explains why much of the world’s land ice is starting to melt and the oceans are rising at an accelerating pace. The heat accumulating in the Earth because of human emissions is roughly equal to the heat that would be released by 400,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs exploding across the planet every day.

Scientists believe most and probably all of the warming since 1950 was caused by the human release of greenhouse gases. If emissions continue unchecked, they say the global warming could

ultimately exceed 8 degrees Fahrenheit, which would transform the planet and undermine its capacity to support a large human population.

2. How much trouble are we in?

For future generations, big trouble.

The risks are much greater over the long run than over the next few decades, but the emissions that create those risks are happening now. Over the coming 25 or 30 years, scientists say, the climate is likely to resemble that of today, although gradually getting warmer. Rainfall will be heavier in many parts of the world, but the periods between rains will most likely grow hotter and therefore drier. The number of hurricanes and typhoons may actually fall, but the ones that do occur will draw energy from a hotter ocean surface, and therefore may be more intense, on average, than those of the past. Coastal flooding will grow more frequent and damaging.

Longer term, if emissions continue to rise unchecked, the risks are profound. Scientists fear climate effects so severe that they might destabilize governments, produce waves of refugees, precipitate the sixth mass extinction of plants and animals in Earth's history, and melt the polar ice caps, causing the seas to rise high enough to flood most of the world's coastal cities.

All of this could take hundreds or even thousands of years to play out, conceivably providing a cushion of time for civilization to adjust, but experts cannot rule out abrupt changes, such as a collapse of agriculture, that would throw society into chaos much sooner. Bolder efforts to limit emissions would reduce these risks, or at least slow the effects, but it is already too late to eliminate the risks entirely.

3. Is there anything I can do?

Fly less, drive less, waste less.

You can reduce your own carbon footprint in lots of simple ways, and most of them will save you money. You can plug leaks in your home insulation to save power, install a smart thermostat, switch to more efficient light bulbs, turn off the lights in any room where you are not using them, drive fewer miles by consolidating trips or taking public transit, waste less food, and eat less meat.

Perhaps the biggest single thing individuals can do on their own is to take [fewer airplane trips](#); just one or two fewer plane rides per year can save as much in emissions as all the other actions combined. If you want to be at the cutting edge, you can look at buying an electric or hybrid car, putting solar panels on your roof, or both.

If you want to offset your emissions, you can buy certificates, with the money going to projects that protect forests, capture greenhouse gases and so forth. Some airlines sell these to offset emissions from their flights, and after some scandals in the early days, they started to scrutinize the projects closely, so the offsets can now be bought in good conscience. You can also buy

offset certificates in a private marketplace, from companies such as [TerraPass](#) in San Francisco that follow strict rules set up by the state of California; some people even give these as holiday gifts. Yet another way: In states that allow you to choose your own electricity supplier, you can often elect to buy green electricity; you pay slightly more, with the money going into a fund that helps finance projects like wind farms.

In the end, though, experts do not believe the needed transformation in the energy system can happen without strong state and national policies. So speaking up and exercising your rights as a citizen matters as much as anything else you can do.

4. What's the optimistic scenario?

Several things have to break our way.

In the best case that scientists can imagine, several things happen: Earth turns out to be less sensitive to greenhouse gases than currently believed; plants and animals manage to adapt to the changes that have already become inevitable; human society develops much greater political will to bring emissions under control; and major technological breakthroughs occur that help society both to limit emissions and to adjust to climate change.

The two human-influenced variables are not entirely independent, of course: Technological breakthroughs that make clean energy cheaper than fossil fuels would also make it easier to develop the political will for rapid action.

Scientists say the odds of all these things breaking our way are not very high, unfortunately. The Earth could just as easily turn out to be more sensitive to greenhouse gases than less. Global warming seems to be causing chaos in parts of the natural world already, and that seems likely to get worse, not better. So in the view of the experts, simply banking on a rosy scenario without any real plan would be dangerous. They believe the only way to limit the risks is to limit emissions.

5. Will reducing meat in my diet help the climate?

Yes, beef especially.

Agriculture of all types produces greenhouse gases that warm the planet, but meat production is especially harmful – and beef is the most environmentally damaging form of meat. Some methods of cattle production demand a lot of land, contributing to destruction of forests; the trees are typically burned, releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Other methods require huge amounts of water and fertilizer to grow food for the cows.

The cows themselves produce emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that causes short-term warming. Meat consumption is rising worldwide as the population grows, and as economic development makes people richer and better able to afford meat.

This is worrisome: Studies have found that if the whole world were to start eating beef at the rate Americans eat it, produced by the methods typically used in the United States, that alone might erase any chance of staying below an internationally agreed-upon limit on global warming. Pork production creates somewhat lower emissions than beef production, and chicken is lower still. So reducing your meat consumption, or switching from beef and pork to chicken in your diet, are both moves in the right direction. Of course, as with any kind of behavioral change meant to benefit the climate, this will only make a difference if lots of other people do it, too, reducing the overall demand for meat products.

6. What's the worst-case scenario?

There are many.

That is actually hard to say, which is one reason scientists are urging that emissions be cut; they want to limit the possibility of any worst-case scenario coming to pass. Perhaps the greatest fear is a collapse of food production, accompanied by escalating prices and mass starvation. Even with runaway emissions growth, it is unclear how likely this would be, as farmers are able to adjust their crops and farming techniques, to a degree, to adapt to climatic changes. Another possibility would be a disintegration of the polar ice sheets, leading to fast-rising seas that would force people to abandon many of the world's great cities and would lead to the loss of trillions of dollars worth of property and other assets. Scientists also worry about other wild-card scenarios like the predictable cycles of Asian monsoons' becoming less reliable. Billions of people depend on monsoons to provide water for crops, so any disruptions could be catastrophic.

7. Will a tech breakthrough help us?

Even Bill Gates says don't count on it, unless we commit the cash.

As more companies, governments and researchers devote themselves to the problem, the chances of big technological advances are improving. But even many experts who are optimistic about technological solutions warn that current efforts are not enough. For instance, spending on basic energy research is only a quarter to a third of the level that several in-depth reports have recommended. And public spending on agricultural research has stagnated even though climate change poses growing risks to the food supply. People like Bill Gates have argued that crossing our fingers and hoping for technological miracles is not a strategy — we have to spend the money that would make these things more likely to happen.

8. How much will the seas rise?

The real question is not how high, but how fast.

The ocean is rising at a rate of about a foot per century. That causes severe effects on coastlines, forcing governments and property owners to spend tens of billions of dollars fighting erosion. But if that rate continued, it would probably be manageable, experts say.

The risk is that the rate will accelerate markedly. If emissions continue unchecked, then the temperature at the Earth's surface could soon resemble a past epoch called the [Pliocene](#), when a great deal of ice melted and the ocean rose by something like 80 feet compared to today. A recent study found that burning all the fossil fuels in the ground would fully melt the polar ice sheets, raising the sea level by more than 160 feet over an unknown period.

With all of that said, the crucial issue is probably not how much the oceans are going to rise, but how fast. And on that point, scientists are pretty much flying blind. Their best information comes from studying Earth's history, and it suggests that the rate can on occasion hit a foot per decade, which can probably be thought of as the worst-case scenario. A rate even half that would force rapid retreat from the coasts and, some experts think, throw human society into crisis. Even if the rise is much slower, many of the world's great cities will flood eventually. Studies suggest that big cuts in emissions could slow the rise, buying crucial time for society to adapt to an altered coastline.

9. Are the predictions reliable?

They're not perfect, but they're grounded in solid science.

The idea that Earth is sensitive to greenhouse gases is confirmed by many lines of scientific evidence. For instance, the basic physics suggesting that an increase of carbon dioxide traps more heat was discovered in the 19th century, and has been verified in thousands of laboratory experiments.

Climate science does contain uncertainties, of course. The biggest is the degree to which global warming sets off feedback loops, such as a melting of sea ice that will darken the surface and cause more heat to be absorbed, melting more ice, and so forth. It is not clear exactly how much the feedbacks will intensify the warming; some of them could even partially offset it. This uncertainty means that computer forecasts can give only a range of future climate possibilities, not absolute predictions.

But even if those computer forecasts did not exist, a huge amount of evidence suggests that scientists have the basic story right. The most important evidence comes from the study of past climate conditions, a field known as paleoclimate research. The amount of carbon dioxide in the air has fluctuated naturally in the past, and every time it rises, the Earth warms up, ice melts, and the ocean rises. A hundred miles inland from today's East Coast, seashells can be dug from ancient beaches that are three million years old, a blink of an eye in geologic time. These past conditions are not a perfect guide to the future, either, because humans are pumping carbon dioxide into the air far faster than nature has ever done.

10. Why do people question climate change?

Hint: ideology.

Most of the attacks on climate science are coming from libertarians and other political conservatives who do not like the policies that have been proposed to fight global warming. Instead of negotiating over those policies and trying to make them more subject to free-market principles, they have taken the approach of blocking them by trying to undermine the science.

This ideological position has been propped up by money from fossil-fuel interests, which have paid to create organizations, fund conferences and the like. The scientific arguments made by these groups usually involve cherry-picking data, such as focusing on short-term blips in the temperature record or in sea ice, while ignoring the long-term trends.

The most extreme version of climate denialism is to [claim](#) that scientists are engaged in a worldwide hoax to fool the public so that the government can gain greater control over people's lives. As the arguments have become more strained, many oil and coal companies have begun to distance themselves publicly from climate denialism, but some are still helping to finance the campaigns of politicians who espouse such views.

11. Is crazy weather tied to climate change?

In some cases, yes.

Scientists have published strong evidence that the warming climate is making heat waves more frequent and intense. It is also causing [heavier rainstorms](#), and coastal flooding is [getting worse](#) as the oceans rise because of human emissions. Global warming has intensified droughts in regions like the Middle East, and it may have [strengthened](#) the drought in California.

In many other cases, though, the linkage to global warming for particular trends is uncertain or disputed. That is partly from a lack of good historical weather data, but it is also scientifically unclear how certain types of events may be influenced by the changing climate.

Another factor: While the climate is changing, people's perceptions may be changing faster. The Internet has made us all more aware of weather disasters in distant places. On social media, people have a tendency to attribute virtually any disaster to climate change, but in many cases there is no scientific support for doing so.

12. Will anyone benefit from global warming?

In certain ways, yes.

Countries with huge, frozen hinterlands, including Canada and Russia, could see some economic benefits as global warming makes agriculture, mining and the like more possible in those places.

It is perhaps no accident that the Russians have always been reluctant to make ambitious climate commitments, and President Vladimir V. Putin has publicly questioned the science of climate change.

However, both of those countries could suffer enormous damage to their natural resources; escalating fires in Russia are already killing millions of acres of forests per year. Moreover, some experts believe countries that view themselves as likely winners from global warming will come to see the matter differently once they are swamped by millions of refugees from less fortunate lands.

13. Is there any reason for hope?

If you share this with 50 friends, maybe.

Scientists have been warning since the 1980s that strong policies were needed to limit emissions. Those warnings were ignored, and greenhouse gases in the atmosphere have since built up to potentially dangerous levels. So the hour is late.

But after 20 years of largely fruitless diplomacy, the governments of the world are finally starting to take the problem seriously. A deal reached in Paris in December commits nearly every country to some kind of action. Religious leaders like Pope Francis are speaking out. Low-emission technologies, such as electric cars, are improving. Leading corporations are making [bold promises](#) to switch to renewable power and stop forest destruction. Around the world, many states and cities are pledging to go far beyond the goals set by their national governments.

What is still largely missing in all this are the voices of ordinary citizens. Because politicians have a hard time thinking beyond the next election, they tend to tackle hard problems only when the public rises up and demands it.

14. How does agriculture affect climate change?

It's a big contributor, but there are signs of progress.

The environmental pressures from global agriculture are indeed enormous.

The demand for food is rising, in large part because of population growth and rising incomes that give millions of once-low income people the means to eat richer diets. Global [demand for beef and for animal feed](#), for instance, has led farmers to cut down huge chunks of the Amazon rain forest.

Efforts are being made to tackle the problems. The biggest success has arguably been in Brazil, which adopted tough oversight and managed to cut deforestation in the Amazon by 80 percent in a decade. But the gains there are fragile, and severe problems continue in other parts of the world, such as aggressive forest clearing in Indonesia.

Scores of companies and organizations, including major manufacturers of consumer products, [signed a declaration in New York](#) in 2014 pledging to cut deforestation in half by 2020, and to cut it out completely by 2030. The companies that signed the pact are now struggling to figure out how to deliver on that promise.

Many forest experts at the Paris climate talks in late 2015 considered the pledge as ambitious, but possible. And they said it was crucial that consumers keep up the pressure on companies from whom they buy products, from soap to ice cream.

15. Will the seas rise evenly across the planet?

Think lumpy.

Many people imagine the ocean to be like a bathtub, where the water level is consistent all the way around. In fact, the sea is rather lumpy – strong winds and other factors can cause water to pile up in some spots, and to be lower in others.

Also, [the huge ice sheets in Greenland](#) and Antarctica exert a gravitational pull on the sea, drawing water toward them. As they melt, sea levels in their vicinity will fall as the water gets redistributed to distant areas.

How the rising ocean affects particular parts of the world will therefore depend on which ice sheet melts fastest, how winds and currents shift, and other related factors. On top of all that, some coastal areas are sinking as the sea rises, so they get a double whammy.

16. Is it really all about carbon?

Here's a quick explainer.

The greenhouse gases being released by human activity are often called “carbon emissions,” just for shorthand. That is because the two most important of the gases, carbon dioxide and methane, contain the carbon molecule. Many other gases also trap heat near the Earth's surface, and many human activities cause the release of such gases to the atmosphere. Not all of these actually contain carbon, but they have all come to be referred to by the same shorthand.

By far the biggest factor causing global warming is the burning of fossil fuels for electricity and transportation. That process takes carbon that has been underground for millions of years and moves it into the atmosphere, as carbon dioxide, where it will influence the climate for many centuries into the future. Methane is even more potent at trapping heat than carbon dioxide, but it breaks down more quickly in the air. Methane comes from swamps, from the decay of food in landfills, from cattle and dairy farming, and from leaks from natural gas wells and pipelines.

While fossil-fuel emissions are the major issue, another major creator of emissions is the destruction of forests, particularly in the tropics. Billions of tons of carbon are stored in trees, and when forests are cleared, much of the vegetation is burned, sending that carbon into the air as carbon dioxide.

When you hear about carbon taxes, carbon trading and so on, these are just shorthand descriptions of methods designed to limit greenhouse emissions or to make them more expensive so that people will be encouraged to conserve fuel.

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/11/28/science/what-is-climate-change.html?_r=0

November 28, 2015

Integrating Ecology and Justice: The New Papal Encyclical

By Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim
Solutions, Volume 6, Issue 4, pp. 38-43

In Brief:

In June of 2015, Pope Francis released the first encyclical on ecology. The Pope's message highlights "integral ecology," intrinsically linking ecological integrity and social justice. While the encyclical notes the statements of prior Popes and Bishops on the environment, Pope Francis has departed from earlier biblical language describing the domination of nature. Instead, he expresses a broader understanding of the beauty and complexity of nature, on which humans fundamentally depend. With "integral ecology" he underscores this connection of humans to the natural environment. This perspective shifts the climate debate to one of a human change of consciousness and conscience. As such, the encyclical has the potential to bring about a tipping point in the global community regarding the climate debate, not merely among Christians, but to all those attending to this moral call to action.

Key Concepts:

- "Integral ecology" brings together nature and humans.
 - Eco-justice encompasses the vulnerability of people and the planet.
 - Inequities and environmental degradation being caused by market capitalism need to be addressed.
 - These moral principles are part of Catholic social justice teachings of earlier Popes.
 - A cosmological perspective or interrelatedness is also part of the encyclical.
 - The encyclical calls for "ecological conversion."
-

On June 18, 2015 Pope Francis released *Laudato Si*, the first encyclical in the history of the Catholic Church on ecology. An encyclical is the highest-level teaching document in

Catholicism. There have been earlier statements by popes and bishops on environmental issues, but never an encyclical.

With 1.2 billion Catholics on the planet, the potential for attention to environmental and climate change issues is unprecedented. Even if, as some argue, encyclicals do not draw the response and obligation from Catholics as in the past, it is clear that this one will be discussed in religious and educational circles radiating out into the larger Christian world and beyond. Indeed, the media coverage of this document has already been robust. Scientists and ecologists have been keen to draw on its message for conservation as UN climate change negotiations in Paris approach in December 2015. What distinguishes the Pope's intervention is his linking of environmental concerns with issues of social justice and economic inequality—themes often lacking from the climate change discussions. This article suggests that the Pope's message has the potential to transform that debate by connecting environmentalism with a century of Catholic social justice teachings. Ecology and social justice are inextricably linked, says the Pope. That's a Christian message but also a profoundly human one.

Pope Francis could not have chosen a more central topic than the human role in ecological degradation and climate change. He critiques our "technocratic paradigm" and "throwaway culture." He calls for a transformation of our market-based economic system that he feels is destroying the planet and creating immense social inequities. Indeed, the encyclical is highly critical of unfettered capitalism and rampant consumerism.

This might seem like a radical message—but it's also the culmination of a century of Catholic social justice thinking. By drawing on and developing the work of earlier theologians and ethicists, this encyclical makes explicit the links between social justice and eco-justice.¹

One of the key architects of the encyclical, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, believes Pope Francis' phrase "integral ecology" is central to understanding this interrelationship. Cardinal Turkson has identified several principles behind the phrase: 1) the moral imperative of all peoples to be protectors of the environment; 2) care for creation as a virtue in its own right; and 3) the need for a new global solidarity to direct our search for the common good.²

Integral ecology means that ecological integrity and social justice are linked because humans and nature are part of nurturing, interdependent life systems. Given that the poor and vulnerable are most adversely affected by an ailing planetary system, the two must be addressed together. While this draws on traditional Christian teachings regarding the poor, it also marks an important shift in the church's conception of the relationship of humans to nature and humans to work.

We can compare Pope Francis' thinking to the writing of Pope John Paul II, who himself builds on Pope Leo XIII's progressive encyclical *Rerum Novarum* on workers' rights in 1891. A hundred years after Leo, John Paul II writes:

The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen 1:28)...It is through work that man, using his intelligence and exercising his freedom, succeeds in dominating the earth and making it a fitting home...Obviously, he also has the

responsibility not to hinder others from having their own part of God's gift; indeed, he must cooperate with others so that together all can dominate the earth. (*Centesimus annus*: 31)

Drawing heavily on biblical language of domination, John Paul underscores the modern separation of humans from nature. However, he also emphasizes the dignity of cooperative human labor as making something productive of God's gift of nature. Thus, the more traditional perspective of "dominion" in Genesis is balanced by a call for "stewardship" of nature. This stands in marked contrast to his successors' more holistic view of nature.

Pope Benedict expanded Catholic thinking regarding the environment. His 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, is focused on charity and our duty to the poor as well as to present and future generations. He wrote of this responsibility arising from:

...our relationship to the natural environment. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. When nature, including the human being, is viewed as the result of mere chance or evolutionary determinism, our sense of responsibility wanes. In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. (*Caritas in Veritate*: 48)

Pope Benedict moves away from language of domination of nature toward the protection of nature. Yet, he holds to a view of creation as in balance, which differs from the more dynamic perspectives of contemporary ecological science. Pope Benedict also presents what he calls the "grammar of nature" saying:

...the natural environment is more than raw material to be manipulated at our pleasure; it is a wondrous work of the Creator containing a 'grammar,' which sets forth ends and criteria for its wise use, not its reckless exploitation. Today much harm is done to development precisely as a result of these distorted notions. Reducing nature merely to a collection of contingent data ends up doing violence to the environment and even encouraging activity that fails to respect human nature itself.

He goes on to write that global development:

...cannot ignore coming generations, but needs to be marked by solidarity and inter-generational justice, while taking into account a variety of contexts: ecological, juridical, economic, political and cultural. (*Caritas in Veritate*: 48)

There is a clear shift here from Pope John Paul. Yet Pope Benedict still relies on an anthropocentric ethic of "wise use" of nature. Perhaps he was wary that talking about nature's inherent goodness might open him to the charge of neopaganism from conservative factions within the church.

Pope Francis doesn't seem to have such reservations. Indeed, following Francis of Assisi, he invokes "Mother Earth" in the opening paragraph of the encyclical. Pope Francis also shifts the

church to a view of nature in line with environmental science and environmental philosophy. He calls for great ecological literacy and understanding of environmental problems. He has left the earlier biblical language of domination for an understanding of integral ecology that connects humans to their environment and to the whole evolutionary process.

Indeed, in this respect there are echoes in the encyclical of the influence of two progressive Catholic thinkers of the 20th century, namely, the scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and the cultural historian Thomas Berry (1914–2009). Both of these thinkers saw the "grammar of nature" as reflecting an evolutionary unfolding of Earth's ecosystems.

Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest and paleontologist whose thinking about the place of humans in evolution led to his exile from Europe to China in the late 1920s. Of particular import is Teilhard's understanding of evolution that he saw being driven by life's "zest." Teilhard wrote: "A zest for living... would appear to be the fundamental driving force which impels and directs the universe along its main axis of complexity-consciousness..."³

Pope Francis has drawn on the same notion to describe a dynamic ecological relationship of humans with Earth's evolution. There are echoes also of cultural historian, Thomas Berry, who situated the human as arising from, and dependent on, this long evolutionary journey. Berry writes:

At such a moment, a new revolutionary experience is needed, an experience wherein human consciousness awakens to the grandeur and sacred quality of Earth's process. This awakening is our human participation in the dream of Earth...⁴

From this cosmological perspective Berry calls on humans to participate in the Great Work of transformation—building new ecological economics, new educational and political systems, and new religious and spiritual communities that are aligned with Earth's capacities and limits.

It is this evolutionary understanding of Earth's systems, so central to Teilhard and Berry, that provides a larger context for the Pope's own revolutionary thinking. Indeed, this is also the perspective of *Journey of the Universe*, which narrates the epic story of evolution in film and book form and shows the implications of this story for environmental living in the *Conversations*.^{5,6}

Without this integrated sense of mutually enhancing human–Earth relations in an evolving universe, climate discussions can become simply business as usual amidst policy proposals, market-based schemes, and technological fixes. This integrated perspective for humans of a change of consciousness and conscience promises to have a rippling effect on the contemporary climate debate. In this spirit, the encyclical calls on governments and individuals to engage in action for climate justice.

The hope is the Pope's intervention can provide a tipping point for the global community—not just among Christians but among other religious groups as well. There are more than a billion Muslims, a billion Hindus, a billion Confucians, and nearly 500 million Buddhists, many of whom are hearing this call to action. The encyclical will also be a source of encouragement to

environmentalists who are not overtly religious but who care deeply about the environment, often for aesthetic and spiritual reasons.

The Pope convened religious leaders, scientists, and economists from all over the world at the Vatican on April 28, 2015 to highlight the moral dimensions of our global environmental crisis. He urged these leaders to join him in speaking out on the human suffering climate change is causing, especially for the most vulnerable. In a similar spirit, he commissioned Cardinal Turkson to convene a gathering at the United Nations on June 30, 2015 to call for concerted ecological and social change. The Pope has also addressed politicians and business leaders at Davos, noting that the wealthier countries have responsibilities to the poor in terms of fair and healthy development. In September, he will address the UN General Assembly and the US Congress to highlight the urgent need for climate change action.

Thus the publication of the papal encyclical is a unique opportunity to scale up and move forward. That is because it provides a renewed moral force and shared ethical commitment regarding environmental issues, especially climate change.⁷ It also highlights that we have a special kinship with nature and are responsible for its continuity for future generations. Indeed, the flourishing of the Earth community may depend on how humans heed this moral call to what Francis calls "ecological conversion."

References

1. Tucker, M.E., J.A. Grim, L. Boff, and S. McDonough. *Ecology and Justice Series*. Orbis Books [online] (2015) <http://www.orbisbooks.com/category-202/>.
2. Gronski, B. Cardinal Turkson sheds light on Pope Francis' environmental encyclical. Catholic Rural Life [online] (2015) <https://catholicrurallife.org/cardinal-turkson-sheds-light-on-pope-franc...>.
3. Teilhard de Chardin, P. *Activation of Energy*, translated by René Hague (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc, New York, 1970).
4. Berry, T. Reinventing the human at the species level in Appendix to *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* Tucker, M.E. and J. Grim eds. (Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 2009). 123.
5. Swimme, B.T. and M.E. Tucker. *Journey of the Universe* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2011).
6. *Journey of the Universe* film (DVD). *Journey Conversations* [online] (2015) www.journeyoftheuniverse.org.
7. Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University. Yale University [online] (2015) www.fore.yale.edu.

<http://thesolutionsjournal.com/node/237383>

December 2015

Green Church Newsletter

http://egliseverte-greenchurch.ca/green/index.php?option=com_acymailing&ctrl=archive&task=view&mailid=69&key=2e792e5c3fb3619dcfdc8d83cbf5fa8e&subid=189-dbe0c9b642707e4c37fc810b1cf1134f

December 2015

Earth Keeper Newsletter

Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute

<http://us6.campaign-archive1.com/?u=887c3de8b0&id=37ed3186b4&e=d85b57a294>

December 2015

Spiritual Principles in Action: A Story for a Younger Generation

By Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
Working with Oneness

First published in *Dust Magazine*

In answer to a question from a 31-year-old person, “What advice do you have for people my age in dealing with a world that tells us we are nothing but material mechanisms, and has almost no concept of the soul?”

CHAPTER ONE

I grew up in an England still dreary in the post-war years. Rationing only ended the year I was born. In my childhood there was religion but no spirituality. I went to church every Sunday, sang hymns and recited prayers. But nowhere was there the suggestion of spiritual states of consciousness. Spiritual bookstores did not exist. Christian mystical writings were present but just as historical texts rather than experiences to be lived. It was a grey world aspiring to middle-class materialism—a TV, a washing machine, even a car! Then in the mid- to late-sixties, another color entered the spectrum of consciousness. The Beatles went to India to meditate with the Maharishi, and orange-robed Hare Krishna devotees could be seen dancing and chanting on Oxford Street in London. Spirituality in all of its flavors and colors began to arrive in the West.

This awakening spirituality was part of my adolescence. When I was sixteen I began to practice Zen meditation, and experienced an inner dimension of emptiness completely different to my schoolboy classrooms. When I was eighteen I met the spiritual teacher Krishnamurti. I remember

it was a beautiful English summer morning. I went to hear him talk and he took me into this space of complete and total freedom. He said there is no path, there is no way to get there, it just happens—but suddenly there was another reality present, completely different than anything I had known before.

I practiced hatha yoga (until I damaged my knee from sitting too long in the lotus position) and became macrobiotic, learning to bake my own unleavened bread. I studied sacred geometry and built geodesic domes. I attended one of the first Glastonbury Festivals, where the pyramid stage was supposed to transmit spiritual vibrations. We felt that we were part of a spiritual movement that was going to change the world. Something was alive in a new way, a new spark of consciousness.

When I was nineteen I met my spiritual teacher, a white-haired Russian lady who had just come back from India where she had been trained by a Sufi master. Meditating in her small North London room beside the train tracks, I felt the presence of invisible spiritual masters—it was magical and mysterious. This world into which I had entered could hardly be compared to the bleak world of my childhood, in which only the physical existed and only material prosperity mattered. And many friends at the time followed similar and different paths—exploring Buddhist meditation in the monasteries of South East Asia, reading Tibetan texts, chanting Hindu mantras or whirling with Sufi dervishes.

Looking back over almost half a century, I can see how our journey, the story of my generation, was to help bring these practices and teachings to the West, to help something come alive in our materialistic Western consciousness. Meditation groups formed, ashrams were built, and many of us practiced meditation, accessing different states of consciousness. We were naïve and optimistic, expecting this infusion of spiritual consciousness to change the world. Sadly, or more realistically, while it changed our world, the world around us only became more enamored of materialism, technology, and the toys of triviality. And as the seventies moved into the eighties and then the nineties, many of the gurus became corrupted, mainly by sex or money, and many sincere seekers disillusioned. The innocence of those early years faded into the harsher light of daily life. But something remained. There was a shift in consciousness—this new color in the spectrum remained—along with the different spiritual practices and texts that had come from the East. And those of us who remained true to our practices, who lived our meditation and spiritual values, held this shift in consciousness, integrated it into our daily life. We listened to our dreams and our heart, we were open to inner experiences beyond the physical. We lived the story of our soul.

Then, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, something within me shifted and I was shown how the inner reality of the mystic had a vital part to play in the outer world. Traditionally the mystic turns away from the outer towards the inner, seeking the truth that in Sufism can only be found within the heart. Through meditation and prayer, going deep within we find something

beyond the illusions of the outer world—we dip into love’s infinite ocean. We experience the reality of the Self and the oneness that belongs to all that exists—what the Sufis call “unity of being.” But I began to realize that this “consciousness of oneness” was needed in our outer world, that our world was suffering from a misguided consciousness of separation, which is the consciousness of the rational self and ego: we are separate from the Earth and separate from each other.

To this effect I wrote a book, *Working with Oneness*, the first in a series of books about applying spiritual principles and practices to the present reality in the outer world. This gradually changed into my Spiritual Ecology work of recent years, giving a spiritual perspective to our present ecological crisis. When I began this work over a decade ago, “oneness” was still a fringe “spiritual” idea. But I am very happy that in the last few years, oneness, interconnectivity, or what the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh calls “interbeing,” have become much more part of the mainstream, and central to understanding the ecological crisis—that we need to respond from an awareness of the Earth as a living organic whole.

Until very recently spirituality and ecology were rarely associated. Environmentalists thought spiritual practitioners were “new age” and not activist enough, while apart from a few “engaged Buddhists” and others, spiritual practices and teachings were focused on self-development and the individual inner journey. But then earlier this year, Pope Francis’s encyclical *On Care for our Common Home*, unequivocally bridged this divide. In it, he stresses how our ecological crisis is both a spiritual and moral problem.

It brought tears to my eyes when I read how we should hear “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” This touched me deeply, as in 2013 I had edited a collection of spiritual teachers responding to our ecological crisis which was titled *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*. Suddenly, what had been a radical idea was proclaimed from one of the world’s most public pulpits. Spirituality and ecology need to be united, and we have to take full responsibility; we need to work together to return to a balanced and sustainable way of life for all of creation—to care for both the soil and the soul.

CHAPTER TWO

As I have mentioned, condensed into these paragraphs is almost half a century’s journey of living and also holding a quality of consciousness radically different to that of the environment I was born into. In its broadest terms this consciousness is *the awareness of a spiritual reality very different to the material focus of our present civilization*. The work of the spiritual seeker or wayfarer is to journey into and then through this spiritual inner reality, and experience the deeper truths of our human and divine nature. In Sufism this journey is sometimes described as different valleys of the quest, or different chambers of the heart, leading finally to divine oneness and

merging in God—union of lover and Beloved. But there is another dimension of this journey, how to apply the inner experiences of the journey to outer life. In particular how can our awareness and understanding of this foundational, inner spiritual reality help a world that is becoming a soulless and environmental wasteland?

Sadly the materialistic values of the fifties have now morphed into a global monster, exploiting and ravaging the Earth in a way that can only result in mutual self-destruction. And while there are those continuing this nightmare of “business of usual”—the global corporations and politicians who pursue only economic growth or greed—there are others who have real “care for our common home,” who hear the cry of the Earth and the pressing need to live from a place of unity. Maybe we have already passed the “tipping point” of unforeseen ecological consequences: temperatures rising, rivers and oceans polluted, and air made toxic. But spiritual consciousness still has a vital role to play as our world spins out of balance.

Yet I believe it is no longer enough just to hold this awareness—we have to bring it into action. Many people who read my book *Spiritual Ecology* responded, “What should I do?” The next chapter in this story of spirituality must be to bring these values, this quality of consciousness, into action to help heal and restore our dying world. I firmly believe that this is the calling for the next generation, for those who have the energy and passion to act from a place of service and love for the Earth. And especially important, from a place of unity.

Unfortunately, only too often activists constellate dynamics of duality, of us against them. And yet the original instructions given to the First Peoples stressed that we “have to get along together.” We are all part of the same living wholeness, and only from a place of inclusion can we transform what has been desecrated by a sense of separation. There are of course many different ways to work towards ecological wholeness, from forming a community of urban gardeners, to developing new economic models based upon generosity and sharing rather than acquisition, such as “pay it forward.” And I firmly believe that, while some global initiatives are vital, like reducing carbon emissions, most initiatives should be small groups of people coming together in different ways. Governments and politicians are too bound to the idea of continued “economic growth” to commit to real change. Instead the world needs to be regenerated in an organic, cellular way, the way life recreates itself.

This is the challenge facing those of the millennial generation who sense that life is something more than the accumulation of “stuff,” who have heard the cry of the Earth, which is also the cry of their own soul. How can we help the world in this time of transition? How can we participate creatively in our lives and communities? There is much work to be done, a work founded upon the principles of oneness and unity, a work that recognizes that all of life is sacred and whole. Life is calling to us and it desperately needs our attention; around us are what Thich Nhat Hanh calls “bells of mindfulness,” which we need to hear and then respond to—hear with our hearts and respond with our hands.

There are many ways to participate, just as Rumi says “there are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” It is for each person to find the community and initiative that speaks most to their nature, their unique offering. And central to this work is that we are here to help each other and to help the Earth—we are here to be of service. These are the spiritual principles that are the foundation of real work that endures, what the engaged Buddhist Joanna Macy calls *The Work that Reconnects*. I also believe that it is important for anyone committing to this work to develop their own spiritual practice—especially helpful is a meditation practice that is done every day. It can be a mindfulness meditation, watching the breath, the Christian practice of centering prayer, or a Sufi heart meditation. It could also be walking in a sacred manner, being aware of our connection to a sacred Earth with every step we take. What matters is that our practice connects us to what is deepest and more enduring within us, a Source beyond the illusions of the ego and the many distractions of the outer world. This practice can support and protect us, and inwardly guide us in our work.

And if I have learned anything from my own journey, I’ve learned what matters most is love. Love is the most powerful force in creation, and it is our love for the Earth that will heal what we have desecrated, that will guide us through this wasteland and help us to bring light back into our darkening world. Love links us all together in the most mysterious ways, and love can guide our hearts and hands. And the central note of love is oneness. Love speaks the language of oneness, of unity rather than separation.

Small things with great love, learning to live and act with love and care, with the true attention of our minds and hearts—these are the signs of the sacred and the truest way to regenerate life, to help life to recreate itself. Yes, we have to relearn many of the sacred principles of life, the patterns of creation, to remember what our ancestors and all indigenous people know (what I have called the principles of Spiritual Ecology). But it is for this younger generation to bring these principles into form, into action, and then the future that is waiting can be born. It will not be easy. The forces of greed and exploitation are more entrenched than we realize, the environmental collapse accelerating. But this is the challenge for those whose hearts are young and energized, who care for the planet and for the souls of future generations. This is the next chapter of the story of our time that is waiting to be lived.

<http://www.workingwithoneness.org/articles/spiritual-principles-action-story-younger-generation>

December 1, 2015

A Unique Moment in History

By Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
Huffington Post

As the world's expectations rise, our prayer is that political leadership will also rise to the occasion. From November 30 to December 11, 2015, the COP 21 meeting in Paris is a unique historical moment, a critical opportunity to make the right choice. Political leaders may and should broker an agreement; but our planet is not negotiable.

In recent decades, the world has witnessed alarming ecological degradation, increasing failure to implement environmental policies, as well as an ever-widening and scandalous gap between the rich (predominantly of the north and west) and the poor (predominantly in the south and east). As we have repeatedly emphasized, these vital challenges are not primarily political or economic. They are profoundly spiritual and ethical.

Our deep-felt conviction is that all of us -- as citizens of this delicate planet that we cherish and share -- are involved in this crisis. No single region or nation can be blamed for its cause, just as no single institution or discipline can resolve the crisis. We are all in the same boat. We are all called to care. We are all obliged to respond.

By some mysterious connection that we do not always understand (and indeed sometimes choose to ignore), the earth reminds us of our vocation and obligation to protect our planet and its natural resources, to preserve and sustain it for our neighbors and for future generations. We will surely be judged by the urgency with which we respond to the ecological crisis of our age. The earth still has the resilience to heal, but only if we allow it to survive.

Unlike former generations, today we have no excuse. We have all the data and resources at hand. Yet, the crisis that we face has less to do with the environment and more to do with the way we perceive and treat the world. We are treating this earth in an inhumane and godless manner precisely because we see it in this way. Unless we radically change the way we perceive the world, unless we voluntarily transform our pattern of consumption, then we will simply be dealing with symptoms, rather than with their causes.

The responsibility of political leaders in Paris over the next few days is crucial and urgent, especially in the aftermath of recent dark events in the city of lights. Their responsibility is compelling and desperate, particularly in view of the alarming flight and global plight of refugees. But it is imperative and authoritative when we consider the rise in temperatures and sea levels, the extinction of forests and species, or the extreme changes in weather and excessive impact of mining. In Paris, let the political agreement be ambitious and the legislative action tenacious.

An unprecedented gathering of world civil and religious leaders planned to be in attendance for the United Nations Climate Change Convention. We have witnessed an exceptional groundswell on the grass-roots level. Even where politicians are uncertainty and apathy, citizens of the world are resolved and undaunted.

Capacity crowds were to attend and march, pray and fast, in a revolutionary crusade to save the planet. Sadly, the multitude will be more moderate. But the momentum remains undiminished, the optimism undimmed. The entire world is still watching. The entire world is still waiting. The entire world is still wishing.

If political leaders have hitherto been cautious -- uncertain at best and unresponsive at worst -- then it is time to represent their people and nations. If political policy has hitherto been slow -- nominal at best and unsupportive at worst -- then it is time to speak out and take measures. If political action has hitherto been slow -- at best inadequate and inconsistent, at worst fruitless and futile -- then this is surely the time to ensure that it is not too little and too late.

Political leaders must choose and act with responsibility, with clarity, and with commitment. They must look for answers outside of their comfort zone, beyond familiar patterns or politics-as-usual. They must choose to care for the vulnerable and fragile, no longer to ignore the marginalized and suffering.

And religious leaders must persist in recalling and revealing the mystery of creation. There is a divine spark in the whole world and we must remind people that the value of our planet is much greater than any individual, corporate or national interest. It is the moral obligation of us all to rediscover and reaffirm this compassionate vision of God's gift of creation.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew/a-unique-moment-in-history_b_8688462.html

December 1, 2015

What does your faith say about how we treat the environment?

By Kelsey Dallas
Deseret News National

More than 150 world leaders gathered in Paris on Monday for the start of an international conference on climate change. Policymakers are expected to reach an agreement within the next few weeks on how to address environmental degradation by reducing greenhouse gas emission and supporting sustainable energy initiatives.

Although political concerns and scientific research drive debates on the environment, faith leaders are increasingly speaking out on the issues discussed this week in Paris.

Pope Francis released an encyclical on the environment in June, presenting climate change as a moral crisis and asking Catholics to take better care of creation. Evangelical Christian pastors have led their congregations in gardening and energy-efficiency projects through partnerships with organizations like the Evangelical Environmental Network.

Linking religious beliefs with environmental activism has long been the mission of scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker, a senior lecturer at Yale University who has been studying the relationship between religion and ecology for more than 20 years. A leading voice on the way spirituality can inform faith-based environmental activism, she co-directs the [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#) with her husband, John Grim.

Tucker first became interested in faith-based environmental activism when she was living in Japan in the 1970s and studying religious traditions like Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism. These Asian religions often provide practitioners with both a spiritual path and a social philosophy, and Tucker's research helped her recognize the power of religion to encourage people to live in harmony with nature.

When she returned to the U.S., Tucker began working with Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and environmental activist. "He was one of the very first people to see the environmental crisis as a spiritual crisis," she said.

Guided by Berry's mentorship, Tucker and her husband pioneered the academic study of religion and ecology, presenting lectures, editing collections of articles on the subject and producing the Emmy award-winning documentary, "[Journey of the Universe](#)," on humanity's place in the cosmos.

In October, when she was in Salt Lake City to attend the Parliament of the World's Religions, Tucker shared her thoughts with Deseret News National on the relationship between religion and the environment and how faith leaders can encourage church members to be involved in efforts to end climate change. This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Deseret News: Your work at the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology began 20 years ago. How has faith-based environmental engagement changed since then?

Mary Evelyn Tucker: When we began hosting conferences on this topic in the mid-nineties, there was no field of religion and ecology. We had to call up every person and ask them to contribute their knowledge.

In 20 years time, this effort has really grown. It's now a field in academia and a force in larger society.

We have classes on religion and ecology at Yale and other universities, as well as at high schools. And as [the Climate March](#) in New York City last year illustrated, faith leaders are emerging as powerful voices on this topic.

DN: Speaking of religious leaders, Pope Francis released an encyclical on the environment this summer. What effect could his leadership have on faith-based engagement with environmental issues?

MET: Pope Francis is an amazing leader, as we can all see. He's got authenticity, sincerity and a genuine concern for the poor and outcast. He's a great messenger.

What he's doing that's so helpful is weaving together our concerns for the degradation of ecosystems, species and water, pollution issues and climate change. He's saying these shifts affect people in immense ways.

The poor are the ones most affected. Ecology and justice — topics we've been working on for a long time — are highlighted in this encyclical. He calls this work "integral ecology," a term that was also used by my mentor, Thomas Berry.

DN: This fall's Parliament of the World's Religions in Salt Lake City cited caring for creation as one of its core themes. Why was it important to you to participate in the event?

MET: My husband and I have come to all the parliaments, besides, of course, the first one in 1893 in Chicago.

At each one, we were trying to focus the religions of the world on their great texts and teachings on the environment. It's taken quite a while.

In Melbourne in 2009, there were maybe 20 panels on religion and ecology. That number has doubled and tripled since then. I'm thrilled with the growth in interest and engagement around environmental justice.

DN: It's hard to point to a verse in the Bible and determine what Christianity teaches about climate change. How are religion and ecology linked?

MET: At the Forum on Religion and Ecology, we're trying to overcome that gap of knowledge. We suggest that religions need to retrieve, re-evaluate and reconstruct traditions in order to address modern issues.

We need theologians and academics to help do that, answering questions like how the verse in Genesis about dominion over the environment should be interpreted or what it means to care for creation.

Religions have obvious teachings (on the environment) that we need to bring forward, as well as liturgical systems that weave humans into the great cycles of the cosmos and nature. For example, Christmas is celebrated at the winter solstice.

DN: Are you optimistic about faith-based conversations on the environment continuing to grow?

MET: Yes, definitely. I think that once religious traditions really understand the moral force that is there for change (in terms of how we approach the environment), there could be a rippling effect across the whole country.

The environment is not just an issue for science or policy or economics or law or technology. All of these approaches are necessary, but not sufficient.

With the moral force, and I think sincere activism of faith leaders and laity around the world, there's a tidal wave of change that's beginning and growing across the planet.

We're at a moment of great transition, and it's a very exciting moment for all of us.

<http://national.deseretnews.com/article/6875/what-does-your-faith-say-about-how-we-treat-the-environment63.html>

December 2, 2015

Paris: A Spiritual Response to Climate Change

By Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
Huffington Post

In a city whose soul is bleeding from the acts of terrorists, world leaders are meeting to discuss the fate of an Earth whose soul is also bleeding--bleeding from exploitation, from our civilization's relentless pursuit of materialism. These leaders will discuss carbon emissions and the global rise of temperature, but I doubt they will dare to discuss the deeper malaise of a civilization whose only goal seems to be economic progress.

Sadly, even the concept of "sustainability" has been co-opted by our culture. Sustainability no longer refers to upholding the viability of our ecosystem--its biodiversity and beauty, its wilderness and wonder--but to upholding the very materialistic culture that is destroying it. This attitude reveals that, above all, we want to sustain our energy-intensive, resource-depleting lifestyle, the very demands of which are damaging our planet. For many at the Paris gathering, "environmentalism is no longer about how to save the environment. It has instead become about how we in the developed world can save our lifestyle."

As we follow our consumerist dreams and our version of sustainability, the Earth suffers, and some of us, hearing the cry of the Earth, are responding to this deep wound. Those gathered in Paris know that we need to act "before it is too late." But, unless we ask the deeper questions, unless we consider the soul as well as the soil, how can we begin to bring the Earth back into balance? We can no longer afford to treat the Earth as something separate, just a physical environment--we are all part of the same living wholeness.

While there are those continuing the present nightmare of business as usual, there are others who have real "care for our common home," who hear the cry of the Earth and the pressing need to live from a place of unity. Maybe we have already passed the "tipping point" of unforeseen ecological consequences: temperatures rising, rivers and oceans polluted, and air made toxic. But as Pope Francis's encyclical spoke so powerfully, religious and spiritual consciousness has a vital role to play.

Two years ago I published a collection of essays, *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, to help pioneer this emerging awareness of the need for a spiritual response to our ecological crisis--that it is a spiritual as well as a physical crisis. Many who read this book responded, "What should I do?" More specifically, the central question we should be asking is, how can we bring spiritual values, a sense of the sacred, into action to help heal and restore our dying world? I firmly believe that this is the calling for those who have the energy and passion to act from a place of

service and love for the Earth, and especially important, are able to respond from a place of unity.

We are all part of the same living wholeness, and only from a place of unity can we transform what has been desecrated by centuries of thinking that we are separate from the Earth. The original instructions given to the First Peoples stressed that we "have to get along together." There are of course many different ways to work towards ecological wholeness, from forming a community of urban gardeners, to developing new economic models based upon generosity and sharing rather than acquisition, such as "pay it forward." And, while some global initiatives are vital, like reducing carbon emissions, I firmly believe that most initiatives should be created by small groups of people coming together in different ways--as is already happening. Governments and politicians are too bound to the idea of continued "economic growth" to commit to real change. Rather, the world needs to be regenerated in an organic, cellular way, the way life recreates itself--with different groups emerging as part of our new, living structure.

This is the challenge facing those of us who sense that life is something more than the accumulation of "stuff," who have heard the cry of the Earth and recognize that it is also the cry of our own soul. How can we help the world in this time of transition? How can we work together to break free from our pathological addiction to consumerism? How can we participate creatively in our lives and communities? The Earth is part of our own self and we are a part of its suffering wholeness. There is much work to be done, a work founded upon the principles of oneness and unity, a work that recognizes that all of life is sacred and whole. Life is calling to us and it desperately needs our attention; around us are what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "bells of mindfulness," which we need to hear and then respond to--hear with our hearts and respond with our hands.

And if I have learned anything from my own spiritual journey, it is that what matters most is love. Love is the most powerful force in creation, and it is our love for the Earth that will heal what we have desecrated, that will guide us through this wasteland and help us to bring light back into our darkening world. Love links us all together in the most mysterious ways, and love can guide our hearts and hands. And the central note of love is oneness. Love speaks the language of oneness, of unity rather than separation.

As the darkness of terrorism attacked Paris, the most moving response of some of those directly affected was their focus on love--that only love can conquer hate, that love is what really matters, that the final message in our life should be love. Now, this week in the same city, we should aspire to bring this message of love into the darkness of our global exploitation. We are one with the Earth and it needs actions based upon love and unity.

Small things with great love, learning to live and act with love and care, with the true attention of our minds and hearts--these are the signs of the sacred and the truest way to regenerate life, to help life to recreate itself. Yes, we have to relearn many of the sacred principles of life, the patterns of creation, to remember what our ancestors and all indigenous people know (what I have called the principles of Spiritual Ecology). What we need is to work to bring these principles into form, into action, into the myriad ways we can help the Earth to regenerate--ways that foster real sustainability. Then the future that is waiting can be born. It will not be easy. The

forces of greed and exploitation are more entrenched than we realize, the environmental collapse accelerating. But this is the challenge for those whose hearts are strong, who care for the planet and for the souls of future generations.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/llewellyn-vaughanlee/paris-a-spiritual-respons_b_8697058.html

December 6, 2015

Scientists enlist the big gun to get climate action: Faith

By Seth Borenstein, Associated Press
The Daily Mail

PARIS (AP) — The cold hard numbers of science haven't spurred the world to curb runaway global warming. So as climate negotiators struggle in Paris, some scientists who appealed to the rational brain are enlisting what many would consider a higher power: the majesty of faith.

It's not God versus science, but followers of God and science together trying to save humanity and the planet, they say.

Physicist John Schellnhuber, founder of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, said he has been coming to these international talks for 11 years and essentially seen negotiators throw up their hands and say "sorry guys we tried our best." And no one protested. But this time, with the power of Pope Francis' encyclical earlier this year calling global warming a moral issue and an even more energized interfaith community, Schellnhuber feels the world's faithful are watching and will hold world leaders accountable.

"They know they will be measured against the encyclical," Schellnhuber, a member of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said Saturday at a Catholic Church event. Ever the scientist, Schellnhuber said on Saturday he hadn't seen any evidence yet during the first week of negotiations that this will happen, but he has faith it will.

In the first five days of climate negotiations, interfaith activists came, fasted, talked to media, buttonholed leaders and prayed. On Saturday night in a downtown Paris chapel, hundreds of people, many of them prostrated on the ground, sang and prayed for the climate negotiators and mostly for the world.

Faith "is much deeper" than science, said Caroline Bader of the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation.

And so are their numbers. Bader said interfaith leaders recently handed top United Nations negotiators a petition with 1.8 million signatures begging for meaningful climate action. Such action was also sought by Brother Alois Taize, a Catholic member of the ecumenical monastery,

as he was preaching at the song-laden service about how the faithful and the world have to open their eyes to solutions to global warming.

"The environment movement, which has primarily been a secular one, has realized that over the last 30 years or so it's not been that successful in achieving its goals," Joe Ware of Christian Aid wrote in an email from the Paris talks. "Increasingly it has looked to faith groups for help in mobilizing a broader movement of people calling for action on climate change. They are actually natural allies as almost all faiths have a theology of creation care at their heart."

Scripps Institution of Oceanography scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a non-Catholic who advised Pope Francis on climate and is on the pontiff's science academy, says he thinks this new alliance will play a major role in what he hopes will be a historic agreement.

But for Ramanathan, now a member of the Holy See's delegation to the climate talks, it's more than science or history. About four years ago he had a moment that he called "a revelation."

He was presenting a paper on glacier melt to the scientists at the pontifical academy. It was academic and laid out the conclusions in cold hard facts. But then the chancellor to the academy, a bishop, added one sentence to the end: "If we want justice and peace, we must protect the habitat that sustains us."

It was quickly agreed to and Ramanathan started to look at climate science not as an academic issue but an issue of justice, because those who are hurt the most by climate change are the world's poorest 3 billion. He started volunteering, working with the poor and examining his own consumption habits, like how much he drives.

Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, said Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* is less about ecology than morality and fairness.

"Climate change is a global problem with serious social, environmental, economic, distributional and political dimensions, and poses one of the greatest challenges for humanity," the bishop said Saturday. "The poor populations are the most severely affected even though they are the least responsible."

Pope Francis, called a rock star by young religious climate activists, was not in Paris. But as he spoke to faithful in St. Peter's Square Sunday he appealed to those deciding on climate change measures to show courage by also fighting poverty, saying "the two choices go together."

He asked for prayers so that those making decisions on climate measures receive "the courage to always use as their criterion of choice the greater good of the human family."

Marcia McNutt, a former U.S. Geological Survey director and *Science* magazine editor who is about to become the head of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, can't say enough about the importance of the pope's message.

"You can argue the science until cows come home, but that just appeals to people's intellect," McNutt said. "The pope's argument appeals to someone's heart. Whenever you appeal to someone's heart that's a much more powerful message."

In some ways, the enlisting of the faith movement is a sign of scientists' desperation, but it's also a realization of the need for a moral revolution on climate, said Ramanathan, who actually briefed the pope on climate in a parking lot.

The world will not act enough on climate change, Ramanathan said, "until we teach this in every church, every mosque, every synagogue, every temple."

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-3348252/Scientists-enlist-big-gun-climate-action-Faith.html>

December 7, 2015

Eco-Congregation Scotland Newsletter

<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=a37b4ff760ffcc7fd1c3611b4&id=e1b53c2dcd&e=709fe41ec4>

December 8, 2015

Talking Point

Issue I

Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences (IFEES)/EcoIslam

<http://us11.campaign-archive2.com/?u=9e7db8d664e580892adb797bf&id=2869b2629c&e=ec660b7322>

December 12, 2015

Nations Approve Landmark Climate Accord in Paris

By Coral Davenport

New York Times

LE BOURGET, France — With the sudden bang of a gavel Saturday night, representatives of 195 nations reached a landmark accord that will, for the first time, commit nearly every country to lowering planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions to help stave off the most drastic effects of climate change.

The deal, which was met with an eruption of cheers and ovations from thousands of delegates gathered from around the world, represents a historic breakthrough on an issue that has foiled decades of international efforts to address climate change.

Traditionally, such pacts have required developed economies like the United States to take action to lower greenhouse gas emissions, but they have exempted developing countries like China and India from such obligations.

The accord, which United Nations diplomats have been working toward for nine years, changes that dynamic by requiring action in some form from every country, rich or poor.

“This is truly a historic moment,” the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, said in an interview. “For the first time, we have a truly universal agreement on climate change, one of the most crucial problems on earth.”

President Obama, who regards tackling climate change as a central element of his legacy, spoke of the deal in a televised address from the White House. “This agreement sends a powerful signal that the world is fully committed to a low-carbon future,” he said. “We’ve shown that the world has both the will and the ability to take on this challenge.”

Scientists and leaders said the talks here represented the world’s last, best hope of striking a deal that would begin to avert the most devastating effects of a warming planet.

Mr. Ban said there was “no Plan B” if the deal fell apart. The Eiffel Tower was illuminated with that phrase Friday night.

The new deal will not, on its own, solve global warming. At best, scientists who have analyzed it say, it will cut global greenhouse gas emissions by about half enough as is necessary to stave off an increase in atmospheric temperatures of 2 degrees Celsius or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit. That is the point at which, scientific studies have concluded, the world will be locked into a future of devastating consequences, including rising sea levels, severe droughts and flooding, widespread food and water shortages and more destructive storms.

But the Paris deal could represent the moment at which, because of a shift in global economic policy, the inexorable rise in planet-warming carbon emissions that started during the Industrial Revolution began to level out and eventually decline.

At the same time, the deal could be viewed as a signal to global financial and energy markets, triggering a fundamental shift away from investment in coal, oil and gas as primary energy sources toward zero-carbon energy sources like wind, solar and nuclear power.

“The world finally has a framework for cooperating on climate change that’s suited to the task,” said Michael Levi, an expert on energy and climate change policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. “Whether or not this becomes a true turning point for the world, though, depends critically on how seriously countries follow through.”

Just five years ago, such a deal seemed politically impossible. A similar 2009 climate change summit meeting in Copenhagen collapsed in acrimonious failure after countries could not unite around a deal.

Unlike in Copenhagen, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius of France said on Saturday, the stars for this assembly were aligned.

The changes that led to the Paris accord came about through a mix of factors, particularly major shifts in the domestic politics and bilateral relationships of China and the United States, the world's two largest greenhouse gas polluters.

Since the Copenhagen deal collapsed, scientific studies have confirmed that the earliest impacts of climate change have started to sweep across the planet. While scientists once warned that climate change was a problem for future generations, recent scientific reports have concluded that it has started to wreak havoc now, from flooding in Miami to droughts and water shortages in China.

In a remarkable shift from their previous standoffs over the issue, senior officials from both the United States and China praised the Paris accord on Saturday night.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who has spent the past year negotiating behind the scenes with his Chinese and Indian counterparts in order to help broker the deal, said, "The world has come together around an agreement that will empower us to chart a new path for our planet."

Xie Zhenhua, the senior Chinese climate change negotiator, said, "The agreement is not perfect, and there are some areas in need of improvement." But he added, "This does not prevent us from marching forward with this historic step." Mr. Xie called the deal "fair and just, comprehensive and balanced, highly ambitious, enduring and effective."

Negotiators from many countries have said that a crucial moment in the path to the Paris accord came last year in the United States, when Mr. Obama enacted the nation's first climate change policy — a set of stringent new Environmental Protection Agency regulations designed to slash greenhouse gas pollution from the nation's coal-fired power plants. Meanwhile, in China, the growing internal criticism over air pollution from coal-fired power plants led President Xi Jinping to pursue domestic policies to cut coal use.

In November 2014 in Beijing, Mr. Obama and Mr. Xi announced that they would jointly pursue plans to cut domestic greenhouse gas emissions. That breakthrough announcement was seen as paving the way to the Paris deal, in which nearly all the world's nations have jointly announced similar plans.

The final language did not fully satisfy everyone. Representatives of some developing nations expressed consternation. Poorer countries had pushed for a legally binding provision requiring that rich countries appropriate a minimum of at least \$100 billion a year to help them mitigate and adapt to the ravages of climate change. In the final deal, that \$100 billion figure appears only in a preamble, not in the legally binding portion of the agreement.

“We’ve always said that it was important that the \$100 billion was anchored in the agreement,” said Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu, a negotiator for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the incoming leader of a coalition known as the Least Developed Countries coalition. In the end, though, they let it go.

Despite the historic nature of the Paris climate accord, its success still depends heavily on two factors outside the parameter of the deal: global peer pressure and the actions of future governments.

The core of the Paris deal is a requirement that every nation take part. Ahead of the Paris talks, governments of 186 nations put forth public plans detailing how they would cut carbon emissions through 2025 or 2030.

Those plans alone, once enacted, will cut emissions by half the levels required to stave off the worst effects of global warming. The national plans vary vastly in scope and ambition — while every country is required to put forward a plan, there is no legal requirement dictating how, or how much, countries should cut emissions.

Thus, the Paris pact has built in a series of legally binding requirements that countries ratchet up the stringency of their climate change policies in the future. Countries will be required to reconvene every five years, starting in 2020, with updated plans that would tighten their emissions cuts.

Countries will also be legally required to reconvene every five years starting in 2023 to publicly report on how they are doing in cutting emissions compared to their plans. They will be legally required to monitor and report on their emissions levels and reductions, using a universal accounting system.

That hybrid legal structure was explicitly designed in response to the political reality in the United States. A deal that would have assigned legal requirements for countries to cut emissions at specific levels would need to go before the United States Senate for ratification. That language would have been dead on arrival in the Republican-controlled Senate, where many members question the established science of human-caused climate change, and still more wish to thwart Mr. Obama’s climate change agenda.

So the individual countries’ plans are voluntary, but the legal requirements that they publicly monitor, verify and report what they are doing, as well as publicly put forth updated plans, are designed to create a “name-and-shame” system of global peer pressure, in hopes that countries will not want to be seen as international laggards.

That system depends heavily on the views of the future world leaders who will carry out those policies. In the United States, every Republican candidate running for president in 2016 has publicly questioned or denied the science of climate change, and has voiced opposition to Mr. Obama’s climate change policies.

In the Senate, Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader, who has led the charge against Mr. Obama’s climate change agenda, said, “Before his international partners pop the champagne,

they should remember that this is an unattainable deal based on a domestic energy plan that is likely illegal, that half the states have sued to halt, and that Congress has already voted to reject.”

There were few of those concerns at the makeshift negotiations center here in this suburb north of Paris. The delegates rose to their feet in applause to thank the French delegation, which drew on the finest elements of the country’s longstanding traditions of diplomacy to broker a deal that was acceptable to all sides.

France’s European partners recalled the coordinated Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, which killed 130 people and threatened to cast a shadow over the negotiations. But, bound by a collective good will toward France, countries redoubled their efforts.

“This demonstrates the strength of the French nation and makes us Europeans all proud of the French nation,” said Miguel Arias Cañete, the European Union’s commissioner for energy and climate action.

Yet amid the spirit of success that dominated the final hours of the negotiations, Mr. Arias Cañete reminded delegates that the accord was the beginning of the real work. “Today, we celebrate,” he said. “Tomorrow, we have to act. This is what the world expects of us.”

Correction: December 12, 2015

An earlier version of this article misstated the agency for which Michael Levi works. It is the Council on Foreign Relations, not the Center on Foreign Relations.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/13/world/europe/climate-change-accord-paris.html>

December 15, 2015

Climate, Mind and Behavior Newsletter

Garrison Institute

<https://ginst.informz.net/informzdataservice/onlineversion/pub/bWFpbGluZ2luc3RhbmNlaWQ9NTIyOTA4Nw==>

December 16, 2015

On care for our common home

By Phyllis Zagano
National Catholic Reporter

When you were decking your halls recently, they probably were not in your 30,000 square-foot hillside mansion in Los Angeles. That's not a typo. Things have gotten so out-of-hand in

California that [The New York Times ran a front-page story](#) about the seventy-foot high \$100-million extravaganza the neighbors call "the Starship Enterprise."

Maybe the Archdiocese of Los Angeles should tack a copy of Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment "[Laudato Si', on Care for Our Common Home](#)" to the front door of the building?

The construction is ruining the environment. No kidding. There are tales of dirty water run-off, trucked-out dirt, even the threat of landslide.

Things are getting quite serious. Maybe not in your backyard today, but tomorrow. ...

It is time for everyone to take a deep look at what is going on. Let's connect the dots between climate change, excessive building, and money.

Yes, I know about [the Paris climate change agreement](#). Yes, I know [196 world leaders agreed to do something](#) for the planet. But Paris was essentially about poverty. The excesses of the rich are what cause greenhouse gasses, and it is the poor who suffer. The rich are not generally focused on their carbon footprints or whether they've properly separated the paper and plastic for recycling.

I am talking about the superrich, the folks overbuilding in California and elsewhere around the world. I am talking about the secret rich, who have enough money to keep from being famous. I am talking about the very rich, who settle back in wood-paneled cabins of their private aircraft with double beds and showers and butlers as they jet from one hideaway to another. You can read the details in *The Times*. You can see the results in L.A.

Of course it's not only in Los Angeles. In larger or smaller measure, the same blight spreads in cities and towns around the globe where zoning and building inspections are minimal or non-existent, or where other shall we say "interests" are considered when granting variances. No matter who you are, someone else has more money, more power, and more connections. No matter where you are, you have the opportunity to suffer the poverty of careless oversight combined with too much money, power, and connections. The overall result: a ruined neighborhood or cityscape, a polluted stream or wasted woodland. Whether really or metaphorically, each of us lives with the truly poor at the bottom of every overbuilt hill awaiting the certain landslide of rubbish and dirty water.

In these respects, with *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis is the voice of one crying out in the wilderness. Except of course, there's not that much wilderness left. Francis' words are strong, but realistic: pollution causes premature deaths and the earth is starting to look like "an immense pile of filth."

The bottom line, in Francis' words: "we have no such right."

No, we do not. But, we suffer equally the "globalization of indifference." Whether at the town council meeting or down at the zoning board, high-priced lawyers argue that this or another structure or road or clearing is "in keeping with the surrounding area." Other high-priced lawyers create the shell companies that own the land and structures, so even if a government agency

orders a correction or a tear-down, the village, town, or city must expend huge resources just finding out who owns the place.

So it is with the Los Angeles "residence" that seems big enough to house a plane load full of refugees. Who owns it? Who can do anything about it? And, beyond the people at the bottom of the hill, who cares?

[Phyllis Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y. She will speak February 9, 2016 at St. Michael's College, Vermont and May 6, 2016 at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto. Her books include [*On Prayer: A Letter to My Godchild*](#) and [*In the Image of Christ: Essays on Being Catholic and Female.*](#)]

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/just-catholic/care-our-common-home>

December 16, 2015

WCC leader says faith groups must follow up on climate deal

Vatican Radio

World leaders have hailed the climate change agreement they struck in Paris at the weekend as historic, while some environmentalists have warned the deal does not go far enough to curb the effects of global warming on our planet. Financial analysts meanwhile have described the summit's outcome as the most important climate agreement since the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, saying it will boost the world's low carbon-emissions economy.

Leaders of the Christian Churches and other faith communities also played a vital role in Paris, representing the voice of the poorest communities who are worst effected by climate change.

Pope Francis on Sunday urged the international community to urgently follow up on the path set by the agreement, paying special attention "for the most vulnerable populations".

Among the Christian leaders addressing the talks in Paris was the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. He was in Rome this week for talks with Cardinal Peter Turkson of the Pontifical Justice and Peace Council and members of the St Egidio community. Rev Fykse Tveit spoke to Philippa Hitchen about his hopes and his expectations following the historic agreement...

Rev Fykse Tveit says he told the politicians in Paris that all people – but especially the most vulnerable – have a right to hope that the world leaders would show responsibility towards all of humanity and not just the interests of their own countries.

He says the agreement is an important symbol of this and that politicians, business leaders, researchers, the civil sector and the religious communities now need to "speak the same language" to press for monitoring and implementation.

Faith leaders, he says, need to be “both strong in the conviction that (implementation) is possible” and hold the world leaders accountable to the commitments they have made. In Paris, he says, there was an interaction between civil society, the most vulnerable communities and politicians, “working together in ways we haven’t seen before”.

The religious discourse – especially Pope Francis’ encyclical – he says, has had an impact and “now it’s time to follow up”.

Regarding the recent refugee crisis that has caused tensions in many European countries, including his own nation, Norway, Rev Fykse Tveit praises the Norwegian Council of Churches for calling for the legal rights of refugees to be respected. He says there is a growing ecumenical and interfaith movement opposing the skepticism and proposing a more hospitable approach

There is a strong role for the Churches, he says, to combat the current fears and show that “our own security and wellbeing is not only defined by protecting our resources, but by making sure we live in a world of peace and justice, dealing with each other in a decent way”.

Rev Fykse Tveit also speaks about the Jubilee Year, inaugurated by Pope Francis earlier this month, saying it offers an ecumenical challenge, as well as opportunity for the “worldwide fellowship of humanity” to see that we need mercy “to be able to find a way forward”.

Finally the WCC leaders shares some of the priorities of the ecumenical body for the coming year: firstly, to look at what Christians can say together to combat the use of religion to justify violence; secondly to follow up on the climate change achievements; and thirdly to pursue the search for justice and peace, especially in the Middle East.

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/12/16/wcc_leader_says_faith_groups_must_follow_up_on_climate_deal/1194830

December 22, 2015

The ecological justice work of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary at West Lake landfill — and beyond

By Kelly Moffitt
St. Louis Public Radio

You may have heard of [the local group of nuns who go to Bridgeton to pray](#) for and protest over the West Lake and Bridgeton landfills, which have been the subject of [much controversy in recent years](#). What you may not know is that movement is part of a greater spiritual calling for the Franciscan Sisters of Mary (FSM) to do ecological justice work — and how close-to-home the landfill saga is for the sisters.

In fact, the landfills are less than two miles from the group’s living quarters and administrative offices. [After moving to the area in](#) 2012 from the convent at St. Mary’s Hospital in Richmond

Heights, the order started to become active not only at the landfills but also at town hall meetings, contacting local officials [and adopting environmental investing and philanthropic policies](#).

FSM and the Catholic Church's focus on environmentalism, ignited by [Pope Francis' calls to address climate change](#) with the groundbreaking [42,000 word encyclical](#), has not always been so pronounced.

“We as Franciscans have always been involved with the environment as we follow [St. Francis' model](#),” said Sister Susan Scholl, president of the group. “Even for us, we've been in healthcare, it has only been in the last four to five years that we've turned our focus to the environmental issues.”

Scholl is referring to the sisters' involvement [as founders of SSM Health in St. Louis](#).

“When we moved our sisters from our convent behind St. Mary's, our offices also moved to Bridgeton,” Scholl said. “All of us were in the same area as the landfill, which was somewhat of a surprise to us. The proximity to it was our first awakening to it.”

On Tuesday's “St. Louis on the Air” Scholl and Gale Thackrey, the group's ecological justice coordinator, joined the show to talk about the work they do to better the environment and how it ties in with the Catholic Church's environmental mandate as a whole.

In fact, the landfills are less than two miles from where the group's living quarters and administrative offices sit. [After moving to the area in](#) 2011 from Richmond Heights, the order started to become active not only at the landfill sites but also at town hall meetings, contacting local officials [and adopting environmental investing and philanthropy policies](#).

On Tuesday's “St. Louis on the Air” Sister Susan Scholl, the president of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, and Gale Thackrey, the group's ecological justice coordinator, joined the show to talk about the work they do to better the environment and how it ties in with [Pope Francis' calls to address climate change](#) and the Catholic Church's environmental mandate as a whole.

Sister Susan Scholl and Gale Thackrey join "St. Louis on the Air" host Don Marsh to discuss the ecological justice work of the Franciscan Sisters of Mary at the West lake landfill and, more broadly, in their "mission investing."

A mission to care for the environment

“The sisters have a mission that is ‘compassionate care of the planet,’” said Thackrey, who recently returned from Paris, where she attended the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference to network. “Through that, I look for areas where there may be an injustice, areas where we can do better. When I heard about the West Lake Landfill issue through the Missouri Coalition for the Environment ... I was surprised to find out all this was happening in the St. Louis area.”

Thackrey, and later the sisters themselves, met with the coalition as well as “Just Moms STL,” a group of moms in the Bridgeton area advocating for environmental and health justice for those living around the landfills.

They found that, most of all, people outside of Bridgeton just didn’t know about the issue. That’s when the sisters started attending community meetings, visiting classrooms, meeting with legislators with company executives, and also exerting a physical presence at the landfills through prayer vigils.

Bringing awareness through action

Nowadays, you can find the sisters holding a prayer vigil once every other week across from the site of the landfills — something Thackrey invites all faith communities to participate in. There are only 74 sisters who are part of the order today, and they are aging. “There’s very little to do on a daily basis, physically,” said Scholl. “We can lend our presence and our financial support and the wisdom of our years.”

“Our presence hopefully brings some notoriety to it,” Scholl continued.

Thackrey said the group is making some strides politically and counts the legislation recently introduced in November in the U.S. Senate ([sponsored by Claire McCaskill and Roy Blunt](#)) and House ([sponsored by Lacy Clay and Ann Wagner](#)) as signs of success that their pleas are being heard. Those bills call for the Secretary of the Army, through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to take over the remediation efforts at West Lake Landfill from Republic Services.

“Their ecological justice mission is to improve our environment, to have a response to things that may negate a healthy environment,” said Thackrey, calling the bills a tremendous success. “The sisters ... realize health and environment are very closely related. From that aspect, we continue to improve our environment, therefore improving health.”

Bringing change through investment

Aside from protest, prayer and legislative action, the sisters are pursuing ecological justice in another, stealthier way: through their finances they invested over the years from their congregation.

“We are an aging congregation — we can’t be out there doing these things, but we can support those who are,” said Scholl. “We can use the resources we have to a better advantage. We took a chunk of the money we had invested in Wall Street type things and moved it to mission investment. That means we can use these resources while we still earn a return for doing sustainable agriculture, saving the wetlands, investing in clean energy.”

"The truth of it is that we single-handedly can't have an impact, but it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

The other portion of money that the sisters took out is going to philanthropy.

“The truth of it is that we single-handedly can’t have an impact, but it is better to light a candle than curse the darkness,” said Scholl. “We do what we can do. It is very inspiring to see all the groups, both where our mission investments are but groups we do philanthropy with, to see how inspired these young people are and the kind of programs that they put together to save the rainforest, to use clean energy, sustainable agriculture.”

Thackrey said she met with the beneficiaries of some of their investments at the Paris climate conference and was excited to see the impact such investing had on the groups. Likewise, she met with indigenous groups from “where the frontlines are burning,” and realized how much more help they need. She came away from the conference feeling optimistic, particularly given the [White House American Business Act on Climate Pledge](#) and the involvement of mayors from urban areas all over the globe.

Scholl believes that the Pope’s recent statements on climate change are also cause for optimism about the movement on climate change as a whole — globally and here at home.

“I think he has done a great service for the whole global environment because people are impacted by this,” Scholl said. “I’m very impressed with Pope Francis that he was able to step out there. He does get criticism because he is picking into little things—but those are things people can do every day. He begins to tie it to spirituality. This is our common home. There is a requirement for all of us to take care of it. Frankly, personally, everything this man writes just bowls me over. I think he is really excellent.”

“I think the Holy Spirit put him in place and I trust her judgment,” she continued.

Has the Pope influenced your views on climate change? Email talk@stlpublicradio.org or tweet us at [@STLonAir](https://twitter.com/STLonAir).

Some responses, via email, so far:

No, the Holy Father hasn't changed my mind, because I already believe, and with reading Earth In The Balance and An Inconvenient Truth, from former Vice-President Al Gore, I've always believed that our activities have affected the Earth's climate. We are continuing to contribute to the changes in weather, and overall climate, and with each passing year, I predict, that the extreme weather we're having will get worse. It doesn't take Nostradamus to see that with the violent storms we see in Spring and Summer, the warmer weather we're having now, and the affects around the world that climate change is not, as some would say, a "a Liberal myth". I applaud his Holiness for his stance, and as a Catholic, I hope we'd learn to reverse (as much as we can) the damage we're doing to the world, before it's too late [lest we abuse the world God gave us]. -- Michael Chandra

This World is gifted with a highly respected man in the way of Pope Francis. This doesn't happen often enough. His "Laudato Si" is a testament to our culture. He is directing us to "Care for our common home." Hard to believe the conservative attitude that there is no issue with the condition of our Home. Revolutionaries historically may not live long lives...pray this is not true

of Francis. We need him, his love for all things living is a beacon for us to emulate. The Franciscan Sisters are certainly among those carrying his banner and acting on it. —Kate Shaw

No, the Pope endorsed climate change as a moral, as well as an existential, issue. Something I already believe is true. Since morality is rarely ever discussed in this world of political and economic tussling, he elevated this life threatening reality to a new plain. --Barbara Anderson

I am influenced insofar I am affirmed. Granted, this pope has some limited scientific background. For these issues my views on global warming were formed years ago by scientific evidence. It is important and good that he affirms the need for action to address climate change. His is a voice that expresses a need for action in many places that have been ignored for far too long. --Peter Gounis

No the Pope has not influenced my opinion on climate change. I believe climate change is real and so does the Pope. --Rosemary Bagin

I love this Pope but his opinion on climate change hasn't moved me in any way. I've felt this has been happening and was quashed in the US for many years now, mostly due to the corporations that make money off fossil fuels. I'm glad he's been able to voice his opinion on such a large stage.

What I am most amazed by though, is the negative reaction to him even having an opinion on climate change. He's one man, with no legislative power, no authority to impose or require any action- just an opinion and a suggestion. And that that opinion could ignite such backlash (mostly in the US) kind of gives me a glimpse into what it must have been like when Christ spoke. I never understood how someone's ideas of goodness and loving and caring could provoke and bristle people. Seeing this in a modern day setting put the crucifixion in a brighter light for me. -- Susan Gioia

<http://news.stlpublicradio.org/post/ecological-justice-work-franciscan-sisters-mary-west-lake-landfill-and-beyond>

December 22, 2015

Praise and plaudits from the best of COP21

By Donna Schaper
National Catholic Reporter

After Paris and its enormous invigoration of the environmental, scientific and religious communities, it is time to figure out who is who and what is what. My big takeaways involve all three of these communities at their environmental -- and strategic -- best.

First, the scientists. Veerabhadran Ramanathan, a scientist with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California-San Diego and member of the Pontifical Academy

of Sciences, [told the Associated Press](#) during COP21 (the United Nations climate summit) he thinks the alliance of science and religion -- as exemplified in Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" -- would play a major role in the eventual agreement.

Thank you for this handshake between science and religion. It is as rare as it is necessary.

Physicist John Schellnhuber, founder of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany, added in the same piece he has attended the international talks for 11 years and essentially been disappointed. But now with the watchful gaze from faith communities, he suspected leaders might be held more accountable: "They know they will be measured against the encyclical," Schellnhuber, also a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, told AP.

Thank you for another rare and essential handshake, and thank you, Vatican, for hosting such an illustrious academy of science!

The ecumenical religious climate movement -- also arrived in Paris with great vigor. Most impressive was the Lutheran World Federation's decision to bring only delegates to COP21 who were under age 30. That was daring and smart. If they have to go to more COPs, at least they will be prepared.

At the conference's midweek point, the many faith groups gathered at the American Cathedral in Paris to build ourselves up. GreenFaith, the OurVoices campaign, the World Council of Churches, Islamic Relief Worldwide, the Bhumi Project (Hindu), Plum Village (Buddhist), the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, ACT Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, the Franciscan Action Network, and others all were represented.

The liturgy for the night was appropriate to our stage of development as a global religious movement. The liturgy was quiet, humble and had pilgrimage as its central motif. We were helping each other to "keep on keeping on."

Thank you, American Cathedral in Paris, for hosting us and our simple, yet deep, liturgy.

And then there is the climate movement, which involved itself in great ethical spectacle all across Paris. The best for me was the [trial of Exxon Mobil](#), arranged by 350.org and its inimitable leader Bill McKibben. Since the Paris Agreement's adoption, he has basically argued that the deal is great, [especially if it had happened in 1995](#). "This didn't save the planet but it may have saved the chance of saving the planet," McKibben also said. He won't let us forget the power of evil and how much Exxon Mobil destroyed.

Thank you, Bill McKibben, for keeping naiveté from our door.

I won't forget going to a planning meeting for a proposed next-day morning action at the Louvre. The group spent 45 minutes imitating the Occupy movement's open style of meeting, with once again the white men doing more talking than the white women. Of the 50 people

gathered in the cold dark room, near the Bastille, appropriately uncomfortable, three were people of color.

The question was whether the gorgeous black umbrellas with messages on them should be delivered en masse or individually, given it was believed that neither cops nor the press would let anyone anywhere near the Louvre. The concerning issue was that the Louvre takes donations from fossil fuel industries. *“What if we can’t get in?” “Well, let’s find out where another museum is that takes fossil fuel contributions and put up our umbrellas there.”*

The action was actually -- even with this modest preparation -- incredibly successful and got the kind of [international notoriety](#) it deserved. Even with Paris on lockdown for security reasons following the mid-November terrorist attacks, two women got into the Louvre and were able to pour oil on the floor. As is typical these days with ethical spectacle, the tweets mattered more than the action.

Thank you, environmental movement for ethical spectacles abundant.

I will give Ramanathan a final word here: “Until we get our message into every church, every mosque, every temple, every movement, the environment will not change,” he told AP. “When we do, it will.”

For everything to change, as Naomi Klein puts it so well, everybody will have to change. More religious and scientific cooperation and getting over the old divides will matter. More ethical spectacle, even when it is immature, will help us. And surely getting to the grassroots -- as the pope has argued in his field hospital approach to the congregations -- will be necessary. No root can be left behind, as everything changes.

And people under 30 should get the tickets and the support going forward -- and those of us over 30 need to be sure to fund them.

[Donna Schaper is senior minister of Judson Memorial Church in New York City. She was in Paris for a portion of the COP21 United Nations climate summit.]

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/praise-and-plaudits-best-cop21>

December 28, 2015

A young Catholic from Kenya reflects on the Pope's African visit

A month after the apostolic visit to Kenya, Uganda, and CAR, the impact of Francis' call to integrity, holiness, and unity has been felt among both Catholics and non-Catholics alike

By Allen Ottaro
The Catholic World Report

A month has already gone by since Pope Francis set foot on Kenya soil, on his first apostolic visit to the African continent, a visit which also took him to Uganda and the Central African Republic. Following the trip, the Holy Father has shared his reflections about his time in Africa, fielding questions from journalists on the flight back to Rome and commenting at the Wednesday General Audience on the second day of December.

Asked what his most memorable moment of his first trip to Africa was, Pope Francis replied, “The crowds. That joy. That capacity to celebrate on an empty stomach. But for me, Africa was a surprise. I thought, God surprises us, but even Africa surprises us. There were many moments. But the crowds, they felt visited. They have a very great sense of welcome. I saw in the three nations that they had this sense of welcome because they were happy to feel visited.” Back in St. Peter’s Square at the General Audience, Pope Francis used the opportunity to share his experience and to give thanks. “Africa is beautiful! I thank the Lord for this great gift of His.”

I offer here some initial reflections, based on my own experience of the Pope’s time in Nairobi; I know that in the months to come, more reflections will emerge. I begin with a brief history of my ‘papal encounters’. Prior to last month, the last time a pope had been to Kenya was in September 1995. I was still in primary school, in my home town of Njoro, about 180 kilometers from the capital, Nairobi. I was not even aware that Pope John Paul II was in the country, perhaps owing to the fact that my parents were both non-practicing—my mum a Catholic and my dad an Anglican.

Fast forward to my early twenties when I became actively involved in youth and young adult ministry. My friends and I were preparing ourselves for World Youth Day 2005, in Cologne, Germany. I was looking forward to see Pope John Paul II. Then, in April of that year, he died. I was devastated. Would the next Pope show the same love and commitment to young people as JPII did? Would he show up in Cologne, to honor the appointment JPII had made with the youth?

That World Youth Day turned out to be what the then Archbishop of Cologne Cardinal Joachim Meisner, referred to as “the World Youth Day of two Popes. John Paul II in heaven and Benedict XVI on earth.” I managed, finally to catch glimpses of Pope Benedict XVI during the main events of WYD 2005. It was a wonderful gift to be able to lead groups to the next three World Youth Days, in Sydney (2008), Madrid (2011) and Rio (2013).

In May 2015, I was invited to Rome, to a meeting of the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), in preparation for the release of the encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Our Coordinator, Mr. Tomas Insua, intimated that six of us would have a chance to attend the Wednesday General Audience and to greet Pope Francis. I could not believe it—until it finally happened. Pope Francis, at the end of the audience, went round greeting everyone gathered on the upper sections of the square on either end of the main podium from where he delivers the catechesis. By this time, news of a possible papal trip to Africa was already going round. Someone asked me whether I would be meeting Pope Francis on his visit to Africa. I remember thinking to myself that it would be really special were that to happen.

When the aircraft carrying Pope Francis and his entourage landed in Nairobi, I was attending a conference organized by the Symposium for Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) on Land Grab and Just Governance in Africa. I watched television coverage of the Pope's arrival and marveled at just how extensively the Kenyan media were reporting on the events. The Catholic Church in Kenya does not run a television station, and so it was rather unusual to watch a flurry of interviews featuring priests, bishops and lay Catholics, explaining the significance of the papal visit. It was a moment of grace to see updates on social media, with a friend on Facebook sharing that she was now able to discuss her Catholic faith in a public space, without feeling shy. In closing his speech during the welcome ceremony at State House, President Kenyatta requested Pope Francis to, "Pray for me. Pray that as I lead this nation, God will lead me".

Before celebrating Mass at the University of Nairobi grounds, Pope Francis held an ecumenical and interreligious meeting at the Apostolic Nunciature. He reiterated the need for religions to play a key role in "forming consciences, instilling in the young the profound spiritual values of our respective traditions, and training good citizens, capable of infusing civil society with honesty, integrity and a world view which values the human person over power and material gain". I reflected on how honesty and integrity are values that are in short supply in my country, where the mentality of "getting ahead" often takes precedence. Unable to make it to the University grounds for the Mass on a wet, rainy morning due to early road closures, I followed the Mass on television, and listened to the translation of the Pope's homily, which he delivered in Italian. I felt encouraged and re-affirmed as Pope Francis reminded us that Jesus "asks us to be missionary disciples, men and women who radiate the truth, beauty and life-changing power of the Gospel", and ending with the motto chosen by the Church in Kenya for his visit: "Stand strong in faith! Do not be afraid!"

Later that afternoon, together with two of my colleagues, I went to the United Nations complex to listen to the Pope address diplomats and UN staff. It was also the first time I saw Pope Francis in person in Nairobi. Events at the United Nations offices in Nairobi are usually formal affairs, full of protocol. On this occasion, however, the atmosphere was one of joyous anticipation. A choir was already belting out well-known Catholic hymns as the Pope alighted from his car. The UN staff in conference room two, cheered and ululated as the Holy Father, accompanied by Cardinals Njue (Archbishop of Nairobi), Turkson (President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace) and Parolin (Secretary of State), walked into the hall. Welcoming remarks from the top three UN officials followed, with Mr. Steiner (Executive Director, United Nations Environment Program) inviting Pope Francis to "speak from the heart of Africa, to the hearts of people across the world".

For my colleagues and I, it was a moment of 'homecoming', of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* in Africa. Pope Francis gave a strong and impassioned, wide-ranging speech, touching on deforestation and desertification, the 'throw-away culture' and urbanization, and development, poverty and exclusion. On climate change, Pope Francis warned that, in reference to the Paris climate change conference, "it would be sad, and I dare even say catastrophic, were particular interests to prevail over the common good". When he reminded us in his final remarks that "Africa offers the world a beauty and natural richness which inspire praise of the Creator", I

noticed how little I pay attention to my natural surroundings, and just how much all of creation should fill me with a sense of awe for God.

On his final day in Kenya, Pope Francis visited the Kangemi neighborhood, where he met with 1200 representatives from eleven slums in Nairobi, referring to them as “brothers and sisters, who I am not ashamed to say, have a special place in my heart”. At the Kasarani Sports Stadium on the other side of town, thousands of young people were gathered. The bishops and political leaders, including several governors arrived, and were soon joined by President Kenyatta. The atmosphere was electric, full of song and dance, punctuated with moments of reflection led by the Archdiocese of Nairobi’s youth chaplain. At one point, the Bishops accepted a challenge from the program director, to dance to a popular local tune. Within minutes and without being prompted, the President and the First Lady, joined in as well! It was as if they were all saying to the young people, “we identify with you, with your hopes and desires.”

Then Pope Francis arrived at the stadium and was driven around the stadium in the Pope mobile. He listened and took notes, as two youth representatives, Lynette and Emmanuel, enumerated the challenges faced by their contemporaries. Tribalism, corruption and radicalization of young people, all hot button issues in Kenya, were top on the list. The politicians seemed nervous. I found it most impressive that none of the politicians were listed on the day’s program. Young people are generally treated by the political class in Kenya as mere political capital. This day however, was for the Pope and the youth. “Tribalism! It can destroy. It can mean having your hands hidden behind your backs, and have a stone in each hand to throw at others. Tribalism can only be overcome with your ear, your heart and your hand”, said Pope Francis in his response as he tackled the issues head-on. Speaking in his native Spanish, he went on to invite everyone to do something that deeply moved me, and that will be remembered in Kenya for a long time. “I want to invite you all today, to the young, to invite Lynette and Emmanuel to come up now, and that we hold each other’s hands. Let’s hold hands together. Let’s stand up as a sign against tribalism. We are all a nation!” He exhorted us to work every day, opening our hearts to root out tribalism, a vice that has wrought division and pain in Kenyan society for decades.

Pointing out that the evil of corruption is a reality in all areas of life, including in the Vatican, Pope Francis explained that “corruption is something that eats inside, like sugar. Sweet, we like it, it’s easy. And then we end up in a bad way. So much sugar that we end up being diabetic, or our country ends up being diabetic. Young people: corruption is not a path to life; it’s a path to death”. Corruption in Kenya has been described by many as a national disaster, as the vice has permeated almost all spheres of society. The Church in Kenya now has a great task ahead, in ensuring that the words of Pope Francis are not conveniently forgotten.

Finally, Pope Francis decided to share “something personal”. “In my pocket, I always carry two things”, he said, “a rosary to pray, and something here which seems odd, this is here the history of God’s failure. It’s the way of the cross, a mini way of the cross, as Jesus suffered, and when they condemned him right up to where he was buried. With these two things, I do the best I can. And thanks to these two things, I never lose hope”.

I hope that Pope Francis’ message may continue to transform my country. That we may do the best we can, that we may never cease to pray, and that we may never lose hope.

Allen Ottaro lives in Nairobi, Kenya, where he is a parishioner at St. Paul's Catholic University Chapel in the Archdiocese of Nairobi. He is a co-founder of the Catholic Youth Network for Environmental Sustainability in Africa, and is the former national coordinator of MAGIS Kenya.

http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/4466/a_young_catholic_from_kenya_reflects_on_the_popes_african_visit.aspx

December 29, 2015

The Rabbi Who Became an Environment Minister and Calls the Pope His 'Rav'

By Cecilia Blasbalg
Haaretz Daily Newspaper

Sergio Bergman, the Argentinian pharmacist-turned-rabbi-turned-politician, says his latest career choices were all inspired by his 'rabbi': Pope Francis

When Argentina's new government was sworn in earlier this month, most ministers took their oath on a Christian Bible. But there was one politician who brought his own holy text, a Hebrew Bible with just the Old Testament. That was Rabbi Sergio Bergman, Argentina's newly-minted environment minister.

He may be the only rabbi holding a government post outside Israel, but Christianity, and one very Christian leader in particular, played a key role in inspiring Bergman to enter politics and take on the mantle of defender of the environment.

The 53-year-old rabbi, who wears a large knitted skullcap, readily admits that it was his friendship with the Argentine-born Pope Francis – known as Jorge Mario Bergoglio until he became pontiff – that led him to his recent career choices.

"Bergoglio is the reason I got into politics in Argentina. When someone asks me why would I, as a rabbi and also as someone with little background on this issue take on this role, I answer back that before you ask me why, you must ask Bergoglio why, too," Bergman said in an interview with Haaretz.

Protecting the environment "is a moral issue and we will end up destroying the planet if we don't change things. This comes from my lessons with Bergoglio, whom I see as a true rav," he said, using the Hebrew term for rabbi.

Bergman has written several books including "A Gospel According to Francisco," which details his relationship with Bergoglio when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires and is based on the thoughts and teachings of Francis that Bergman collected during their meetings and conversations.

Bergman says that his desire to protect the environment stems also from reading "Laudato si'," the pope's second encyclical, published earlier this year, in which Francis criticizes consumerism and irresponsible development while warning about the dangers of global warming. The document "is my guide and my bible on environmental issues," Bergman told Haaretz in a phone interview last week.

Discussing his environmental policies, he said Argentina has so far lagged behind in the fight against global warming and pledged the country would stand by the agreement signed earlier this month at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, which aims to reduce emissions to a level that will keep the rise in global temperatures below 2 degrees Celsius.

Earlier this year, the rabbi also introduced a bill in the parliament of Mercosur (the South American trade bloc) that would make the Southern Ocean region of the Antarctica a protected area and restrict human activities in the surrounding waters.

Bergman stepped into politics during the 2011 mayoral elections of Buenos Aires, briefly running for mayor as an independent before withdrawing his candidacy to join the conservative Mauricio Macri, who won that election and went on to take the presidency in the national vote last month. Over the last years, the rabbi has served as a municipal official and a lawmaker for Macri's Propuesta Republicana party.

Bergman, who lives with his wife and four children in the northern Buenos Aires suburb of Nunez, started his career as a pharmacist. In 1992 he went on to study at the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Argentina, where he was ordained a Conservative rabbi, and in 2001 he was chosen to lead Templo Libertad, the oldest Jewish congregation in the country, which was founded in the mid-19th century.

In 1993 he moved to Israel for a couple of years where he completed his Master of Education at Hebrew University and afterwards went on to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City where he received his Master of Arts in Jewish Studies.

Despite being a rabbi who entered politics, Bergman feels that Orthodox rabbis holding political posts in Israel could not serve as role models for him.

"What I learned in Israel is the absolute opposite of what I do in Argentina," he said, criticizing the role of religion in the Jewish state.

"I would like for Israel to be a Jewish yet secular state and for all religions and different variations of Judaism to be accepted equally by Israel and not require an appeal to the Supreme Court, which is what happens today," he said, referring to the supremacy of Orthodox Judaism over other streams of the religion in Israel. "Religious leaders in politics only look out for their sector's interests. I was voted by the citizens of Argentina, the majority of whom are not Jewish, and my role in government is not for the interests of the Jewish community but for Argentina as a nation."

There is however at least one issue concerning the Jewish community that is very close to Bergman's heart: the investigation into the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people and left hundreds injured in the deadliest terror attack in the country's history.

Macri has pledged to cancel the agreement signed by his predecessor, the left-leaning Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, to investigate the bombing jointly with Iran.

The deal had been soundly criticized at home and abroad, as Tehran was seen by many – including, according to recent revelations, Kirchner's own foreign minister – as responsible for the attack.

Bergman said Kirchner's policy was the result of her close ties with the socialist government of Venezuela, a country that Macri now seeks to expel from Mercosur over rights abuses.

"The previous relationship between us and Iran was a direct result of Venezuela. Cristina Kirchner used very worrisome expressions leading to anti-Israeli sentiment in Argentina because of Venezuela," Bergman said. "Argentina will change its relationship with Iran and the memorandum (on the AMIA investigation). We want to keep relations only with reasonable countries."

Bergman said he believes relations with Israel will improve, though he blamed the previous government for skewing many Argentines' views on the Middle East conflict.

"Cristina used the term Palestinian in a certain way to support Venezuela and the agreement with Iran. She presented images of Palestinians as victims of the terrorist actions caused by Israel and used them for her agenda," he said. "I believe that anti-Zionism is a new form of anti-Semitism. To blame Israelis for the deaths of all the Palestinians can lead to hating Jews."

Still, Bergman noted that, as a rabbi who has just been elected to public office, he is the living embodiment of the fact that "Argentina cannot be an anti-Semitic country."

<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/features/.premium-1.694366>

December 30, 2015

Water concerns bubble up in Appalachia

By Lydia Noyes
Global Sisters Report

Since 1970, the [Catholic Committee of Appalachia](#) has existed to serve Appalachia and to address the issues this region faces, both communally and environmentally. As a membership-based organization, the CCA provides a community of solidarity and a network of support for people of faith working for social, economic and ecological justice in Appalachia. The CCA

holds an annual gathering every fall, and this post is my reflection on the Sept. 18-20 gathering in Charleston, West Virginia:

After moving to central Appalachia, my husband and I found the community we have been missing at the annual gathering of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia.

For one weekend of the year, legions of passionate and environmentally and socially minded Catholics from the Appalachian Mountain states drive hours to attend the meeting, held this year in Charleston. The mission of the 2015 meeting was to study the water crisis on a local and global scale.

I consider myself relatively informed about the humanitarian crises happening throughout the world thanks to my college education. However, the CCA meeting blew apart my confidence that I could even understand the environmental tragedies in my own backyard. The drought in California is well known, and I expect global water wars to define much of my adult life, but until this conference, I had never given any thought to water issues in the eastern United States.

The conference began with a presentation from Dr. [Ben Stout](#), a professor of stream ecology at Wheeling Jesuit University, about Big Coal's effects on the Appalachian water system. Stout's career was research-focused until he was called to court to testify in a series of cases against coal companies' work to reclaim mountaintop removal sites. When told that they needed to return the mined site to how it looked before, these companies would vehemently deny that the streams they removed had existed in the first place, presumably assuaging themselves of the guilt of rebuilding them.

Though Appalachia is a water-wealthy region, Dr. Stout provided evidence that this water supply is threatened. Toxic [algae blooms](#) from excess nutrients that come from chemical fertilizers are becoming larger and more frequent, and underground wells are continuously contaminated by mining.

In 2014, the coal cleaning company Freedom Industries suffered a massive [chemical spill](#) from a containment tank used to clean coal slurry that contaminated the Charleston water supply for days. The nonpolar molecule 4-Methylcyclohexanemethanol doesn't dissolve in water and can't be removed by flushing out tanks, causing this hard-to-detect toxin to linger in a water supply virtually forever. Dr. Stout said everyone in Charleston was risking their health unless they fully replaced their water heaters after the spill; the city government only suggested throwing out plastic dishes.

Another conference speaker, Dr. [Laura Diener](#), a professor at Marshall University, spoke about the 2014 chemical spill in terms of poverty and inequality, indicating that income is a driving factor of safety when faced with contaminated water. Her field research and in-person interviews told a shocking story about accessibility.

During the spill, most affluent residents were able to buy bottled water, leave the region for a few days, or drive to various emergency tanks of safe water throughout the city. However, those without cars had difficulty getting to these tanks, and many were forced to drink from their taps

anyway. Some of the tanks in the poorest neighborhoods were illegally filled with the contaminated water, and in some cases, prison inmates weren't given access to safe water until their families protested for days.

This was toxic water. Showering with it caused many to break out in rashes, and ingesting it caused nausea and lingering sickness. Over 700 people were stricken, and 16 were hospitalized. Yet some were still forced by lack of options to use it, even in baby formula.

This was no natural disaster, no act of God. This chemical spill was directly caused by inept safety measures by Freedom Industries and the coal industry as a whole.

This isn't an isolated problem. Spills like this happen a lot, and many regions of Appalachia are permanently cut off from their groundwater supply because of chemical contamination. Why was the Charleston spill different? Why did it make national and international news? Because for once, it affected an urban area. In the words of one of Professor Diener's interviewees:

"It's a good thing this spill happened to rich white people, too — otherwise, no one would pay attention."

Sadly, this lack of attention to the suffering of the rural poor is a common story in Appalachia. Dr. [Shannon Bell](#), an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Kentucky, took part in an interactive conversation at the conference about how her research revealed the ways industries pollute rural communities.

In so many ways, the roots of communities and families run incredibly deep in this region. Yet these roots are being torn up as families become stymied in their attempts to stay and thrive in their home communities because of the poverty caused by the coal companies. Bell has collected story after story of women suffering from the ecological impacts of the industry. (Check out her book on her research, [*Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed: Appalachian Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice*](#).)

In one instance, a broken containment pond caused massive flooding in a mountain valley and almost carried away a woman's house with her children in it. Now, her children have nightmares every time it rains, and their home has lost all resale value. In another case, coal dust from a processing plant settles so thickly on the homes in the nearby community that some homes have depreciated in value from \$144,000 to less than \$12,000.

That loss is incredible enough, but it is made worse because living in such close proximity to coal factories dramatically raises one's risk of cancer. When the value of a home can depreciate almost 92 percent, what chance does a non-affluent family have to sell and move somewhere safer? More importantly, why should they have to? That is a loss of power. Without their consent, without their voices being heard, the people of Central Appalachia are being sacrificed for the energy needs of the rest of the world. And every time I turn on the hot water, I am contributing to their suffering.

This isn't a far-away problem. This is happening right here in America. It's affecting the lives of the students I work with. It has defined the lives of their parents and has limited the options for the next generation. The least we can do is to try to understand. After all, being informed is the first step to lasting change.

[Lydia Noyes and her husband, Ian, are volunteers with the Notre Dame Mission Volunteers AmeriCorps program. She is a 2015 graduate of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has degrees in environmental studies and international development.]

[Notes from the Field *are reports from young women volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. The project began in the summer of 2015 when, working with the [Catholic Volunteer Network](#), we enlisted four young women working in Honduras, Thailand, Ethiopia and the United States to blog about their experiences. The fall 2015 series presents two more women, both volunteering with sisters' ministries in the United States.*]

<http://globalsistersreport.org/blog/gsr-today/environment/water-concerns-bubble-appalachia-36021>
